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Relationship between Youth and Parent Perceptions of Family Environment and Social Anxiety

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Abstract

This study concurrently examined the relationship between adolescents' perceptions of their parents' child-rearing styles and family environment and their reports of social anxiety. Adolescents reporting higher levels of social anxiety perceived their parents as being more socially isolating, overly concerned about others' opinions, ashamed of their shyness and poor performance, and less socially active than did youth reporting lower levels of social anxiety. Parent perceptions of child-rearing styles and family environment, however, did not differ between parents of socially anxious and non-socially anxious adolescents. Results are comparable to studies using adult retrospective reports and are discussed with regard to the role of the family environment in the development of social anxiety.

Although social phobia received only scant research attention through the 1980s, recently it has become the focus of a large amount of research attention (Beidel & Randall, 1994). Although research is beginning to flourish on adult social phobia, research on childhood and adolescent social phobia and social anxiety is still lagging behind (Beidel & Randall, 1994). This lack of research on childhood social phobia is a major concern due in part to the number of youth affected by this disorder. For instance, it has been estimated that 9 to 15% of children and adolescents who are referred to psychological clinics suffer from social phobia, and up to 1.1% of the general youth population suffers from social phobia (Last, Strauss, & Francis 1987; Strauss & Francis, 1989).

Retrospective adult studies indicate that 50% of adults who suffer from social phobia report the onset of their symptoms by age 12 and many report being socially anxious for as long as they can remember (Bourdon et al. 1988). Beidel and Morris (1995) report that during adolescence, individuals begin to experience increased social demands and develop more complex cognitive abilities. According to these researchers, the likelihood of social phobia manifesting itself during this developmental period increases because adolescents now experience the anxiety of being scrutinized by others around them. Specifically, social phobia may occur in adolescents because they begin to discern differences between their personal identity and their identity as perceived by society. Given the evidence suggesting that social phobia begins in childhood or adolescence and data suggesting many youth experience social phobia, it is imperative that researchers begin investigating correlates of social phobia in child and adolescent populations.

There have been various etiological theories and explanations developed for social phobia, one of which has focused on the role of familial factors. Several studies (Bruch & Heimberg, 1994; Bruch, 1989; Silverman, Cerny, & Nelles, 1989) have used a retrospective approach in obtaining individuals' perceptions of their parents' child-rearing attitudes and their family environments. In general, researchers have found differences between individuals with social phobia and both normal control groups and other types of anxiety-disordered groups. Specifically, socially phobic individuals perceive their parents as having been more overprotective during childhood (Bruch & Heimberg, 1994), more rejecting, and less emotionally supportive (Arrindell, Emmelkamp, Monsma, & Brillman, 1983; Parker, 1979), isolating them from routine social experiences, more concerned about others' opinions, and not emphasizing family sociability (Bruch, 1989; Bruch & Heimberg, 1994; Bruch, Heimberg, Berger, & Collins, 1989). In interpreting these results, Bruch and Heimberg (1994) posited that "a parent's own fearfulness could lead to avoidance of social transactions and parental anxiety may be associated with the tendency to isolate the child and discourage family socialization" (p. 165), which could then result in restricted social opportunities and increased social anxiety for the child.

Bruch (1989) also reported that "parenting practices that convey rejection to a child may instill a preoccupation with others' evaluative remarks, perhaps leading to a generalized fear of negative evaluation" (p. 42). This instilled fear of negative evaluation may induce a child or adolescent to be afraid of social situations in which social evaluation may occur. In extreme instances, fear of negative evaluation may contribute to an individual becoming socially phobic. Buss (1980) also believes that parents' who are overly concerned with others' opinions may engender a fear of negative evaluation in their children as a result of their continually reminding the child that other people are examining their appearance and social behavior. Bruch (1989) believes that such a fear of negative evaluation may then lead a child or adolescent to avoid the attention of others, especially the scrutiny of others in new social contexts.

Bruch (1989) also suggested that a child's level of social comfort and competency may be directly related to the parents' level of sociability and the encouragement of the child's sociability. First, as Beidel and Morris (1995) explain, parents have a great influence on young children's social interactions because they are solely responsible for arranging social opportunities for their children. For example, when parents encourage their child to invite

friends home to play, facilitate family social activities, and entertain friends in the home, they model appropriate social behavior. However, when such activities are absent, the child may not learn appropriate social interaction skills via observational learning and direct experience due to inadequate social opportunities (Bruch, 1989). If children do not have adequate opportunities to learn social skills they may learn to fear new situations because they are unsure how to interact properly. Daniels and Plomin (1985) further believe that socially phobic mothers avoid exposing their children to multiple types of social interactions as a result of their own anxiety, which in turn helps promote social phobia and fear in their children through direct modeling and a reduction in social experiences.

A serious concern with the majority of studies that have investigated socially phobic individuals' perceptions of their families is that these studies are primarily retrospective in design. Retrospective designs rely on adults remembering and reporting their parents' child-rearing styles and their family environment from the past (sometimes as many as 30 or 35 years previously). Unfortunately, many individuals may not be able to accurately remember what occurred in the past, and their perceptions may be negatively biased by their current experiences. To alleviate the limitations of a retrospective research design, Rapee (1995) suggests that the relationship between family environment and social phobia needs to be investigated concurrently.

Thus, the primary purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationship between adolescents' perceptions of their parents' child-rearing styles and family environment and their reports of social anxiety concurrently. Given the retrospective adult literature, it was hypothesized that youths with increased levels of social anxiety would perceive their parents as overemphasizing the importance of others' opinions, as being ashamed of their shyness and poor performance, and as deemphasizing socialization with others, as compared to low socially anxious youth. Results from previous child and adolescent research has demonstrated the importance of obtaining information from multiple raters to accurately ascertain a youth's environment (Piacentini, 1993). Consequently, the present study investigated the relationship between both the youth's perceptions of the family environment and parents' perceptions of the family environment and, ultimately, the relationship between parents' perceptions and youth social anxiety. However, previous research has also shown limited agreement between parents' and youths' perceptions of the environment (Kazdin, French, Unis, & Esveldt-Dawson, 1983). Although this investigation was somewhat exploratory, it was hypothesized that adolescents and their parents would have similar perceptions of the family environment and that parents of socially anxious youth would perceive themselves as being ashamed of their youth's shyness and poor performance, as placing greater emphasis on others' opinions, and the family as being less social as compared to parents of low socially anxious youth.

Method

Participants

As part of a larger study, 2,708 students (1,363 males and 1,345 females) in grades 7 ($n = 817$; 418 males and 399 females), 8 ($n = 776$; 377 males and 399 females), 9 ($n = 603$; 303

males and 300 females), and 11 ($n = 512$; 265 males and 247 females) from public and parochial junior high and high schools in rural and mid-sized midwestern cities participated in the present study. Only those students with parental consent and who signed a youth assent form were eligible for participation. Parental consent rates ranged from 94 to 98%. Student assent rates reduced overall rates of participation to between 90 and 97%, with a modal school participation rate of 95%. Participation rates did not vary by gender in any of the schools. Student participation was strictly voluntary and the students were told they were completing questionnaires to help the investigators learn more about youths' friendships, emotions, and activities. Due to the racial and ethnic homogeneity of the population from which the participants were recruited, the majority of students were Caucasian (82%), yet represented a wide range of socioeconomic levels (10% upper middle class; 17% middle class; 21% lower middle class; 11% upper lower class, 39% lower class, and 2% impoverished).

In addition, as part of the aforementioned larger study, 404 parents (248 mothers and 156 fathers) of the youth participants also completed questionnaires. Parents were selected for participation using criteria developed for the larger study.¹ Specifically, youths' scores on a social anxiety, depression, and general anxiety measure were used to classify the youth of the larger study into two groups: (a) Negative Affectivity Group (those youth who scored .5 standard deviation or more above the mean [for that youth's grade and gender] on any of the three measures: social anxiety, depression, or general anxiety), and (b) Comparison Group (those youth whose scores on all three of the measures were no more than a .5 standard deviation above the mean [for that youth's grade and gender] for each measure). After classification, all parents of students in the Negative Affectivity Group were mailed questionnaires. In addition, parents of a matched group of students (i.e., matched on race, gender, grade, socioeconomic status, age, and living environment [i.e., single- vs. two-parent family]) selected from the Comparison Group were mailed questionnaires. Both mothers and fathers were asked to complete separate questionnaires for students in two-parent families. Each parent who completed a questionnaire received a \$15 check for his/her participation. Parent participation rates were 33% for parents in the Negative Affectivity Group and 35% for parents in the Comparison Group.

Measures

Students completed five paper-and-pencil self-report questionnaires described below.

Demographic Questionnaire

The Demographic Questionnaire (DQ) that was developed for this study was used for descriptive purposes only. Each student was asked to provide the following information: name, grade, school attending, gender, ethnicity, age, the adults with whom the youth lives, and the youth's parents' occupations. This information was used to determine socioeconomic status using the Dunkin Index (Reiss, 1961).

Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents

The Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A; La Greca, 1998; La Greca & Lopez, 1998; La Greca & Stone, 1993) consists of 18 items reflecting fears of negative evaluation, social

avoidance, and distress, and four filler-items. The SAS-A items are answered using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not at all* (1) to *all the time* (5). Scores can range from 18 to 90, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of social anxiety.

Results of factor analysis of the SAS-A revealed three different factors and are utilized as subscales: individuals' concern of being negatively evaluated by their peers (Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale [FNES]); discomfort and inhibition related to being in new situations or with unfamiliar peers (Social Avoidance and Distress Scale-New Situations [SADS-New]); and general or pervasive social inhibition, discomfort, and distress (General Social Avoidance and Distress Scale [SADS-General]). The internal consistency of the subscales have been adequately demonstrated ($\alpha = .69-.86$) as well as the psychometric integrity of the three subscales in terms of concordant and discriminant validity (La Greca, 1989; La Greca & Lopez, 1998). The SAS-A was used in the present study to determine levels of social anxiety in participants and as one of the measures used to classify participants into Negative Affectivity and Comparison Groups.

Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale

The Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS; Reynolds & Richmond, 1985) is a 37-item questionnaire designed to measure the presence and severity of anxiety in children and adolescents from 6 to 19 years of age. Youths respond to the 37 descriptive statements in a yes-no format, indicating whether the statements do or do not pertain to themselves. Of the RCMAS's 37 items, 28 items pertain to subjective, physiological, and motoric characteristics of anxiety and are summed to form a Total Anxiety score. The remaining nine items tap social desirability in responding and are summed to obtain a Lie score. Total Anxiety scores range from 0 to 28 with higher scores indicating greater levels of anxiety in an individual.

The RCMAS is reported to have high internal consistency ranging from .56 to .80 across 11 age groups for its three subscales and above .80 for the total score and adequate test-retest reliability (Reynolds & Richmond, 1985). Construct validity has been demonstrated by strong correlations between the RCMAS and Spielberger's State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (Reynolds & Richmond, 1985). The RCMAS was included in the present study as one of the measures used to classify participants into Negative Affectivity and Comparison Groups and was selected due to its widespread use in previous research.

Children's Depression Inventory

The Children's Depression Inventory (CDI; Kovacs & Beck, 1977) consists of 27 items designed to assess a variety of symptoms related to cognitive and somatic indices of depression. The CDI was designed for use with children and adolescents 7 to 17 years of age. Scores on the CDI range from 0 to 54, with higher scores reflecting greater self-reports of depressive symptoms. The CDI has shown adequate internal consistency ($\alpha = .71-.94$; Saylor, Finch, Spirito, & Bennett, 1984) and can differentiate between children independently diagnosed as depressed and nondepressed (Carlson & Cantwell, 1979). The CDI is also the most commonly used measure of childhood depression in research studies and by clinicians (Kazdin, 1981). The CDI was included in the present study as one of the measures used to classify participants into Negative Affectivity and Comparison Groups.

Family Environment Questionnaire

The Family Environment Questionnaire (FEQ) is a 27-item self-report measure that was created for this study by slightly modifying the Parent Attitudes Toward Child-Rearing Scale (PATCS; Bruch et al. 1989), which assesses adults' retrospective reports of their childhood family environment. The PATCS was modified in four ways. First, to reflect youths' current perceptions, item wording was changed from past to present tense. Second, the language was simplified (e.g., the word "lectured" was changed to "tell me how to"). Third, students were asked to indicate how true an item was for their mothers and fathers separately (as opposed to "parents" on the PATCS). Fourth, eight new items assessing youths' self-perceptions of sociability were added to the PATCS.

Thus, the FEQ-Student version consists of 27 items that are answered using a 5-point scale ranging from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (5). The first 19 items are answered by the youth with regard to each parent separately, yielding scores for the youth's perception of his/her mother and of his/her father. These 19 items are divided into the same four subscales as on the PATCS: (a) Isolation, which consists of five items measuring the youth's perception of how socially isolated his/her parents keep him/her (e.g., "My parents don't like me to go out unless it is for something special"); (b) Others' Opinion, which consists of five items assessing the degree to which the youth perceives his/her mother and father as being overly concerned about other people's opinions (e.g., "My parents won't let me wear the clothes I want because they are scared that other people, like family or neighbors, will say something"); (c) Shame, which consists of five items measuring the youth's perception of how ashamed his/her parent is of his/her shyness or poor performance (e.g., "If I don't do well in school, like in class or at sports, my parents get upset and act like I embarrassed them"); and (d) Family Sociability, which consists of four items assessing the youth's perception of his/her mother and father's sociability (e.g., "My parents enjoy taking the family to visit other people"). The Isolation, Others' Opinion, and Shame subscales are all scored so that high scores are negative (i.e., represent greater perception of parent's social isolation of the youth, over concern with others' opinions, and shaming of the youth). The Family Sociability Score, however, is scored in such a way that high scores are positive (i.e., indicative of perceptions of greater sociability of parents).

The last eight items on the FEQ create the Self-Sociability Scale, which assesses the frequency in which the youth engages in social activities outside the home (e.g., "Spend time with other kids outside school," "Go to other kids homes"). The Self-Sociability Scale is scored in such a way that high scores are negative (i.e., indicative of a child being less socially active).

Bruch et al. (1989) reported Cronbach alphas on the PATCS ranging from .71 to .86. Cronbach alphas for the current FEQ, however, were somewhat lower ($M = .61$).

As part of the larger study, parent participants completed several questionnaires. The only measure relevant to the present study, however, was the FEQ-Parent version described below.

FEQ-Parent version

The FEQ-Parent version is a self-report questionnaire, created for the present study, which contains parallel items to those on the FEQ-Student form. The first 19 items are answered by the individual parent with regard to how much each statement characterizes the parent's attitudes or behaviors. The FEQ-Parent version items are answered using a 5-point scale ranging from *not at all characteristic of me* (1) to *very characteristic of me* (5). The 19 items are divided into the same four subscales as on the youth form: Isolation, Others' Opinion, Shame, and Family Sociability. The Isolation, Others' Opinion, and Shame subscales are all scored so that high scores are negative, while the Family Sociability Score is scored in such a way that high scores are positive.

Procedure

Parents of all youth in identified grades at selected schools were mailed consent letters. The purpose of the study was described and examples of items from the questionnaires were provided in these letters. Parents were asked to contact the principal investigator if they did not wish to have their child participate in the study. During regularly scheduled class times, students with parental consent met in groups and were given a packet containing an assent form and the questionnaire packet. The purpose of the study and instructions for completing the questionnaires were described to the students who signed an assent form if they were willing to participate in the study. After the students were given the questionnaires they were allowed to complete the packets at their own pace. Trained research assistants circulated among the youth during the testing sessions and provided individualized help to any student who experienced difficulty. Completion of all measures in the present study took approximately 30 minutes.

Parent participants received packets containing a written consent form and the questionnaire packet in the mail after their children had been identified as either belonging to the Negative Affectivity Group or the matched Comparison Group. This selection process is described in the Participants section above. Once parents completed their questionnaires, they used the return envelopes provided to mail them back to the investigator. The parents then were mailed \$15 for their participation.

Results

Relationship between Students' Perception of Family Environment and Self-Reported Social Anxiety

To investigate whether adolescents with increased levels of social anxiety perceive their family environments differently than adolescents with lower levels of social anxiety, high and low social anxiety groups were formed. Specifically, students scoring at least 1 standard deviation above their specific gender and grade mean (see Table 1 for means and standard deviations) on one or more of the following, SAS-A Total score, FNES, SADS-New, or SADS-General, were classified as High Social Anxiety. These criteria resulted in 829 students being classified as High Social Anxiety (414 males, 415 females). Students scoring at or below their specific gender and grade mean on all four of the following, SAS-A Total score, FNES, SADS-New, and SADS-General, were classified as Low Social Anxiety. These

criteria resulted in 927 students being classified as Low Social Anxiety (474 males, 453 females). The remaining 952 students remained unclassified and were not included in the between-group analyses.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for SAS-A Subscales and Total Score by Grade

Grade	<i>n</i>	FNES		SADS-N		SADS-G		Total Score	
		<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)
7	794	20.29	(7.38)	13.25	(4.25)	10.25	(3.82)	43.79	(13.15)
8	785	19.78	(6.91)	13.34	(4.21)	10.25	(3.70)	43.44	(12.94)
9	610	18.54	(6.41)	12.95	(4.18)	9.92	(3.81)	41.52	(12.51)
11	509	19.09	(5.88)	13.52	(3.73)	10.28	(3.51)	42.92	(11.19)

SAS-A = Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents; FNES = Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale; SADS-N = Social Avoidance and Distress Scale–New Situations; SADS-G = Social Avoidance and Distress Scale–General; Total Score = SAS-A Total score

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) using the two levels of social anxiety (High vs. Low) as the independent variables and the nine subscales of the FEQ-Student version as dependent variables was computed. The MANOVA indicated an omnibus difference between the two social anxiety groups, $F(1, 1446) = 30.45, p < .001$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .84$. As shown in Table 2, the univariate *F*-tests indicated that the youths in the High Social Anxiety group scored significantly differently than those in the Low Social Anxiety group on all of the FEQ-Student subscales. Specifically, students classified as High Social Anxiety perceived their fathers and mothers as being more socially isolating, as being more concerned about others' opinions, more ashamed of their shyness and poor performance, and less socially active than did those classified as Low Social Anxiety. In addition, students in the High Social Anxiety group also reported themselves as being less socially active than did students in the Low Social Anxiety group.²

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations on FEQ-Student Scale by Social Anxiety Group

	High Social Anxiety (<i>n</i> = 829)		Low Social Anxiety (<i>n</i> = 927)		<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
DADISO	10.57	2.95	9.40	2.86	1, 1446	59.91*
MOMISO	10.59	3.09	9.25	2.78	1, 1446	75.12*
DADOPIN	10.99	3.68	9.55	3.32	1, 1446	60.60*
MOMOPIN	11.29	3.80	9.72	3.39	1, 1446	68.07*
DADSHME	9.21	3.77	7.92	3.19	1, 1446	49.22*
MOMSHME	9.28	3.79	7.92	3.16	1, 1446	55.76*
FAMSOCD	12.99	3.06	14.26	3.30	1, 1446	62.43*
FAMSOCM	13.12	3.09	14.46	3.05	1, 1446	69.76*
SELSOC	24.97	7.76	20.18	6.12	1, 1446	175.15*

FEQ = Family Environment Questionnaire; DADISO = Dad Isolation Score; MOMISO = Mom Isolation Score; DADOPIN = Dad Others' Opinion Score; MOMOPIN = Mom Others' Opinion Score; DADSHME = Dad Shame Score; MOMSHME = Mom Shame Score; FAMSOCD = Dad Family Sociability Score; FAMSOCM = Mom Family Sociability Score; SELSOC = Self-Sociability Score

* $p < .001$

Relationship between Parents' and Youths' Perceptions of Family Environment

Pearson product moment correlations were computed to compare students' and parents' perceptions of the family environment. Specifically, each of the eight subscales of the FEQ-Student version were correlated with its corresponding subscale on the FEQ-Parent version (e.g., student's report of mother being isolative with mother's report of her isolative behavior; student's report of father's concern with others' opinion with father's report of his concern with others' opinion).

As seen in Table 3, in general there was moderate but consistent association between youth and parent reports of family environment. The only parent and student report that was not related was the student's and mother's report of reacting to the student's shyness or poor performance with shame ($r = .05$).

Table 3. Correlation between FEQ-Parent Scale Scores and FEQ-Student Scale Scores

FEQ Scale	Student vs. Father Report	Student vs. Mother Report
Isolation ^a	.28*	.25*
Others' opinion ^b	.28*	.25*
Shame ^c	.34*	.05
Family sociability ^d	.39*	.36*

a. Youth and parent perceptions of how much parents keep their youth socially isolated.

b. Youth and parent perception of how concerned parents are about others' opinions.

c. Youth and parent perception of how much parents feel shame about their youth's shyness or poor performance.

d. Youth and parent perception of family sociability.

* $p < .001$

Relationship between Parents' Perception of Family Environment and Youths' Reported Social Anxiety

To investigate whether the parents of adolescents with increased levels of social anxiety perceived their family environments differently than did the parents of adolescents with lower levels of social anxiety, MANOVAs were computed. Specifically, two MANOVAs using parents of youths in the High Social Anxiety group ($n = 197$; 123 mothers and 74 fathers) and parents of youths in the Low Social Anxiety group ($n = 207$; 125 mothers and 82 fathers) as the independent variable.³ The first MANOVA utilized the mothers' FEQ scores while the other used the fathers' FEQ scores as the dependent variables. Neither the MANOVA using the mothers' FEQ subscales nor the fathers' FEQ subscales yielded significant main effect differences between the two social anxiety groups, $F(1, 239) = 1.04, p > .05$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .978$; $F(1, 136) = 1.33, p > .05$, Wilks' $\Lambda = .952$, respectively.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationship between social anxiety and specific aspects of one's family environment for an adolescent population using a research design that attempted to alleviate past limitations of adult retrospective studies. This relationship was investigated by examining differences between high and low socially

anxious youths' perceptions of their family environment and their parents' perceptions of the family environment.

Overall, youths who reported experiencing high levels of social anxiety perceived their family environments differently than youths who reported experiencing low levels of social anxiety. Parents of youths who reported experiencing high levels of social anxiety, however, did not perceive the family environment differently than did parents of youth who reported experiencing low levels of social anxiety; likely due to the limited association found between youth and parent perception of family environment.

Results indicated that youths in the High Social anxiety group perceived their mothers and fathers as being more socially isolating, more concerned about others' opinions, more ashamed of the students' shyness and poor performance, and less socially active than did youths in the Low Social Anxiety group. The high socially anxious youth also reported being less socially active themselves than did the low socially anxious youth. The significant relationships between youths' social anxiety and perceptions of family found in this study are consistent with the retrospective studies by Bruch (1989) and Bruch et al. (1989) using adults diagnosed with social phobia. Bruch's (1989) adult social phobics reported perceiving their parents "as seeking to isolate them from social experiences, overemphasizing the opinions of others, and deemphasizing socializing as a family unit" (p. 45). Additionally, the adult social phobics in the Bruch et al. (1989) study perceived their parents as socially isolating them and as using shame to discipline them. The results of the present study also corroborate the finding by Parker (1979) that social phobics perceive their parents as being overprotective.

The results of the present study in conjunction with the previous results using adults' retrospective reports (Bruch, 1989; Bruch & Heimberg, 1994; Bruch et al., 1989) lend support to Buss's beliefs that parental admonishments may influence the development of youths' fear of negative evaluation in social interactions. Specifically, Buss (1980, 1986) believes that parents who continually criticize their youth's appearance and behavior and overly emphasize being scrutinized by others, may contribute to the youth developing a fear of negative evaluation in social situations. Importantly, the current study provides nonretrospective support for Buss's (1980, 1986) belief that youths may develop a primary component of social anxiety, the fear of negative evaluation, from critical and shameful interactions with their parents.

The results of the current study also provide support for a modeling causal explanation of the development of social anxiety in youths. Specifically, Silverman et al. (1989) suggest that the development of social anxiety is significantly influenced by youths modeling their parents' socially anxious behaviors. Results from the present study indicate that high socially anxious youths not only report being less socially active themselves, but also perceive their parents as being less socially active. The youths' perceptions found in the present study suggest that socially anxious youths may model their parents' socially anxious social behavior and, thus, become less socially active themselves. It is possible that consequent social isolation and withdrawal then leads to parental concern and criticism.

It is important to note, however, that the current research design makes it impossible to determine the direction of the relationship between youth social anxiety and perceptions of parent behavior. Not only may parenting behaviors influence the development of social

anxiety in youth, but social anxiety in youths may result in distorted or biased interpretations of parental behavior. Thus, prior to any definitive statements being made regarding the influence of parenting practices on the development of social anxiety in youths, additional research with longitudinal designs that can better address the question of directionality is needed.

Furthermore, the nature of the present design makes it impossible to determine the accuracy of the youths' perceptions. The question of the youths' accuracy in perceptions is especially significant given the limited association between youths and parents' reports found in the present study and the finding that parents of high socially anxious youths and parents of low socially anxious youths did not differ significantly in their perceptions of the family environment. It is not surprising that a limited association occurred between parents' and youths' perceptions given previous research findings indicating limited agreement between youths' and parents' ratings (Kazdin et al., 1983). Taken together, these findings suggest that youths' experience of social anxiety may not depend on what is really going on in the home, but more with how youths personally perceive their family environment. Future research, however, will be necessary to more systematically investigate the relationship between youths' perceptions and actual parenting practices and behavior. For example, youths could be directly observed in the home environment or both parents and youths could be asked to fill out daily diaries in an attempt to get a clearer indication of the family environment and parenting practices.

Several other limitations of the present study also need to be addressed in future research. The homogenous sample in this study limits the generalizability of the results. Thus, future research should incorporate more diverse populations, including different ethnic and cultural groups and youths from more urban settings to increase the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the social anxiety groups in the present study were created using SAS-A means and standard deviations from the study population. It should be noted that by using such means and standard deviations, cutoff scores were greater than those suggested by the author of the SAS-A (La Greca, 1998, 56 vs. 50). Nonetheless, it is difficult to determine the clinical significance of youths falling within the high social anxiety group. Thus, future research should investigate the relationship between adolescent social anxiety and family environment utilizing clinical populations (i.e., adolescents diagnosed with social phobia).

In spite of the limitations described above, the results of this study suggest the importance of addressing family and parenting issues when treating children and adolescents experiencing social anxiety. For example, when a youth presents with problems related to social anxiety or social phobia, it will be important for clinicians to assess the youth's and parents' perceptions of the family environment, as well as directly observing family functioning. Such an environmental assessment will help provide a more complete understanding of the developmental origin of a youth's social anxiety and may identify specific family factors that promote and maintain social anxiety in that youth.

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Notes

1. One purpose of the larger study was to determine whether different familial and developmental correlates exist for youth reporting symptoms of social anxiety, depression, or general anxiety and whether social anxiety and depression could be differentiated based on these patterns or whether all were related to a more general symptom pattern labeled negative affectivity. Thus, a negative affectivity and a comparison group were formed.
2. Separate MANOVAs were computed for youth who had parents participating in the study and for youth who did not. There were no differences in the pattern of results, and therefore all youth were used in these analyses.
3. Analyses were conducted comparing the youth of parents in the two socially anxious groups on demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age, ethnicity of youth, socioeconomic status of family, and with whom the child resides). No group differences emerged.

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