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The Shyness & Social Anxiety Workbook

SECOND EDITION

PROVEN, STEP-BY-STEP TECHNIQUES FOR OVERCOMING YOUR FEAR

MARTIN M. ANTONY, PH.D.
RICHARD P. SWINSON, MD

"Social anxiety and shyness can become so intense that they prevent people from enjoying life. This book is ideal for anyone who wants to learn to be more comfortable around other people. Drs. Antony and Swinson have taken proven treatments for social anxiety and adapted them for a non-professional audience. The step-by-step strategies described in this book have been shown to be effective, are easy to understand, and are sure to help the reader cope better in social situations. Anyone who experiences significant anxiety when performing or when interacting with other people should read this book!"

—Aaron T. Beck, MD, university professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania

"If you have trouble with social anxiety, you will find the book by Drs. Antony and Swinson to be an excellent resource. This highly experienced duo has provided an excellent road map to guide you through your efforts to overcome your anxiety and improve the quality of your life. Based on the tried and true methods of cognitive-behavioral therapy and on the results of many scientific studies, the techniques described in this book will help you feel better when you are with other people or the center of attention. The only thing you have to do is work hard and apply them. Best wishes for your journey along that road."

—Richard Heimberg, Ph.D., director of the Adult Anxiety Clinic of Temple University, Philadelphia

"Drs. Antony and Swinson provide practical advice in a highly readable format. This book will be invaluable to people whose social anxiety prevents them from leading full and happy lives."

—Murray B. Stein, MD, professor of psychiatry and director of anxiety and traumatic stress disorders program at the University of California, San Diego

"This is an excellent resource written by world-renowned and skilled clinicians and researchers in the area of anxiety disorders. Drs. Antony and Swinson present the most up-to-date information about social anxiety and its treatment in a way that is clear and, most importantly, that provides step-by-step tools for overcoming this disorder. This is a must-read for persons suffering with social anxiety."

—Michelle G. Craske, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles

"This workbook by Antony and Swinson gives the millions of people whose lives are limited by social fears the hope to control their future. The book is clear, practical, easy to follow, and, above all, based on solid, scientific ground. The sections on troubleshooting are especially valuable to really help fine-tune the techniques. I would strongly recommend this book to anyone who is serious about overcoming their social fears."

—Ronald M. Rapee, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, author of *Overcoming Shyness and Social Phobia*

"This volume, written by a team composed of a psychologist and a psychiatrist, is an outstanding workbook for any individual suffering from social anxiety or shyness and wishing to undertake a structured self-help program to overcome it. The book can be used alone or in conjunction with therapy. The authors are experts in their field and they offer strategies that are solidly grounded in the latest research literature. The workbook format provides readers with the exercises and worksheets they need to do the difficult work required to overcome their shyness and social anxiety."

—Jacqueline B. Persons, Ph.D., director of the San Francisco Bay Area Center for Cognitive Therapy and clinical professor in the department of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley

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For our students.

—MMA and RPS

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A special thank-you goes out to our colleagues, clients, and patients who provided many helpful suggestions over the years that informed this second edition of *The Shyness and Social Anxiety Workbook*. Finally, we wish to express our gratitude to the staff at New Harbinger Publications (including Carole Honeychurch, Matthew McKay, Catharine Sutker, Amy Shoup, Dorothy Smyk, and many others), who worked closely with us through all stages of developing, editing, and marketing this book.

—Martin M. Antony, Ph.D.
Richard P. Swinson, M.D.
Toronto, Canada

Introduction

Shyness and social anxiety are universal. From time to time, almost everyone has felt nervous speaking in front of a group or anxious when interacting with another person. We wonder if a presentation has gone well or whether we have made a good impression on a first date or a job interview. In fact, even some celebrities, who make their living in the public eye, have been described as excessively shy from time to time, including Harrison Ford (actor), Mary Chapin Carpenter (singer), Michelle Pfeiffer (actor), David Bowie (rock star), David Letterman (talk-show host), Nicole Kidman (actor), and Carrie Underwood (*American Idol* winner). There have also been reports in the media about musical performers like Barbra Streisand, Carly Simon, and Donny Osmond suffering from performance anxiety. Even radio "shock jock" Howard Stern has described himself as being painfully shy when he is outside the safe confines of his on-air studio. (FYI, details on other shy celebrities can be found at www.shakeyourshyness.com/shypeople.htm.)

Shyness and social anxiety can range in intensity from being fairly mild to completely incapacitating. In extreme cases, social anxiety may prevent an individual from developing friendships, working, or even standing in a public place. Regardless of whether your fears are minor or completely overwhelming, the strategies described in this book will help you to deal more effectively with social anxiety.

We recommend that you read this workbook in the order in which the chapters appear. The initial chapters are designed to educate you about the nature of social anxiety and to teach you how to evaluate the main features of your own social anxiety. Then we discuss the costs and benefits of different treatment approaches and help you to select among available treatment options. Subsequent chapters provide detailed information about particular treatment strategies including medications, cognitive therapy for changing your anxious thoughts, using exposure to confront the situations you fear, and fine-tuning your communication and performance skills. The final chapter of the book discusses strategies for maintaining your improvements.

This book is different from other self-help books in a number of ways. Of the many books on social anxiety and shyness that you will find in your local bookstore, this was the first to be written in a workbook format. It is filled with exercises and practices designed to teach you basic strategies for overcoming shyness and social anxiety. We encourage you to fill in the blank worksheets and forms located throughout the text. In addition, we encourage you to make copies of the forms for your personal use so you can continue to use them over the coming months.

This book also differs from many others because the strategies we recommend have all been investigated extensively in well-designed clinical studies. In addition to specializing in helping people deal more effectively with their anxiety, we also are actively involved in research on the nature and treatment of anxiety. It is a well-established fact that when the techniques described in this book are used in a therapeutic setting, people generally experience a significant decrease in their social and performance anxiety (Rodebaugh, Holaway, and Heimberg 2004). Essentially, we have taken strategies that have proven to be useful in therapy and adapted them into a self-help format. Recently, investigators have also shown that our self-help approach (using the first edition of this book) can also be effective for reducing social anxiety (Moore, Braddock, and Abramowitz 2007). This workbook is designed so that it can be used alone or coupled with regular visits to a professional therapist. In fact, a motive for writing this book was to have a good reference our own clients and patients can use as they progress through therapy.

This second edition has been thoroughly updated with the latest scientific knowledge and references concerning the nature and treatment of social anxiety (for example, the section on the genetic underpinnings of social anxiety now includes a discussion of the Human Genome Project, which hadn't been completed when the first edition was published). The chapter on medications has also been revised to include the latest information on medications that have only recently been studied for treatment of social anxiety. Sections that were previously unclear or out of date have been completely rewritten. We have added many new examples and several forms and diaries have been updated and simplified. New sections have been added as well, including a discussion of strategies for improving motivation for treatment and sections for family members and friends of people who suffer from social anxiety. Finally, the lists of recommended readings and Internet resources have been thoroughly updated.

The journey to overcoming your shyness and social anxiety may not be an easy one. Some aspects of your fear will be easier and quicker to overcome than others. Also, for every two or three steps forward, you may experience what feels like a step back. Nevertheless, the techniques described in this book have been shown to reduce social and performance fears in most people who use them consistently. With hard work and perseverance, these strategies will provide you with the opportunity to make big, positive changes in your life.

PART 1

Understanding Your Social Anxiety

CHAPTER 1

Shyness and Social Anxiety

Rachel was a twenty-six-year-old woman who worked as an assistant manager of a small bookstore. She was referred to our Anxiety Treatment and Research Centre to get help for intense anxiety about her upcoming wedding. Rachel wasn't afraid of being married; in fact, she looked forward to spending years together with her husband. She was terrified of the wedding itself. The idea of being on display in front of such a large audience was almost unthinkable. In fact, she had postponed her wedding twice before because of her fear of being the center of attention.

Rachel's anxiety involved more than just a fear of her wedding. She reported that she'd always been shy, even when she was very young. When she was in high school, her anxiety around people had become so intense that it was affecting her school life. She was convinced that her classmates would find her dull or boring, or that they would notice her anxiety and assume that she was incompetent. Typically, Rachel avoided doing oral reports at school and didn't take any classes where she felt her performance might be observed or judged by her classmates (such as physical education). On a few occasions, she even asked for special permission to hand in a written essay instead of doing a presentation in front of the class. Despite being an excellent student, she generally tended to be very quiet in class and rarely asked questions or participated in class discussions.

Throughout college, Rachel found it difficult to make new friends. Although people enjoyed her company and often invited her to parties and other social events, she rarely accepted the invitations. She had a long list of excuses to get out of socializing with other people. She was comfortable only with her family and a few longtime friends, but aside from those, she usually avoided contact with other people.

After college, Rachel began working at a bookstore, and after a short time, she was promoted to assistant manager. She was always comfortable dealing with customers at her store, and she gradually became more comfortable talking to her coworkers.

However, she avoided eating lunch with other staff members, and she never attended any social events, including the company's annual holiday party.

Rachel lived with her social anxiety for years, despite how it interfered with her education, work, and social life. It was not until the anxiety prevented her from having the kind of wedding she and her fiancé wanted that she decided to seek help.

Rachel's story is not that different from those of other people who experience intense feelings of shyness, social anxiety, and performance-related fears. The types of anxious beliefs and behaviors that she reported are similar to those that many socially anxious people describe. After her evaluation at our center, Rachel began a twelve-session course of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and gradually learned to cope with her anxiety more effectively. By the end of treatment, her avoidance of social situations had decreased significantly, and Rachel was much more comfortable in situations that previously made her very anxious.

CBT involves (1) identifying the thought patterns and behaviors that contribute to people's negative feelings, such as anxiety, and (2) teaching people new ways of thinking and behaving to better manage their anxiety. This book will teach you the strategies commonly used in CBT for social anxiety. Before exploring those strategies, however, we will begin this chapter in the same way we usually begin treatment with the individuals we see in our program—with an overview of the nature of fear and anxiety in general, and of social anxiety in particular.

ANXIETY, WORRY, FEAR, AND PANIC

Everyone knows what it feels like to be afraid. Fear is a basic human emotion. In humans, fear is controlled, in part, by an area of the brain called the limbic system. The *limbic system* includes some of the deepest, most primitive structures of the brain—structures shared by many less "evolved" animals. In fact, there is reason to believe that the emotion of fear is present across most, if not all, animal species. Most organisms display specific patterns of behavior when confronted with danger and often these "fearful" behaviors include forms of aggression or escape. Therefore, the intense feelings we experience when we are exposed to an immediate danger often are called the "fight-or-flight" response.

Although most people use the terms "anxiety" and "fear" interchangeably, behavioral scientists who study emotions assign somewhat different meanings to these and other related terms (Barlow 2002; Suárez et al., in press). *Anxiety* is a future-oriented feeling of dread or apprehension associated with the sense that events are both uncontrollable and unpredictable. In other words, anxiety is a nagging feeling that occurs when a person believes a negative event may occur in the future and that nothing can be done to prevent it.

People who feel anxious tend to dwell upon and ruminate about the possibility of danger. This tendency to dwell on future negative events is called worry. Anxiety is also associated with uncomfortable physical feelings such as arousal (for example, sweatiness, increased pulse), tension (for instance, tight muscles), and pain (like headaches).

There is no question that when anxiety is too intense it can interfere with performance; however, mild to moderate amounts of anxiety are actually helpful. If you never became even slightly anxious under any circumstances, you probably wouldn't bother doing the things that must be done. Why would you bother preparing an assignment on time, dressing nicely for a date, or eating healthy food if you weren't concerned about the consequences of not doing these things? In part, it is anxiety that motivates us to work hard, prepare for challenges, and protect ourselves from possible threats.

In contrast to anxiety, *fear* is a basic emotion that occurs when an individual is confronted with an immediate real or imagined danger. Fear leads to a sudden, intense physiological alarm reaction that essentially has one purpose—to get the person away from the danger as quickly as possible. When people feel fearful, their bodies go into overdrive to ensure that escape is fast and successful. Heart rate and blood pressure increase to transfer blood to the large muscles. Breathing quickens to improve the flow of oxygen throughout the body. People sweat to cool off the body and perform more efficiently. In fact, all of these symptoms of arousal and fear are designed to make escape easier, allowing for survival in the face of danger.

Panic attack is the clinical term used to describe the experience of intense fear that takes place even though no realistic danger is actually present. Panic attacks can be triggered by specific situations that people fear (for example, giving an oral presentation, being in a high place, seeing a snake) or they sometimes occur out of the blue, without any obvious trigger. Panic attacks are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

To summarize, fear is an emotional reaction to an immediate danger, whereas anxiety is a state of apprehension about some future threat. For example, worrying about giving a presentation that is a week away is a reflection of anxiety, whereas experiencing an adrenaline rush while in the midst of giving a presentation is usually an example of fear.

Here are a few points to remember:

1. Anxiety and fear are normal emotions everyone experiences from time to time.

2. Anxiety and fear are time-limited. Even though they feel as though they may continue forever, they always decrease over time.

3. Anxiety and fear have a helpful function in that they prepare you for future threats and protect you from danger. So, your goal should not be to rid yourself of *all* fear and anxiety. Rather, your goal should be to reduce your anxiety to a level that no longer interferes significantly with your life.

WHAT IS A SOCIAL SITUATION?

A social situation is any situation in which you and other people are present. Social situations can include those that involve interacting with others (these are often referred to as *interpersonal situations*) or situations in which you are the focus of attention or might be noticed by others (these are often called *performance situations*). Examples of interpersonal situations and performance situations that may be feared by people with high levels of social anxiety include:

Interpersonal Situations

- Asking someone out on a date
- Talking to someone in authority
- Initiating or maintaining a conversation
- Going to a party
- Having friends over for dinner
- Meeting new people
- Talking on the telephone
- Expressing a personal opinion
- Having a job interview
- Being assertive (for example, saying no when you don't want to do something)
- Returning an item to a store
- Sending back food in a restaurant
- Making eye contact

Performance Situations

- Public speaking
- Speaking in meetings
- Playing sports or participating in aerobics
- Performing a piano recital in front of others
- Having others watch you work
- Leaving a recorded message on somebody's voice mail
- Getting married

- Acting on a stage
- Reading out loud in front of others
- Eating or drinking in front of others
- Using public bathrooms with others in the room
- Writing with others watching (for example, completing a form in public)
- Making a mistake in public (for example, falling down, dropping your keys, and so on)
- Walking or jogging on a busy street or some other public place
- Introducing yourself to a group of people
- Shopping in a busy store

WHAT IS SOCIAL ANXIETY?

Social anxiety refers to nervousness or discomfort in social situations, usually because of fear about doing something embarrassing or foolish, making a bad impression, or being judged critically by others. For many people, social anxiety is limited to certain types of social situations. For example, some people are very uncomfortable in formal work-related situations, like presentations and meetings, but are quite comfortable in more casual situations, like parties and socializing with friends. Others may show the exact opposite pattern, with formal work situations being easier than unstructured social gatherings. In fact, it's not unusual to hear of a celebrity who is quite comfortable performing in front of large audiences but who otherwise feels shy and nervous when interacting with people one-on-one or in small groups.

The intensity of social anxiety and the range of feared social situations vary from person to person. For example, some people experience fear that is fairly manageable, whereas others are completely overwhelmed by the intensity of their fear. For some people, the fear is limited to a single social situation (for example, using public restrooms, public speaking), whereas for others, the social anxiety occurs in almost all social situations.

The experience of social anxiety is related to a number of common personality styles and traits including *shyness*, *introversion*, and *perfectionism*. People who are shy often feel uncomfortable in certain social situations, particularly when they involve interacting with others or meeting new people. People who are introverted tend to be quieter and more withdrawn in social situations and may prefer being alone, compared with people who are extroverted or outgoing. However, introverted people are not necessarily anxious or fearful when socializing. Finally, the trait of perfectionism is associated with a tendency to hold overly high standards for oneself that are difficult or impossible to meet. Perfectionism can lead people to feel anxious in public for fear that other people will notice their "flaws" and judge them negatively. Perfectionism is discussed again later in this chapter.

HOW COMMON IS SOCIAL ANXIETY?

It is difficult to obtain accurate estimates of the prevalence of social anxiety because different studies have tended to define social anxiety differently and used different questions when interviewing people about their anxiety. Nevertheless, researchers have consistently found that shyness and social anxiety are common experiences. For example, in a survey of more than 1,000 people from across the United States and elsewhere, psychologist Phillip Zimbardo and his colleagues (Carducci and Zimbardo 1995; Henderson and Zimbardo 1999; Zimbardo, Pilkonis, and Norwood 1975) found that 40 percent of those who were asked currently considered themselves to be chronically shy, to the point of it being a problem. Another 40 percent reported that they had previously considered themselves to be shy. Fifteen percent more considered themselves to be shy in some situations and only 5 percent reported that they were never shy. More recent surveys suggest that the prevalence of shyness may be even higher (for a review of studies on the prevalence of shyness, see Henderson and Zimbardo 1999).

Researchers have also studied the prevalence of social anxiety disorder (a condition associated with extreme social anxiety that will be described later in this chapter). In a recently published survey of more than 9,000 Americans (Kessler et al. 2005), about 12 percent of people reported having the necessary symptoms to receive a diagnosis of social anxiety disorder at some point in their lives. In fact, social anxiety disorder was found to be the fourth most prevalent psychological problem in this study, after depression, alcohol abuse, and specific phobias (for example, phobias of animals, blood, needles, heights, flying, and so on). Other researchers have found the prevalence of social anxiety disorder to be lower than 12 percent, but almost all studies have confirmed that social anxiety disorder is a common problem (Kessler et al., in press).

Differences Between Men and Women

Shyness and social anxiety are common across both sexes, although most studies have found that social anxiety disorder is slightly more prevalent in women than in men (Somers et al. 2006). There are a number of possible explanations for why women are more likely than men to report fearing social situations. First, it's possible that men are actually more anxious in social situations than they are willing to admit. For example, there is evidence from studies of other phobias that men underestimate their levels of fear (Pierce and Kirkpatrick 1992). Also, in Western societies, women are often expected to be more socially active than men. Therefore, men may be able to avoid certain types of social situations more easily than women, without being harassed about their absence and without experiencing as much social pressure from others in their day-to-day lives.

There also may be differences in the types of social situations that men and women fear. One study found that men with social anxiety disorder were more fearful than women of urinating in public bathrooms and returning items to stores, whereas women with social anxiety disorder were more fearful than men of situations such as talking to people in authority, public speaking, being the center of attention, expressing disagreement, and throwing a party (Turk et al. 1998).

Cultural Differences

It is challenging to measure social anxiety across cultures because signs of social anxiety in one culture may have a very different meaning in another culture. For example, whereas some cultures may view poor eye contact as a sign of shyness or social anxiety, other cultures often avert their eyes from contact with another as an appropriate sign of respect. Cultures also differ with respect to their use of pauses and silence during conversation, the preferred physical distance from others, and the appropriate tone of voice (Sue 1990).

Despite the difficulties in measuring social anxiety across cultures, studies generally suggest that social anxiety and shyness are common across different ethnic groups. However, it should be noted that in the United States and Canada, the majority of people who seek treatment for social anxiety disorder tend to be white and have a European background. Although people from nonwhite, non-European backgrounds are just as likely to experience problems with social anxiety, they are less likely to seek help from a mental health professional.

HOW DOES SOCIAL ANXIETY AFFECT PEOPLE'S LIVES?

In this section, we will discuss how a person's social anxiety can affect relationships, work and school, and other day-to-day activities. After reading each section, take a few moments to consider how your social anxiety affects each of these areas of your life, and then describe this in the space provided.

Relationships

Social anxiety can make it difficult for people to establish and maintain healthy relationships. It can affect all levels of relationships, from those with strangers and casual acquaintances to those with family and significant others. For many people, even the most basic forms of social interaction (such as making small talk, asking other people for directions, saying hello to a neighbor) are very difficult. For such a person, dating may be completely out of the question. Social anxiety may be more manageable around more familiar people, such as close friends and family—but not always. For some people, anxiety may actually increase as a relationship becomes more intimate. Also, social anxiety can interfere with existing relationships, particularly if a socially anxious person's partner wants to socialize with others on a more regular basis. The following case examples illustrate how social anxiety can have a negative impact on a person's relationships.

- William has never been in a romantic relationship. Although others have expressed interest in dating him, he always makes excuses not to go out and usually doesn't return their phone calls. William desperately wants to be in a relationship, but he just can't find the courage to take the initial steps.

- Cindy is generally comfortable with her male colleagues at work, and she has several male friends with whom she socializes occasionally. However, as her relationships with men become closer, she is increasingly fearful that the other person will discover the "real" Cindy and reject her. She has ended several relationships with men just as they were becoming close.

- Jerry frequently argues with his girlfriend about his unwillingness to spend time with her friends. Although he was quite shy and anxious when they first started dating, recently his social anxiety has put more of a strain on their relationship. Because of his anxiety, they have been spending a lot of time alone while she has wanted to socialize as a couple with other people.

- Norm has gradually lost many of his friends over the years. For a while after finishing high school, he kept in touch with his closest friends. However, because of his anxiety, he often dreaded returning their calls and almost never accepted their invitations to get together. Eventually, his friends stopped calling him.

- Alison's roommate consistently plays loud music after midnight, making it impossible for her to sleep. Despite feeling very frustrated and angry, Alison avoids asking her roommate to turn down her music for fear that her words won't come out right or that her roommate will think she is an idiot.

- When talking to people whom she doesn't know well, Julia tends to speak very quietly, keep her distance, and avoid eye contact. As a result, people at work have started to leave her alone and they rarely invite her to lunch anymore.

In the space below, record the ways in which social anxiety has affected your friendships and relationships.

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Education and Career

Significant social anxiety can have an impact on a person's education and career. It can affect the types of courses you take in school and the types of jobs you might accept. It can also affect job performance as well as your enjoyment of school or work. Consider the following case examples:

- Naveen turned down a promotion at work that involved significant supervisory responsibilities, including chairing a weekly staff meeting and training groups of staff. Although the promotion would have provided him with a significant increase in salary, Naveen was terrified of speaking in front of groups, and he couldn't even imagine being able to lead the weekly meetings.
- Ruth dropped out of college partway through her third year. As a freshman and sophomore, Ruth had been able to be anonymous in her large classes. However, when her classes became smaller in her junior year, she felt increased pressure to participate in class. She began avoiding her lectures and eventually left school.
- Len dreads going into work each day. He is terrified to speak to his coworkers and avoids speaking to his boss at all costs. Although he never misses work, Len keeps the time he must talk to others at a minimum. He rarely takes a break for fear that others will ask him to have lunch or to spend their breaks with him.
- Cheryl has been out of work for two years. Although she often hears of jobs that might be interesting, the thought of having to go through a formal interview is completely overwhelming. On several occasions she has arranged for job interviews and then failed to show up because of her social anxiety.
- People at work think that Jason is a snob. He tends to be very serious, and he speaks very little to others. Even when someone asks him a question, he tends to answer with only one or two words. In reality, he isn't a snob; he is just very shy and anxious around people at work.

In the space below, record the ways in which social anxiety has affected your work or education.

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