

# The Wall Flower

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# ABSTRACT

Having struggled with social anxiety myself, I was able to uncover a great amount of data in this report by combining it with secondary sources.

# AREA OF INTEREST

## BACKGROUND/LITERATURE REVIEW

Social anxiety may be described in a number of ways, most typically as extreme shyness. There are no specific criteria for having social phobia; but fear and desire to avoid social situations are part of all definitions. It ranges from being helpful and adaptive (e.g. being aware of their surroundings in certain social situations) to being impairing (ruining the persons ability to develop or maintain relationships). These individuals experience fear or anxiety when doing simple things like eating meals in public, going on dates, or talking on the phone. It is not to be confused with being shy, however, as shyness is a personality trait and does not come with the negative thoughts about themselves, they are okay with being shy and can normally function and lives their lives normally with it.

Social anxiety is usually accompanied with other phobias and disorders, the most common being avoidant personality disorder (60%). This makes SAD more chronic and harder to treat. This means that they engage in subtle avoidance behaviors – e.g. averting their gaze while speaking to people and hoping to be overlooked, or even changing their posture to avoid being the center of attention.

### WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF SOCIAL ANXIETY?

#### ***Social anxiety – Clinical, developmental and social perspectives.***

Very few controlled studies support the argument that there is a genetic component to social fears. However, individuals whose parents are overprotective with little family socialization could play a big factor into someone's social anxiety. Comparative psychology has an impact on this area as well; social anxieties are not solely a human disorder, primates and animals share a history of this as well. According to early history, mother and offspring interaction has been an important determinant of social anxious behavior in primates.

#### ***Angst***

Counteracting to the last article, diagnosable social anxiety begins early in adolescence; when evolution expects us to start taking on adult social roles. In an interesting experiment to diagnose social anxiety, 10-month infants were giving a small square and big square. If he could reliably tell that if a large square gave way to a small square, something odd was going on.

This may be the associated with western society, where fewer friends and lower hierarchical ranks could cause social anxiety. In other words, people today do not like to be on the lower side of the totem pole; they lose confidence if they are.

Due to shyness, people with social anxiety rarely get their disorder checked up, thus making the problem worse.

## WHAT ARE THE KEY ISSUES TO SOCIAL ANXIETY?

### ***Overcome phobias and panic attacks***

People with social phobia frequently engage in subtle avoidance behaviors. For e.g a person may avert her gaze while speaking to people in the hope of being overlooked. Or she stands with a hunched and closed posture to not be the center of attention. Many people with social anxiety are afraid of getting caught that they are uncomfortable in social situations and being seen blushing, so sometimes they adopt a disguise (dark glasses, wide brimmed hats, makeup and turtle necks to conceal blushing). Some may be concerned about body odor and use excessive perfume and mints to cover up. This plays part with having body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), a condition in which people have highly exaggerated concerns for their appearance. Small physical flaws can look like disfigurements to them.

Fearing others

Social phobic individuals frequently report neck and shoulder stiffness and headaches. Ahead of feared situations they experience palpitations, rapid breathing, tightening of the chest, heat and sweating, a queasy sensation in the stomach and gut and a pressing need to have a bowel movement or urinate. Some are even too afraid to go to the washroom. They are terrified to take a stand, initiate and take charge of anything; and have little to no essential skills to a social performance – eye contact, appropriate content of speech and reciprocity.

### ***Anxiety disorders comorbid with depression***

Subjects with anxiety disorder are more likely to be unmarried and unemployed than subjects without social anxiety. In a population based twin study in 1996, 1/3 of adolescents with social anxiety who also had comorbid depression committed suicide.

### ***Social Phobia- Clinical Application of Evidence Based Psychotherapy***

People who have social fears will often have concerns about anyone laughing at them, thinking they are stupid, or in some way think badly of them. They are always yearning for approval from others. Poor self-esteem contributes to this picture, but this is not always the case. They usually think that they always receive negative evaluation, and perceive themselves as hopeless human beings. Social phobia, like many other disorders, co occurs with other disorders such as mood disorders, substance abuse (typically alcohol abuse), depression, and other personality disorders. It's actually extremely likely that someone with social anxiety will also have depression.

### ***The anxious brain***

As long as people with social anxiety avoid the kind of exposure they fear, they do not feel their symptoms. They only seek help when they are faced with an important task, when it becomes too late (losing an important job or promotion, messing up a date)

People with social anxiety freeze when they have an attack. This occurs in both a cognitive and behavioral level. They describe their mind as “going blank”. Due to this, they tend to avoid the situation, holding themselves back.

### ***Social Anxiety to Social Phobia***

Social anxiety has a heavy tie to perfectionism. Perfectionists are excessively concerned with physical appearance and approval from others. It reflects the tendency to set high standards for oneself and beat them down if they do not meet those standards. This relates to low self-esteem issues.

## WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO TREAT SOCIAL ANXIETY AS OF NOW? CAN TANGIBLE OBJECTS BE USED TO TREAT THIS?

### ***Angst***

Looking only to the individual is looking in the wrong place. The esteem and attention of others is what matters to most people, much more than self esteem.

The instinctual pain can have real paradoxical advantages when used in another way. E.g. top salespeople and performers are often outwardly extroverted, but when you listen carefully and ask the right questions, they are inwardly socially anxious. Their exquisite sensitivity to the possibility of self-embarrassment allows them to achieve excellence at managing the complex interactions of negotiations and audience engagement.

Biscuits, medals, degrees, large houses and other symbols of authority can offer a small increase in people's perceived social rank. e.g cowardly lion in the wizard of oz needs a medal of courage to feel like the king of the jungle.

Other than that, a lot of therapy can help. Psychotherapy understands the correct patterns of shyness. Cognitive therapy could help an individual come out of their shell by practicing the problem- socializing. For social anxiety, therapy works better than medication.

A quote was brought up which could be useful for people with social anxiety-

***“instead of worrying about what people say of you, why not spend time trying to accomplish something they will admire?”***  
–Dale Carnegie

### ***Overcome phobias and panic attacks***

Always make sure you have knowledge about your fear. Write a daily journal/diary and analyze what it says- people with social anxiety may have all or nothing thinking, such as a mental positive filter, over generalization (“ I always do this”), mind reading, blowing things out of proportion, emotional reasoning, labeling, and self blame.

### ***Social Phobia- Clinical Application of Evidence Based Psychotherapy***

The most single valuable source of evidence is for an individual to put himself or herself in another person's situation. Unfortunately, many clients hold a double standard of what other think of them.

Given the major concern is evaluation from others, it is extremely valuable for the individual to imagine what he would think if the situations were reversed. People with social anxiety tend to hold a double standard.

Otherwise, putting a positive turn to someone's behavior may give them confidence.

. One example is a bashful child who hides his or her face by planting it directly in his or her parent’s body, resulting in adult laughter and encouragement to socialize.

A further example is a distant, detached person who is regarded as “coy” “interesting” or “mysterious. Relating to his or her lack of social initiation or response.

Afraid of embarrassing themselves, and afraid lest people think they have overstepped their instinctual station, some people try to prove themselves worthy. Their fear becomes a guide to the task at hand: if they fear it, they will do it.

Those with social anxiety have an outstanding sensitivity to self-embarrassment, which makes them ever alert to the details of their performance and to the reactions of others.

***Social Anxiety to Social Phobia***

Self report questionnaires are extremely useful in the assessment of social anxiety. On a practical level, questionnaires are efficient, requiring little time to administer and score.

Also, role plays of threatening situations could help someone be more calm when faced with the actual conflict.

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How many people are actually diagnosed with social anxiety? Do they know anyone else who is diagnosed, and how many? What can be done to bring attention to the issue of social anxiety? Which environments do people with social anxiety feel most comfortable in? Which do they feel most uncomfortable in? Does this vary for each person? Does nostalgia or familiarity tie into someone’s scale of being comfortable with something? How?

What are the appropriate skills needed to eliminate social phobia?

Do people feel more comfortable around others with social phobia or feel that it gives them more anxiety? Which colours and nouns are associated with comfort?

# METHODOLOGY/ VISUAL APPROACHES

For my methodology, I used several books to collect statistics on social anxiety, which helped me out a lot rather than collecting data from a small amount of people.

Experimenting with my personal experience with social anxiety has helped in this aspect.

At first, I created a series of simple illustrations reflecting my experience with social anxiety. One illustration represented what I actually looked like on the outside and the other represented what I felt inside. Next, I sat down with a few canvases and some paint to visually express what I was feeling in a few different ways; but later discovered that I could categorize each painting into senses; e.g. see, feel and hear. The colours represented in each painting have been very helpful to create my visual essay. They represented the frustration, sadness and loneliness I felt while my social anxiety was most severe. They were not planned nor sketched out before painting. I chose to choose abstract because there are several different representational illustrations out there; but there was none focused on the emotion and frustration of the person experiencing it.

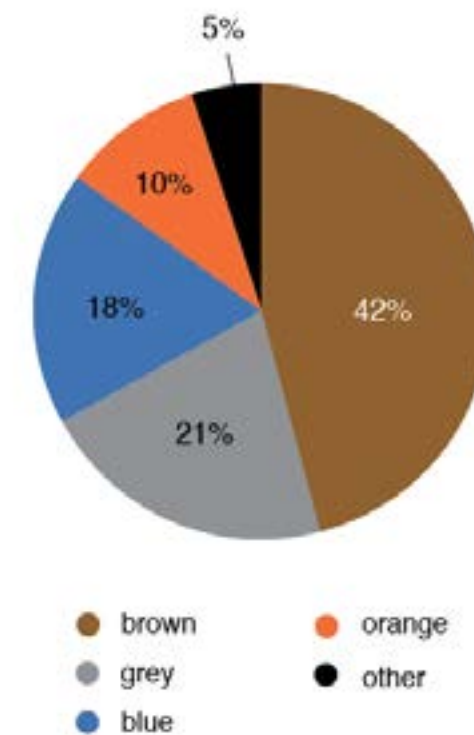
Relating to my visual essay, I was able to then create these paintings and bring them to life and animation. Creating a visual effect allows the user to kind of go "inside" the patients brain and abstractly see what they see.

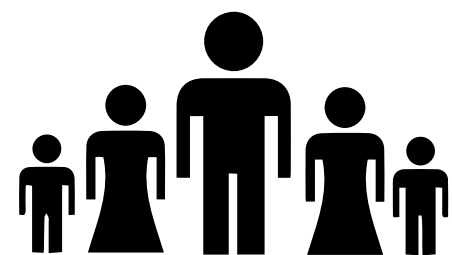
I also analyzed which colours, textures and environments my friends associate with comfort. By collecting a few answers, I was able to see which words occurred more often.

# RESULTS

My results were based on studying why social phobia is so neglected, and which objects, colours and other things could be associated with comfort.

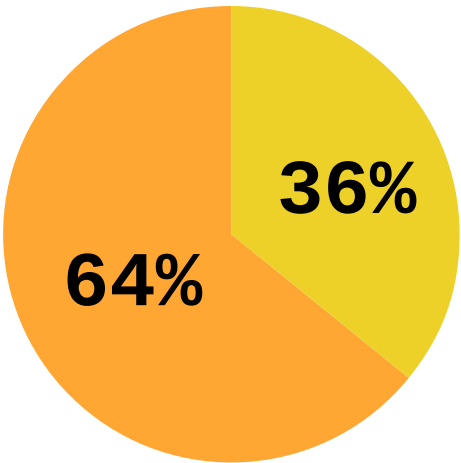
Colours people associated with comfort





**15 million**

North American  
adults have  
social anxiety  
disorder



36% of people with social  
anxiety disorder report  
symptoms for 10 or more  
years before seeking help

# DISCUSSION

Most people do not acknowledge their symptoms when it comes to anxiety. This could be due to shame, background, environment and influence. People's mood can also be relied on colour and physical space.

My research supported my reasoning and approaches in a broad sense of how someone's environment and surroundings affects their anxiety. The limitations of my research were the lack of concise information on the opinions of people with this disorder. I was unable to find enough people with this disorder to collect any data, therefore looked in books instead. Collecting data from people with the actual diagnosis might've made a significant change to the results.

If I had more resources and time, I would experiment with a wide range of ethnic groups, and study their environments and ask them how they think that effects anxiety.

For my final resolution, I would like to look into exhibition style expressions of social anxiety. Tying into my visual essay, expressing social anxiety in an abstract way may help raise awareness about how these people truly feel inside.

# SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

I associated my main topic, social anxiety with mood and objects, and this helped me move my idea into the final design idea of making an exhibition to express the unknown first hand perspective of someone with this neglected illness.



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# APPENDICES:

