

Discrepant Views of Social Competence and Links with Social Phobia

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Abstract : Adolescents' biased perceptions about their social competence (SC), whether negatively or positively, serve to influence their socioemotional adjustment such as early feelings of social phobia (nowadays referred to as Social Anxiety Disorder-SAD). Despite the importance of biased self-perceptions in adolescents' psychosocial adjustment, the extent to which discrepancies between self- and others' evaluations of one's SC are linked to social phobic symptoms remains unclear in the literature. This study examined the perceptual discrepancy profiles between self- and peers' as well as between self- and teachers' evaluations of adolescents' SC and the interrelations of these profiles with self-reported social phobic symptoms. The participants were 390 3rd graders (15 years old) of Finnish lower secondary school (50.8% boys, 49.2% girls). In contrast with variable-centered approaches that have mainly been used by previous studies when focusing on this subject, this study used latent profile analysis (LPA), a person-centered approach which can provide information regarding risk profiles by capturing the heterogeneity within a population and classifying individuals into groups. LPA revealed the following five classes of discrepancy profiles: i) extremely negatively biased perceptions of SC, ii) negatively biased perceptions of SC, iii) quite realistic perceptions of SC, iv) positively biased perceptions of SC, and v) extremely positively biased perceptions of SC. Adolescents with extremely negatively biased perceptions and negatively biased perceptions of their own SC reported the highest number of social phobic symptoms. Adolescents with quite realistic, positively biased and extremely positively biased perceptions reported the lowest number of socio-phobic symptoms. The results point out the negatively and the extremely negatively biased perceptions as possible contributors to social phobic symptoms. Moreover, the association of quite realistic perceptions with low number of social phobic symptoms indicates its potential protective power against social phobia. Finally, positively and extremely positively biased perceptions of SC are negatively associated with social phobic symptoms in this study. However, the profile of extremely positively biased perceptions might be linked as well with the existence of externalizing problems such as antisocial behavior (e.g. disruptive impulsivity). The current findings highlight the importance of considering discrepancies between self- and others' perceptions of one's SC in clinical and research efforts. Interventions designed to prevent or moderate social phobic symptoms need to take into account individual needs rather than aiming for uniform treatment. Implications and future directions are discussed.

Keywords : adolescence, latent profile analysis, perceptual discrepancies, social competence, social phobia

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