

The Efficacy of Self-Report Measures in Predicting Social Phobia in African American Adults

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Abstract: Empirical literature pertaining to anxiety in African Americans has been relatively sparse. More recent studies indicate that the construct of social fear is different in African Americans than in non-Hispanic Whites. Although some of these studies have examined factor structure utilizing self-report measures of anxiety in African American samples, none to date have examined the clinical utility of these measures in predicting anxiety diagnoses, particularly social phobia. A total of sixty-five African American adults from the community completed the Fear Survey Schedule-Second Edition (FSS-II), Social Anxiety Interaction Scale (SIAS), Social Phobia Scale (SPS), and Albany Panic and Phobia Questionnaire (APPQ). The Anxiety Disorder Interview Schedule- Fourth Edition (ADIS-IV) was administered to all participants to specify differential diagnoses of anxiety and related disorders. Twenty-three African American adults were diagnosed with social phobia leaving 42 diagnostic controls. Results suggest that the social anxiety factors were highly predictive of a social phobia diagnosis (AUC = .84 to .90; CI .73-.98, $p < .01$) and sensitivity and specificity rates revealed optimal cutoff scores for each measure. The optimal cutoff scores reveal the clinical utility of the social fear factor from these measures in screening for social phobia in African Americans. Future direction and implications are discussed.

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Keywords: African Americans ■ Anxiety Disorders ■ Clinical Utility ■ Receiver Operating Characteristic Analysis ■ Social Phobia

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, the empirical literature pertaining to the cross-racial and ethnic generalization of anxiety and related constructs has been relatively sparse, although there is a growing body of literature pertaining to African American samples. Previous work in this area indicates that African Americans may significantly differ in the endorsement of anxiety and fear symptoms from their non-Hispanic White counterparts.¹⁻⁶ Specifically, more recent findings suggest that African Americans may endorse more social and animal fears than their non-Hispanic White counterparts.⁷⁻¹¹ These recent studies underscore the need for continued assessment of anxiety in ethnic minority samples. Similarly, they consistently suggest two areas for future study this area: (1) delineating evidence that empirically supported treatments for anxiety disorders generalize to diverse populations and (2) the exploration of anxiety disorder factor variance in ethnic minority samples, which would suggest components for culturally sensitive interventions.¹² For example, the most

recent empirical literature pertaining to anxiety in African Americans indicates that some related constructs appear to diverge from what has been found in studies examining anxiety in non-Hispanic White samples (e.g., perceived control, psychological distress, and worry;⁸ cognitive and somatic symptoms on Beck Anxiety Inventory;⁹ social and animal phobia domains).¹³ This further underscores the need for continued exploration of culturally sensitive assessment of anxiety disorders in African American samples; that is, the utility of instruments, which were developed in majority populations, in minority populations.

SOCIAL PHOBIA IN AFRICAN AMERICANS

Historically, the empirical literature pertaining to social anxiety and social fear has yielded mixed results. For instance, Brown and Eaton¹⁴ noted in their community-based work that African Americans experienced a higher prevalence of social phobia (5.6%) as compared to their non-Hispanic White counterparts (2.6%). However, findings from the National Comorbidity Survey-Replication yielded disparate results from the earlier Brown and Eaton¹⁴ study. Specifically, results from the National Comorbidity Survey-Replication (NCS-R) indicated that African American adults have lower odds of social phobia and less endorsement of social fears.¹⁵ However, results from the NCS-R had a number of shortcomings worth noting. First, the interviews in the NCS-R were administered by a “professional survey interviewer,” and little information was provided as to whether the interviewers were clinically trained. Second, the ethnic match of the trained interviewers is not reported in the NCS-R, making the reliability of the interviews difficult to ascertain. Moreover, these shortcomings are important for at least two reasons. First, African Americans (and others) could have potentially underreported symptoms of social anxiety in the NCS-R due to the aforementioned concerns. Presumably, probing for further questions that may be culturally relevant to ethnic minority participants may have been avoided due to the hierarchical structure of the interviews. Second, self-report anxiety symptoms along with diagnostic information administered by both African American and non-Hispanic White clinically trained researchers was not reported in the

NCS-R study.¹⁵ Although these results are meaningful, these shortcomings would need to be addressed in future studies in order for definitive conclusions to be drawn pertaining African Americans and social phobia.

In terms of the construct of social fear, recent studies indicate the construct of social fear may differ in African Americans when compared to non-Hispanic Whites.^{7,10,13} Specifically, the factor loadings for both animal and social phobia domains have been relatively consistent across both college and community-based samples of African Americans, suggesting a potential cultural homogeneity of phobias in African Americans that may differ from that of non-Hispanic Whites.¹³ Empirical work conducted by Melka and colleagues¹⁰ corroborate the notion that the construct of social anxiety may yield a different factor pattern in African Americans as compared to non-Hispanic Whites. In a study examining the factor structure of the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (FNE) and the Social Avoidance and Distress Scales (SAD) in African American and non-Hispanic White young adults, results indicated that the factor structure for both measures were different in the African American sample. Specifically, five items from the FNE and two items from the SAD had to be omitted in order for the model fit to improve in the African American sample. These results further indicate the need to examine measures of social anxiety in African American adults.

Furthermore, whereas some of these studies have examined the factor structure of proposed models of phobic domains by utilizing self-report measures of anxiety symptoms in samples of African Americans, none to date have examined the clinical utility of these measures in predicting anxiety diagnostic status in African American adults. As previously noted, recent empirical work suggests that African American adults may endorse more social fears than non-Hispanic White adults.^{7,13} This difference in social anxiety symptom endorsement may be accounted for by cultural distinctions that arise between different ethnic groups. In a study conducted by Heinrich et al.,¹⁶ individuals from collectivistic cultures reported higher levels of social anxiety when compared to those from individualistic cultures. Additionally, when racial identity was taken into account, other work revealed that African Americans' attitudes about race may be associated with levels of social anxiety, particularly fear of negative evaluation.¹⁸ Based on the stages of Black Racial Identity put forth by Cross,¹⁹ those internalized individuals were less socially anxious and endorsed less psychological distress, suggesting that those who are secure in their racial identity are also secure in their social interaction. The aforementioned study suggests that higher rates of social avoidance, inhibition, and fear of negative evaluation are found in African American

individuals whose self-perception is characterized by non-Hispanic White values. However, future work in this area is needed in order to determine specific cultural factors that may be endemic to both anxious and non-anxious African Americans. Similarly, extant literature regarding kin support networks in African American culture provides further explanation for the variability in prevalence rates of social phobia (SP) in African Americans and their non-White Hispanic counterparts.^{20–24} Individuals from cultures who are collectivistic in nature, like the extended kin network of many African Americans, identify themselves with the group and strive to maintain the integrity of that group.¹⁷ Thus, African Americans may place more emphasis on their social interactions as to not bring shame to their kin network.⁷ In sum, it appears that further exploration of social anxiety measures is undoubtedly warranted in African American samples and that cultural factors need to be increasingly addressed to determine which specific facets of social anxiety are endemic to African Americans as compared to other groups. Presumably, an effective approach to answering many of these empirical questions requires a further examination of generally accepted measures of social anxiety in a sample comprised of African American adults with and without social anxiety disorder.

SOCIAL PHOBIA ASSESSMENT

Social Phobia Scale (SPS). Past research has identified the Social Phobia Scale (SPS) as a reliable and valid measure for assessing social anxiety.²⁵ The SPS in combination with the SIAS was a significant predictor of anxiety in response to a social challenge.²⁶ Further, in a study conducted by Brown et al.,²⁷ the SPS reliably discriminated patients with social phobia from those with other anxiety disorders. Additionally, a score of 24, which was one standard deviation above the mean of the sample in a study conducted by Heimberg et al.,²⁸ correctly identified cases of social phobia with an efficiency rate of 73%.²⁷ However, the SPS may not be as sensitive to differences between social phobia and panic disorder diagnoses.²⁷ Additional research suggests that the SPS may not be the best predictor of social phobia when compared to the Social Phobia and Anxiety Inventory (SPAI).²⁹ However, the SPS was able to differentiate between those with social phobia and panic disorder at levels that were significantly better than chance. An optimal cutoff score of 26 for predicting social phobia was identified for the SPS, which corroborates findings from prior research.^{27,29} No studies to date have reported the use of the SPS in African American samples.

Albany Panic and Phobia Questionnaire (APPQ). The Albany Panic and Phobia Questionnaire (APPQ) was designed to measure the distinct dimension of fear of sensation-producing activities, as well as the fear of common agoraphobic and social phobic situations.³⁰ Its

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