Shyness and Self-Assurance in Social Anxiety: Intolerance of Uncertainty or Fear of Negative Evaluation?

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Introduction

- Social anxiety (SA) typically refers to anxiety or worry experienced in social or evaluative situations (Marks & Gelder, 1966). Shyness as a trait and behaviour (i.e., the tendency to avoid social situations) shares conceptual overlap and is associated with SA.
- Self-assurance (i.e., experiencing confidence in social situations) and associated behaviours are atypical in individuals with SA. For example, self-assurance has been associated with positive expectancies in social interactions (Arisohn et al., 1988).
- Although the relationship between SA and fear of negative evaluation (FNE) has been documented, recent research suggests that SA may be more positively associated with intolerance of uncertainty (IU) (Carleton et al., in press).
- Given the association between SA and FNE and IU, self-assurance should be inversely related with FNE and IU; these putative relationships are heretofore unexplored.
- Accordingly, the purpose of the current study was to explore the relationship between shyness and self-assurance with respect to FNE and IU.

Method

Participants

- The current investigation included individuals from a community sample. Participants completed a battery of questionnaires as part of a larger study.
  - 87 men, ages 17-34 (*M* = 20.62; *SD* = 3.25)
  - 222 women ages 18-45 (*M* = 20.21; *SD* = 3.32)

Measures

- All participants completed the following measures:
  - Positive Affect Negative Affect Scale-X (PANAS-X; Watson & Clark, 1992)
  - Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (Carleton et al., 2007)
  - Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale-II (BFNE-II; Carleton et al., 2007)
  - Social Interaction Phobia Scale (SIPS; Carleton et al., 2008)

Analyses

- Hierarchical linear regressions were performed with each of the shyness and self-assurance subscales from the PANAS-X as dependent variables, using the BFNE-II, IUS-12, and SIPS as independent variables entered in a separate ascending step.

Results

- Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.
- Independent *t*-tests indicated that men and women did not differ significantly on any of the dependent variables ($p > .05$; $r^2 < .05$).
- Results of the multiple regression analyses are presented in Table 3. The variables included in the analyses were all statistically significantly interrelated:
  - The models for shyness and self-assurance accounted for significant ($p<.01$) proportions of variance (37% and 14%, respectively).
  - The BFNE-II was related to shyness and accounted for 21% of the variance; however, including the IUS-12 and the SIPS accounted for an additional 16% of the variance, and rendered the FNE relationship non-significant.
  - Similarly, BFNE-II was inversely related to self-assurance accounting for 9% of the variance, while including IUS-12 and SIPS accounted for an additional 6% of the variance, and also made the BFNE-II relationship non-significant.

Discussion

- Overall, the current results suggest that shyness and self-assurance are more closely related to uncertainty and anxiety in social interactions, than explicitly fearing negative evaluations.
- The relationship between shyness, self-assurance and IU is particularly important given the precedent focus on the relationship between FNE and SA.
- The IU contribution to shyness and self-assurance in the current study is consistent with recent research with other anxiety disorders; IU has been implicated in generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and obsessive compulsive disorder, and appears to be a fundamental fear (Boelen & Reijntjes, 2009; Carleton, Collimore, & Asmundson, 2010).
- Results of the current study lend further support for uncertainty being a key element in the maintenance of several anxiety disorders. Accordingly, these results underscore the transdiagnostic application of uncertainty to pathological anxiety.
- Future research should address the possible utility of directing intervention specifically at uncertainty in the context of treatment for SA.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	N	*M*	*SD*	*S*	*K*
PANAS-X Shyness	311	8.22	3.68	.82	-.07
PANAS-X Self-assurance	309	15.05	5.43	.52	-.29
IUS-12	311	30.78	11.20	.49	-.51
BFNE-II	311	23.59	14.94	.04	-1.28
SIPS	311	17.84	14.49	.82	-.18

**$p<.01$

Table 2: Correlations

	PANAS-X Self-assurance	BFNE-II	IUS-12	SIPS
PANAS-X Shyness	-.138*	.454**	.488**	.593**
PANAS-X Self-assurance		-.299**	-.325**	-.365**
BFNE-II	-.299**		.589**	.684**
IUS-12	-.325**	.589**		.678**

**$p<.01$

Table 3: Multiple Regression

Model	Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: PANAS-X Shyness $R^2\Delta$	*F*	ß	*Part r*	PANAS-X Self-assurance $R^2\Delta$	*F*	ß	*Part r*
1	**BFNE-II**	.21	80.21**	.45	.45	.09	30.03**	-.30	-.30
2	**BFNE-II**	.16	39.06**	.06	.04	.06	10.26**	-.06	-.04
	IUS-12			.15	.10			-.24	-.15
	SIPS			.47	.29			-.13	-.09

**$p<.01$

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