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## The psychometric properties of the Interpersonal Sensitivity Measure in social anxiety disorder<sup>☆</sup>

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### Abstract

The Interpersonal Sensitivity Measure (IPSM) was developed to assess hypersensitivity to interpersonal rejection, a suggested trait of depression-prone personality (Aust NZ J Psychiatry 23 (1989) 341). Although studies of the IPSM and interpersonal rejection sensitivity have primarily been conducted in depressed populations, it is important to investigate interpersonal rejection sensitivity as a relevant construct in the assessment of social anxiety. This study examined the psychometric properties of the IPSM in treatment-seeking individuals with social anxiety disorder. The results of this investigation support the convergent and divergent validity and internal consistency of the IPSM in socially anxious individuals. An exploratory factor analysis of the scale was also conducted after the original factor and subscale structure was shown to be a poor fit for the present data. Three factors emerged (Interpersonal Worry and Dependency, Low Self-Esteem, and Unassertive Interpersonal Behavior), and 29 items were retained. Because they demonstrated negative factor loadings on Factor 2, it is suggested that the scoring for four items of the original IPSM be reversed. In summary, the revised IPSM assesses three aspects of interpersonal rejection sensitivity and appears to be a valid and reliable instrument for its assessment in social anxiety disorder. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Social anxiety disorder; Interpersonal sensitivity; Validity; Reliability; Factor analysis; IPSM; Dependency; Self-esteem; Unassertive behavior

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## 1. Introduction

The Interpersonal Sensitivity Measure (IPSM) was developed by Boyce & Parker (1989) as a self-report measure of the construct of interpersonal sensitivity, which they defined as “undue and excessive awareness of and sensitivity to, the behavior and feelings of others” (p. 342). This construct has also been described as a general sensitivity to social feedback, vigilance with regard to others’ reactions, increased concern about the behavior and statements of others, and fear of perceived or actual criticism by others (Boyce, Hickie, Parker, & Mitchell, 1993). Interpersonal sensitivity is characterized by a sense of personal inadequacy and frequent misinterpretation of others’ interpersonal behavior and results in discomfort in the presence of others as well as interpersonal avoidance and non-assertive behavior (Boyce & Parker, 1989; Davidson, Zisook, Giller, & Helms, 1989). Although the authors of the IPSM refer to this construct as ‘interpersonal sensitivity’, we suggest the more descriptive label of ‘interpersonal rejection sensitivity’ to avoid confusion with the common conception of interpersonally sensitive/aware individuals and better describe the fear and discomfort associated with perceived interpersonal rejection.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) describes a subtype of major depressive disorder, atypical depression, which was first discussed 30 years ago as resistant to antidepressant medication (Rabkin et al., 1996). The current definition of atypical depression includes the frequent symptom of interpersonal rejection sensitivity, which is conceived of as a persistent personality characteristic. This personality attribute may be exacerbated by depressive episodes, may be a reflection of the sensitivity to rejection induced by depressive episodes, or may represent a vulnerability to depressive episodes. Given these connections between depression and interpersonal rejection sensitivity, Boyce and Parker (1989) proposed that interpersonal rejection sensitivity is a characteristic of the ‘depression-prone’ personality and consequently developed the IPSM to assess this risk factor for the development of depressive disorders.

The initial studies of the scale yielded good evidence in support of the psychometric properties of the IPSM (Boyce & Parker, 1989). In a clinical sample of depressed patients and a non-clinical student sample, internal consistency estimates for the total score were 0.86 and 0.85, respectively. Further, the six-week retest reliability of the IPSM in the student sample was 0.70. A high correlation with a measure of neuroticism ( $r=0.66$ ), a moderate correlation with a measure of self-esteem ( $r=0.39$ ), and a low correlation with a measure of emotional arousability ( $r=0.11$ ) provided evidence for both the convergent and divergent validity of the IPSM. The internal consistency estimates for four of the five IPSM subscales (Interpersonal Awareness, Separation Anxiety, Timidity, and Fragile Inner Self) were comparable to those reported for the total score. However, this initial investigation yielded lower six-week retest reliability for the Need for Approval subscale ( $r=0.55$ ) as well as relatively low alpha coefficients of 0.67 in the patient sample and 0.55 in the student sample (Boyce & Parker, 1989).

Since its development, the IPSM has been used primarily in studies of interpersonal rejection sensitivity as a risk factor for depression. Interpersonal rejection sensitivity appears to be associated with depressive disorders, especially non-melancholic depressive episodes (Boyce et al., 1993, 1990). Although the IPSM is somewhat sensitive to mood states, interpersonal rejection sensitivity represents a more enduring personality characteristic (Boyce & Parker, 1989). Prospective studies

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