

Social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation: Construct validity of the BFNE-II

R. Nicholas Carleton, Kelsey C. Collimore,
Gordon J.G. Asmundson*

Anxiety and Illness Behaviours Laboratory, University of Regina, Regina, Sask., Canada S4S 0A2

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Abstract

The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale [BFNE; Leary, M. R. (1983). A brief version of the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 9, 371–375] is a self-report measure designed to assess fear of negative evaluation, a characteristic feature of social anxiety disorders [Rapee, R. M., & Heimberg, R. G. (1997). A cognitive-behavioral model of anxiety in social phobia. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 35, 741–756]. Recent psychometric assessments have suggested that a 2-factor model is most appropriate, with the first factor comprising the straightforwardly worded items and the second factor comprising the reverse-worded items [Carleton, R. N., McCreary, D., Norton, P. J., & Asmundson, G. J. G. (in press-a). The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, Revised. *Depression & Anxiety*; Rodebaugh, T. L., Woods, C. M., Thissen, D. M., Heimberg, R. G., Chambless, D. L., & Rapee, R. M. (2004). More information from fewer questions: the factor structure and item properties of the original and brief fear of negative evaluation scale. *Psychological Assessment*, 2, 169–181; Weeks, J. W., Heimberg, R. G., Fresco, D. M., Hart, T. A., Turk, C. L., Schneier, F. R., et al. (2005). Empirical validation and psychometric evaluation of the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale in patients with social anxiety disorder. *Psychological Assessment*, 17, 179–190]. Some researchers recommend the reverse-worded items be removed from scoring [e.g., Rodebaugh, T. L., Woods, C. M., Thissen, D. M., Heimberg, R. G., Chambless, D. L., & Rapee, R. M. (2004). More information from fewer questions: the factor structure and item properties of the original and brief fear of negative evaluation scale. *Psychological Assessment*, 2, 169–181; Weeks, J. W., Heimberg, R. G., Fresco, D. M., Hart, T. A., Turk, C. L., Schneier, F. R., et al. (2005). Empirical validation and psychometric evaluation of the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale in patients with social anxiety disorder. *Psychological Assessment*, 17, 179–190]; however [Carleton, R. N., McCreary, D., Norton, P. J., & Asmundson, G. J. G. (in press-a). The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale, Revised. *Depression & Anxiety*; Collins, K. A., Westra, H. A., Dozois, D. J. A., & Stewart, S. H. (2005). The validity of the brief version of the fear of negative evaluation scale. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 19, 345–359]

* Corresponding author. Supported by a Canadian Institute of Health Research Investigator's Award.
Tel.: +1 306 347 2415; fax: +1 306 585 4854.

E-mail address: gordon.asmundson@uregina.ca (Gordon J.G. Asmundson).

recommend that these items be reworded to maintain scale sensitivity. The present study examined the reliability and validity of the BFNE-II, a version of the BFNE evaluating revisions of the reverse-worded items in a community sample. A unitary model of the BFNE-II resulted in excellent confirmatory factor analysis fit indices. Moderate convergent and discriminant validity were found when BFNE-II items were correlated with additional independent measures of social anxiety [i.e., Social Interaction Anxiety & Social Phobia Scales; Mattick, R. P., & Clarke, J. C. (1998). Development and validation of measures of social phobia scrutiny fear and social interaction anxiety. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 36, 455–470], and fear [i.e., Anxiety Sensitivity Index; Reiss, S., & McNally, R. J. (1985). The expectancy model of fear. In S. Reiss, R. R. Bootzin (Eds.), *Theoretical issues in behaviour therapy* (pp. 107–121). New York: Academic Press. and the Illness/Injury Sensitivity Index; Carleton, R. N., Park, I., & Asmundson, G. J. G. (in press-b). The Illness/Injury Sensitivity Index: an examination of construct validity. *Depression & Anxiety*). These findings support the utility of the revised items and the validity of the BFNE-II as a measure of the fear of negative evaluation. Implications and future research directions are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (BFNE; Leary, 1983) is a measure of a person's tolerance for the possibility they may be judged disparagingly or hostilely by others (Leary, 1983). As a latent construct, fear of negative evaluation is believed to promote the development and expression of more general fears, anxiety, and psychopathologies (Reiss & McNally, 1985). This latent fear is partially heritable, related to trait anxiety, and social avoidance (Stein, Jang, & Livesley, 2002). Given the necessity for positive, successful social interaction, particularly for persons in need of therapy (Alden & Taylor, 2004; Segrin, 2001), increased understanding of the effects of fear of negative evaluation and its correlates are crucial.

Several cognitive models, as well as previous research, support the notion that social anxiety is derived in part from fears of perceived negative evaluation (e.g., Clark & Wells, 1995; Rapee & Heimberg, 1997). People with social anxiety demonstrate a variety of behaviours to avoid negative evaluation (Wells et al., 1995) and have attentional biases for detecting social-evaluative threats (Asmundson & Stein, 1994; Heinrichs & Hofmann, 2001; Vassilopoulos, 2005); however, this sensitivity to social threat is believed to be based on implicit and automatic responses determined by stimulus relevance (Philippot & Douilliez, 2005). Socially anxious people have lower levels of confidence in their perceived social skills (Lundh & Sperling, 2002; Stopa & Clark, 1993) related primarily to fear of negative evaluation (Izgiç, Akyüz, Dogan, & Kugu, 2004; Rapee & Lim, 1992; Rodebaugh & Chambless, 2002). Not surprisingly, fear of negative evaluation has also been associated with increased shyness (Miller, 1995), the development of eating disorders (Gilbert & Meyer, 2005; Lundgren, Anderson, & Thompson, 2004), and lower self-esteem (Kocovski & Endler, 2000).

A recent resurgence in BFNE investigations (e.g., Carleton, McCreary, Norton, & Asmundson, in press-a; Rodebaugh et al., 2004; Weeks et al., 2005) was sparked by questions regarding the psychometric properties and utility of some BFNE items. These questions stemmed from concerns about the reverse-worded items included in its repertoire. The original BFNE comprises 12 five-point Likert scale items—8 straightforwardly worded and 4 reverse-worded. Unfortunately, the reverse-worded items were consistently forming a methodologically based factor during psychometric assessment of the scale (Carleton et al., in press-a; Rodebaugh et al.,

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