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Gender differences in Childhood Anxiety Sensitivity Index (CASI) dimensions[☆]

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Abstract

We examined the hierarchical structure of the Childhood Anxiety Sensitivity Index (CASI) as a function of gender and examined the occurrence of gender differences in anxiety sensitivity (AS) dimensions in a large nonclinical sample of children and adolescents ($N = 1698$). Separate principal components analyses (PCAs) on the 18 CASI items for the total sample, boys, and girls revealed similar lower-order three-factor structures for all groups. The three factors reflected Physical, Social/Control, and Psychological Concerns. PCAs on the lower-order factor scores revealed similar unidimensional higher-order solutions for all groups. Girls scored higher than boys on the Physical and, to a lesser extent, Social/Control Concerns factors; girls scored higher on the Physical Concerns factor relative to their scores on the Social/Control and Psychological Concerns factors; and boys scored higher on the Social/Control and Psychological Concerns factors relative to their scores on the Physical Concerns factor. Girls also scored higher than boys on the higher-order factor representing the Global AS construct. The present study provides additional support for the theoretical hierarchical structure of AS and suggests that there is a difference in the manifestation of AS between girls and boys.

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Anxiety sensitivity (AS) is the fear of anxiety-related sensations due to beliefs that such sensations will lead to catastrophic outcomes such as physical illness, social embarrassment, or mental incapacitation (Reiss & McNally, 1985). Longitudinal research supports AS as a vulnerability factor in anxiety disorders development (e.g., Schmidt, Lerew, & Jackson, 1997). Evidence from factor analytic studies on the adult Anxiety Sensitivity Index (ASI; Peterson & Reiss, 1992) supports a hierarchical structure in which three intercorrelated lower-order AS factors (i.e., Physical, Social, and Psychological Concerns) load onto a single higher-order Global AS factor (see Zinbarg, Mohlman, & Hong, 1999 for review). A similar hierarchical structure has been found in recent factor analytic studies of the Childhood Anxiety Sensitivity Index (CASI; Silverman, Fleisig, Rabian, & Peterson, 1991), although there is debate on whether there are two, three, or four lower-order factors (Chorpita & Daleiden, 2000; Muris, Schmidt, Merckelbach, & Schouten, 2001; Silverman, Ginsburg, & Goedhart, 1999).

In adults, women score higher on average on the ASI than men (Peterson & Reiss, 1992). While similar hierarchical factor structures can be extracted from the ASI in men and women, there are gender differences on the particular dimensions of AS in both nonclinical (Stewart, Taylor, & Baker, 1997) and clinical populations (Stewart & Baker, 1999). For instance, Stewart et al. (1997) found that women scored higher than men on the lower-order Physical Concerns factor but not the Social or Psychological Concerns factors of the ASI. In addition, within-gender comparisons showed that women score higher on Physical Concerns relative to their scores on Social and Psychological Concerns dimensions. In contrast, men score higher on Social and Psychological Concerns dimensions relative to their scores on Physical Concerns.

In children, girls score higher overall than boys on measures of childhood AS (e.g., Deacon, Valentiner, Gutierrez, & Blacker, 2002; Muris et al., 2001; van Widenfelt, Siebelink, Goedhart, & Treffers, 2002). Moreover, consistent with adult studies, Deacon et al. (2002) found that girls scored higher than boys on a Physical Concerns subscale, but not a Psychological Concerns subscale, derived from factor analysis of a 12-item ASI for Children (ASIC). In contrast, van Widenfelt et al. (2002) found that girls had higher scores than boys on all three CASI subscales (i.e., Physical, Psychological, and Social Concerns).

To date, no studies have examined CASI factor structure as a function of gender and none have compared girls and boys on CASI dimensions using factor scores as opposed to subscale scores (cf., Stewart et al., 1997).¹ Examination of the factor structure as a function of gender would ensure that the previously observed gender differences in childhood AS are due to actual differences in the relative focus of concerns between girls and boys and not due to gender differences in CASI factor

¹Factor scores, as opposed to subscale scores derived from factor analyses of the CASI items, were examined in the current study. With the use of factor scores, each item is weighted for its relative contribution to the factor in question as opposed to all items being treated as equally representative of the dimension in question which is the assumption when subscale scores are used.

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