



Fear factors: Cross validation of specific phobia domains in a community-based sample of African American adults

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ABSTRACT

The current study attempted a cross-validation of specific phobia domains in a community-based sample of African American adults based on a previous model of phobia domains in a college student sample of African Americans. Subjects were 100 African American community-dwelling adults who completed the Fear Survey Schedule-Second Edition (FSS-II). Domains of fear were created using a similar procedure as the original, college sample of African American adults. A model including all of the phobia domains from the FSS-II was initially tested and resulted in poor model fit. Cross-validation was subsequently attempted through examining the original factor pattern of specific phobia domains from the college sample (Chapman, Kertz, Zurlage, & Woodruff-Borden, 2008). Data from the current, community based sample of African American adults provided poor fit to this model. The trimmed model for the current sample included the animal and social anxiety factors as in the original model. The natural environment-type specific phobia factor did not provide adequate fit for the community-based sample of African Americans. Results indicated that although different factor loading patterns of fear may exist among community-based African Americans as compared to African American college students, both animal and social fears are nearly identical in both groups, indicating a possible cultural homogeneity for phobias in African Americans. Potential explanations of these findings and future directions are discussed.

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Specific phobias continue to represent a paradox in the empirical literature, being estimated as the most pervasive of all psychological disorders in community-based samples with a 1-year prevalence rate of 8.7% (Kessler, Belfund, Demler, Jin, & Walters, 2005) yet being ancillary to more debilitating anxiety disorders (Chapman, Kertz, Zurlage, & Woodruff-Borden, 2008). Despite continued advancement in the study of anxiety and related constructs, the relationship between specific fear domains (e.g., fear factors) and anxiety continues to raise questions about the distinct nature of the construct of fear (Craske et al., 2009). Similarly, the existing literature pertaining to anxiety and related constructs in ethnic minority samples continues to be sparse although there is burgeoning evidence that African Americans in particular may endorse more fears and have higher rates of specific phobias than their non-Hispanic White counterparts (Chapman et al., 2008; Last & Perrin, 1993; Nalven, 1970; Neal & Brown, 1994; Neal & Turner, 1991; Neal, Lilly, & Zakis, 1993). The aforementioned studies particularly suggests more animal fears (e.g., fear of dogs) in African Americans than their non-Hispanic White counterparts although

no such differences have been noted pertaining to the other fear domains. Nascent work in this area (see Chapman et al., 2008) has utilized college samples to compare African Americans and their non-Hispanic White counterparts on domains of fear, with results further suggesting that African Americans may endorse more fears than non-Hispanic White adults. Although these findings represent advancements in the area of anxiety and related disorders in ethnic minority samples, similar work in community-based samples of ethnic minorities would significantly enhance our understanding of the various domains of fear in under-served populations. The current study represents a significant stride in this area through an attempt to cross validate the one confirmatory factor analysis to date of specific phobia domains in a community-based sample of African American adults.

1. Fear factors: specific phobia domains in African American adults

While anxiety disorders in general are not fully understood in terms of their presentation and prevalence in African American samples (see Heurtin-Roberts, Snowden, & Miller, 1997; Smith, Friedman, & Nevid, 1999), specific phobias represent a facet of anxiety that previous studies have indicated may occur more frequently in African Americans than in their non-Hispanic White counterparts (Chapman et al., 2008; Last & Perrin, 1993; Nalven, 1970;

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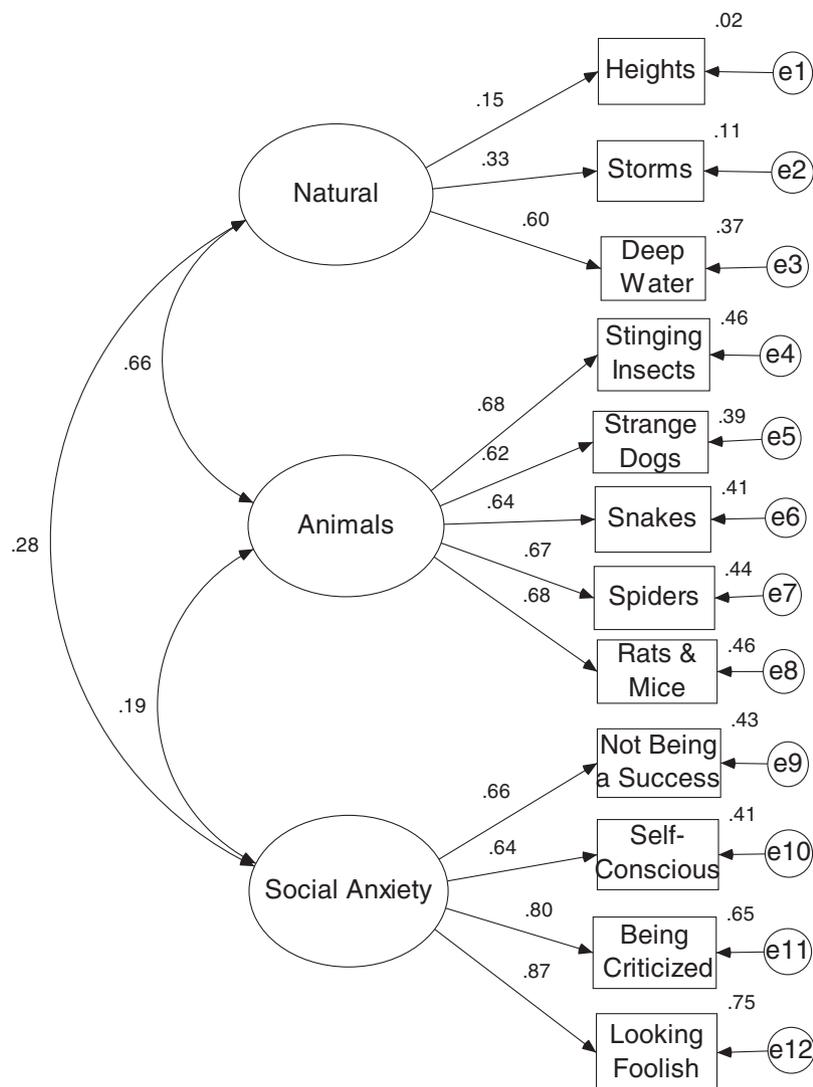


Fig. 1. Specific phobia domains for African American college student sample in *y*.

Neal & Turner, 1991). Additionally, a previous study by Chapman et al. (2008) in which they conducted a confirmatory factor analysis of specific phobia domains based on the items from the Fear Survey Schedule-II (FSS-II) suggests that the fear domains endorsed by African Americans differ from those typically endorsed by non-Hispanic Whites. Of the fear domains associated with a diagnosis of specific phobia, which include animal type, natural environment type, blood–injection–injury type, situation type, and other type (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), African Americans were found to endorse fears falling within the domains of Natural Environment Type and Animal Type, as well as fears related to social anxiety (see Fig. 1). In regards to Natural Environment Type fears, African Americans endorsed more fears of heights, storms, and deep water than the non-Hispanic White sample. Additionally, while both samples reported Animal Type fears, the African American sample was more likely to endorse fears of strange dogs, stinging insects, and rodents than the White sample. Lastly, the African American sample differed significantly from the non-Hispanic White sample in the social fear domain, particularly the fear of not being a success.

While these findings from the Chapman et al. (2008) study are intriguing in terms of the fear domain specificity apparent between samples of African American and non-Hispanic White college students, subsequent research efforts are needed to deter-

mine if these differences in factor loadings would subsist as a homogenous pattern of commonly endorsed fears within community dwelling African Americans. The current study addresses this question by attempting to cross-validate the original model of fear domains for African American college students with specific fears endorsed in community dwelling African American adults. To date, this appears to be the first attempt to cross-validate factor loadings of specific phobia domains in a community based ethnic minority sample.

Based on the aforementioned literature, a confirmatory factor analysis (cross-validation) of the Chapman et al. (2008) study was attempted. It was hypothesized that a similar pattern of fears would emerge within the community sample as in the original phobia groupings of the college sample; specifically, it was hypothesized that the factor loadings for the animal (e.g., fear of strange dogs, stinging insects, and rodents), natural environment (e.g., fear of heights, thunderstorms, and deep water) and social fears (e.g., e.g., not being a success) would be similar in the current sample as in the original sample which is further underscored in previous work (Brown & Eaton, 1986; Chapman et al., 2008; Last & Perrin, 1993; Neal & Turner, 1991). Due to the relative scarcity of literature related to specific phobias in ethnic minority samples (e.g., limited work on BII fears), no additional a priori predictions were made.

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