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## Phobic anxiety in 11 nations: part II. Hofstede's dimensions of national cultures predict national-level variations

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## Abstract

Hofstede's dimensions of national cultures termed Masculinity–Femininity (MAS) and Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) (Hofstede, 2001) are proposed to be of relevance for understanding national-level differences in self-assessed fears. The potential predictive role of national MAS was based on the classical work of Fodor (Fodor, 1974). Following Fodor, it was predicted that masculine (or tough) societies in which clearer differentiations are made between gender roles (high MAS) would report higher national levels of fears than feminine (or soft/modest) societies in which such differentiations are made to a clearly lesser extent (low MAS). In addition, it was anticipated that nervous-stressful-emotionally-expressive nations (high UAI) would report higher national levels of fears than calm-happy and low-emotional countries (low UAI), and that countries high on both MAS and UAI would report the highest national levels of fears. A data set comprising 11 countries ( $N > 5000$ ) served as the basis for analyses. As anticipated, (a) high MAS predicted higher national levels of Agoraphobic fears and of Bodily Injury–Illness–Death fears; (b) higher scores on both UAI and MAS predicted higher national scores on Bodily Injury–Illness–Death fears, fears of Sexual and Aggressive Scenes, and Harmless Animals fears; (c) higher UAI predicted higher national levels of Harmless Animals, Bodily Injury–Illness–Death, and Agoraphobic fears.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Culture and gender roles

Fodor (1974), among many others (e.g. Brehony, 1983; Chambless, 1982, 1989; Chambless & Goldstein, 1980; Wolfe, 1984), have advanced theoretical speculations for explaining the higher frequencies in adulthood of (agora)phobic conditions in females as compared to males by pointing to the dependence and superhelplessness that are inherent to the stereotypically feminine gender role. Thus, these authors have argued that as young girls grow to become women, traditional societal mores promote dependency, shaping their behavior and aspirations by deemphasizing autonomy and mastery while fostering expectations of protection and guidance. By contrast, for boys socialization entails reinforcement for quite different behavior: males are expected to be independent, confronting, and instrumental in their approach towards the world (cf. Woody & Chambless, 1989). In the classical view of Fodor (1974) phobic behavior of any kind, albeit agoraphobic fears in particular, is consistent with traditionally defined feminine gender roles (i.e. emotional, submissive, excitable, passive, house-oriented, not at all adventurous, avoidant of mastery experiences and of competition, displaying lack of assertiveness and a strong need for security and dependency) and at odds with the traditional male gender role (e.g. autonomous, achievement-oriented, initiative taking, assertive). Fodor (1974) notes that when the realistic stresses of adult life and marriage become overwhelmingly great, stereotypically emotional, passive, helpless women become anxious, wish to flee, dream of becoming more independent or of rescue or escape, and ultimately develop a phobia. In doing so they sink even further into an exaggerated version of the stereotypic feminine gender role, becoming dependent on those around

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