

# This Week's Citation Classic

**Geer J H.** The development of a scale to measure fear.

Behav. Res. Ther. 3:45-53, 1965.

[Department of Psychology, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY]

A paper and pencil test to measure fears was developed using empirical item selection of self report data. The scale was validated by behavioral tests. The Fear Survey Schedule II was found to have excellent psychometric properties and to be related to other personality measures. [The *Science Citation Index*<sup>®</sup> (*SCI*<sup>®</sup>) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*<sup>®</sup> (*SSCI*<sup>™</sup>) indicate that this paper has been cited over 195 times since 1966.]

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"The work on the Fear Survey II was one of the first projects that I undertook as a new faculty member at the State University of New York at Buffalo. I had worked on the original studies on Wolpe's systematic desensitization by Pete Lang and David Lazovik<sup>1</sup> at the University of Pittsburgh. That work and my dissertation research on cardiac conditioning led me to be interested in examining and testing a classical (Pavlovian) model of fear.

"The work thus far in that area had been based upon clinical experience or classical conditioning of autonomic responses using aversive unconditional stimuli. The data available seemed to suggest that classical conditioning provided a reasonably good fit to the data available on fear. There were, however, no data available directly testing the model on humans. It seems to me that such tests were both feasible and needed.

"I decided that one avenue of approach to these issues was to study individuals who had

fears to determine whether or not their fears acted like conditioned responses. In order to follow that strategy I needed some way of identifying individuals who had fears so that they could be brought to the laboratory for study. A perusal of the literature made it clear that there was no available instrument that had been developed in a systematic manner that I could use to select fearful individuals. My first task was obvious, develop a psychometric instrument or test that would allow me to identify individuals who experienced a greater or lesser degree of fear. From that need to select populations for study, the Fear Survey Schedule II was born. I might note, parenthetically, the scale was named Fear Survey Schedule II since Akutagawa<sup>2</sup> had developed a fear survey several years earlier based upon his feeling as to what were the most common fears. There were 18 of 50 items in common between the two scales.

"Two points of interest about the scale are worth mentioning. First, when the paper that described this scale was originally submitted to one of the journals of the American Psychological Association, it was rejected with an offer to publish a brief one page note on the work. The journal editor in his letter of rejection said that he could not waste valuable journal space on the manuscript as psychologists would not be interested in viewing people as a 'bag of fears.' I presume that the study's inclusion as a 'Citation Classic' vindicates my belief that the research was of interest and value.

"Finally, much of the interest and citation of the Fear Survey Schedule II has come from clinical interest and studies. This has always concerned me since I viewed the scale as a research tool that had no clinical validation. As we all know, however, once one publishes material he or she loses control over its application."

1. **Lang P J & Lazovik D.** The experimental desensitization of a phobia. *J. Abnorm. Soc. Psychol.* 66:519-25, 1963.
2. **Akutagawa D.** *A study in construct validity of the psychoanalytic concept of latent test anxiety and test of a projection distance hypothesis.* University of Pittsburgh. 1965. Unpublished doctoral dissertation.