

Yes We (*Anxiously*) Can: Liberal Ideology and Anxiety Predict Social Distancing During The COVID-19 Pandemic

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INTRO

- Negative emotions like fear and anxiety serve a function: helping us avoid threats
- Does anxiety play an adaptive role during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

METHODS

- Representative sample (N=10,645) from the American Trends Panel, conducted March 19th–24th 2020
- Created a five-item social distancing index ($\alpha = 0.73$)
- Open-source programs: data preparation done in R and multiple regression and mediation analyses done in Jamovi

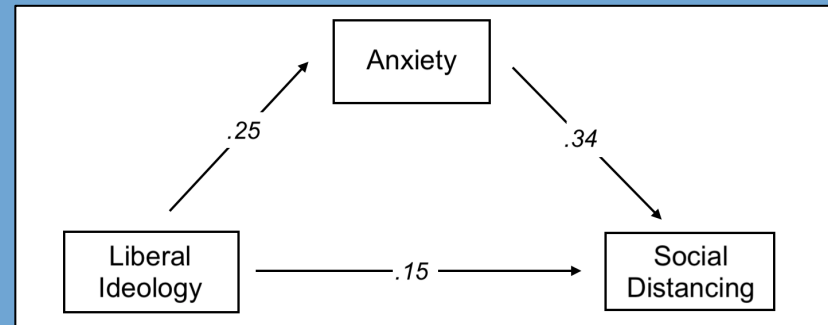
RESULTS

- Liberals were both more anxious ($b = .25, p < .001$) and more likely to social distance ($b = .23, p < .001$).
- Anxiety predicted more social distancing ($b = 0.34, p < .001$).
- Anxiety partially mediated the relationship between liberal ideology and social distancing (indirect effect = $.09, 95\%CI[.08; .10]$).

DISCUSSION

- These findings are consistent with functional perspectives on negative emotion, which **suggests that anxiety might have played a role in adapting to COVID-19 by social distancing.**

In March 2020, anxious Americans were more likely to social distance. Liberals were both more anxious, and more likely to social distance.

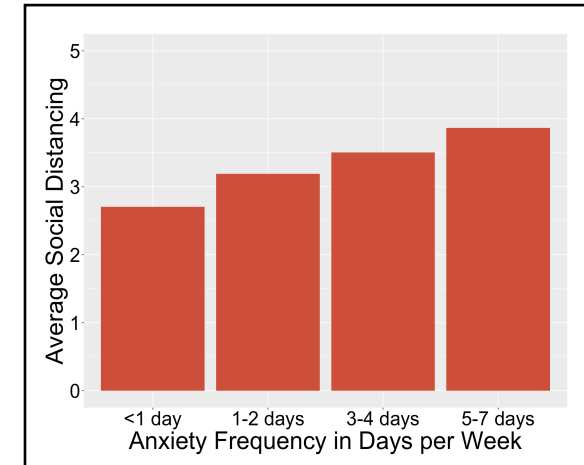


EXTRAS

To create the social distancing index, we summed five questions asking if participants would be comfortable...

- Visiting a friend/family member's house
- Eating out in a restaurant
- Attending a crowded party
- Going out to the grocery store
- Going to a polling place to vote

The average participant was comfortable doing 3.29 out of 5 activities.



Anxiety continued to predict greater social distancing, ($\beta = .23, p < .001$) after controlling for:

- Five other well-being variables – depression, loneliness, hopefulness, trouble sleeping, and psychosomatic symptoms of anxiety
- Seven demographic variables – urban (vs. non-urban) location, gender, age, education, liberal ideology, religiosity, income