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AN INHIBITION FROM BEING SHY: SHYNESS AND ITS EFFECTS ON CAREER PREFERENCES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Shyness affects career preferences and other aspects of an individual's life. Hypotheses that the researcher considered were that shy individuals have poor social skills, have low self-esteem, are indecisive about their careers, and choose nonsocial careers. The correlational design included the variables shyness, self-esteem, communication competence, career decisiveness and career choice. The factorial design included the independent variables, presentation of careers and temperament, and the dependent variable, career choice. The statistical analyses that the researcher used were a correlation matrix and an ANOVA for the study and multiple linear regression analyses and Pearson r correlations to establish validity and reliability. The results supported the hypotheses with the exception of shy individuals choosing non-social careers in the experimental group and shyness predicting career decisiveness. Current and past research on shyness and its effects on self-esteem and social skills showed similar results, but the results pertaining to career development differed from past research.

INTRODUCTION

“Shyness involves self-preoccupation and behavioral inhibition in social interactions due to the prospect of interpersonal evaluation” (Bruch, Heimberg, Hunt, McIntosh, & Rivet, 1999, p. 374). Shyness affects overall ability to function, particularly in social situations. “Loneliness serves as a partial mediator between shyness and depressive symptoms” (Joiner, 1997, p. 387). Low self-esteem is a depressive symptom. In unsupported and shy individuals, a higher risk of depressive symptoms existed (Joiner, 1997). Other mediators between shyness and depressive symptoms besides loneliness may have included other variables: self-esteem and hopelessness (Joiner, 1997).

Cognitive Beliefs

Belief in incapability of socializing keeps shy individuals from overcoming their shyness. To understand how self-beliefs shape social behavior, research needs to focus on perceived control and individual differences in personal characteristics (Beer, 2002). If a shy individual looks at socializing as a learning experience, success and achievement of goals are more likely because he or she sees his or her shyness from a positive perspective (Beer, 2002).

Social Skills and Their Effects

Shy individuals exhibit poor social skills because as they grow up, they do not engage in social interactions, which teach social skills. Past research showed that due to their poor social skills, shy individuals become increasingly unlikely to engage in social interactions; therefore, they isolate themselves from others (Bem, Caspi, & Elder, 1988). Rejection by others is common. Feelings of inadequacy emerge due to repeated rejection from others, which probably intensifies their shyness. Peer acceptance of individuals who are shy differs between cultures; therefore, generalizing might be a problem. For example, one study showed that in Shanghai peers accept shy, Chinese children, but in Western literature, peer rejection exists for shy individuals (Chen, Li, & Rubin, 1995). When one specifies that shy individuals experience peer rejection, it is important to specify the culture that the researcher will study. Shy individuals also tend to avoid others. Their tendency to avoid others might explain why shy individuals lack assertiveness. Instead, shy individuals are passive, which increases the likelihood that others do not hear them (Bem et al., 1988).

Self-esteem and its Effects

The researcher hypothesized that shy individuals have low self-esteem. According to past research, shy people had difficulty shifting attention, regulating their emotions, and using coping strategies (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Murphy, 1995). Since past research showed that shy individuals had difficulty regulating their emotions and were preoccupied, shy individuals may be prone to noticing their faults and being rejected by others. Experiencing rejection and noticing their faults may lead to a decrease in their self-esteem. Based on past research, shy individuals also were more likely to mask their emotions (Eisenberg et al., 1995). Even though shy individuals may have low self-esteem, it may not be noticeable. For example, shy individuals may smile when they really feel insecure. Past research also showed that the social failures and negative

feelings of shy individuals resulted in social anxiety, further withdrawal, and peer rejection (Eisenberg et al., 1995). Other past research showed that depressed youth reported higher levels of negative emotions, and one of those emotions was shyness (Carey, Carey, & Finch, 1991). Past research also showed a negative correlation between shyness and self-esteem (Betz & Smith, 2002).

Holland's Theory

Holland's theory was the subject of much past research. His theory considered six personality types. The types are realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. The structure that makes up these types is hexagonal. The structure models the relation among vocational preferences (Ægisdóttir, Einarsdóttir, Gerstein, & Rounds, 2002). "A person of a given personality type will choose and feel most satisfied in the environment that corresponds to his or her personality" (Ankarlo et al., 1995, p. 365). According to past research, barriers can influence the strength and interrelations of job preferences (Ægisdóttir et al., 2002). Being shy, having low self-esteem, and having poor communication competence may be barriers that predict job preferences. Besides looking at Holland's structure and its relation among vocational preferences, past research also showed how Holland's theory provided a way for counselors and clients to determine the person-environment fit with the assumption that the fit influenced job satisfaction and success (Ægisdóttir et al., 2002). Shy people probably have greater job satisfaction and success when their work environment is solitary. According to Holland's theory, those most skilled socially are of the social type, followed by enterprising, artistic, investigative, conventional, and realistic types (Ankarlo et al., 1995). Realistic people would have the lowest level of social skills, investigative and conventional the next lowest, and enterprising and artistic relatively high levels of social skills (Ankarlo et al., 1995, p. 368). Consequently, if shy individuals have poor social skills, they may choose non-social careers that do not require them to engage in frequent, interpersonal communication. That is, they choose more careers that are of the realistic, investigative, or conventional type.

Indecision

The lack of social skills and other variables associated with shyness may have an impact on many decisions in life. Their shyness may inhibit them from doing what they want to do. "The experience of negative emotion facilitates and maintains avoidance behaviors" (Schmidt, 1999, p. 316). Social self-efficacy related strongly to shyness, and career decision self-efficacy related to global self-esteem, shyness, depressive symptoms, and career indecision (Betz & Smith, 2002). Since shyness, self-esteem, and career indecision related separately to career decision self-efficacy, the researcher hypothesized that shyness, self-esteem, and communication competence predict career decisiveness. Other past research also showed that shyness inversely related to the frequency of career information seeking and career decisiveness (Bruch & Phillips, 1988).

Career Choices

Past research showed that shy individuals, in contrast to non-shy individuals, expressed career preferences limited to non-interpersonally oriented occupations, engaged in less career exploration, and reported a greater degree of indecisiveness (Bruch

& Phillips, 1988). The researcher hypothesized that shy individuals choose more non-social careers when the researcher immediately reminds them about which careers are social and which careers are non-social than when the researcher does not make participants consciously aware of the two categories of careers. Due to their fearful reaction to the stimulus word, shy individuals may avoid the social careers. In contrast when no stimulus exists, no fearful reaction occurs. Consequently, shy individuals may choose careers that really interest them.

Summary and Purpose

The purpose of the research was to see what types of careers shy individuals preferred and to see if shy individuals were decisive about their careers. The researcher believed that if shy individuals had poor social skills and low self-esteem, they must also be indecisive about their career preferences. Betz and Smith (2002) showed that shyness and career indecision related to depressive symptoms (Betz & Smith, 2002). Another hypothesis is that shy individuals choose careers that do not involve interpersonal communication and sociability even if their true interests are in another field. After all, shy individuals, in contrast to non-shy individuals, reported less consideration and less exploration of careers requiring interpersonal contact (Bruch, Giordano, & Pearl, 1986).

METHOD

Participants

For the correlational design, the researcher had 63 participants, and the experimental design had the same 63 participants for the first set of sessions. For the second set of sessions, 25 of the 63 participants chose to return. Participants were both men and women in college at McNeese State University. They were 18 years of age and older.

Design

Correlational design. The researcher used a technique called multiple correlations to establish criterion validity. The researcher measured all of the variables using existing scales or scales that the researcher created. The predictor variables included shyness, self-esteem, communication competence, and age. The criterion variable was career decisiveness. The predictor variables for another multiple correlation were shyness, self-esteem, and communication competence. The criterion variable was the number of non-social careers that participants chose. The researcher also used a multiple correlation where the predictor variables included shyness, self-esteem, and communication competence, and criterion variable was career decisiveness. In the correlation matrix, the variables included shyness, self-esteem, communication competence, career decisiveness, and career choice.

Experimental design. For one part of the study, the researcher performed an experimental manipulation. The choices of careers in the control group included non-categorized careers (see Appendix A). The researcher labeled the choices of careers in the experimental group as social or nonsocial (see Appendix B). The experimental design was a factorial and repeated measures design. The dependent variable was the

number of non-social careers participants chose; the independent variable was presentation of careers. The levels of the independent variable were non-categorized careers versus careers categorized as social or non-social. The participant variable was temperament: shy individuals versus non-shy individuals.

Materials

Shyness Scale. The researcher used a 20-item Shyness Scale (Cheek & Melichor, 1985). The scale was a Likert scale. Possible responses were in a five-point format with choices that ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The scale included statements such as “I often have doubts about whether other people like to be with me,” and “I feel inhibited in social situations.” Past research showed the internal consistency reliability to be .94 in a sample of 326 college students (Cheek & Melichor, 1985, see Appendix C).

Self-Esteem Scale. The researcher also used the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. The scale was a 10-item Likert scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Participants answered questions on a four-point format with choices that ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Examples of statements in the scale were “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself,” and “I feel that I have a number of good qualities.” The test-retest reliability has ranged from .82 to .88 (Rosenberg, 1965, see Appendix D).

Communication Competence Scale. The researcher also used the Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale, which contained 12 items (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). Possible responses to each item ranged from 0, which meant completely incompetent, to 100, which meant completely competent.” The items included statements such as “Talk with an acquaintance.” and “Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.” Even though the scale contained a number of sub-scores, the researcher only computed the total self-perceived communication competence score. The reliability of the total self-perceived communication competence score was .92 (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988, see Appendix E).

Career Decisiveness Scale. The researcher also used a Career Decisiveness Scale that contained 10 items on a 4-point Likert format. The responses ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The items included statements such as “I have decided what I will do after I get my degree,” and “I have decided how far I am willing to drive to work each day.” Because the researcher created the scale, the researcher established test-retest reliability and criterion validity (see Appendix F).

Experimental Manipulation. One instrument included 50 non-categorized career options (see Appendix A). Half of the options were nonsocial careers; the other half were social careers. The other instrument also included 50 career options, but the researcher placed the careers in categories: social and nonsocial (see Appendix B). The researcher decided which careers were social and which were non-social by interpreting Holland’s theory. That is, the researcher took careers that were of the social and enterprising types and labeled them social and took careers that were of the investigative, conventional, and

realistic types and labeled them non-social careers (Jones, 2004). The researcher established test-retest reliability and criterion validity.

Procedure

The researcher asked participants to sign an informed consent form. The researcher held group sessions with 13 to 20 participants per session for the first sessions. The researcher held a second set of sessions to establish validity and reliability for the two scales that the researcher created.

Correlational Design. Sixty-three participants completed the shyness, self-esteem, communication competence, and career decisiveness scales in the same order. A total of 25 participants returned, and they completed the career decisiveness scale, again, to establish validity and test-retest reliability.

Experimental Design. The researcher gave half of the participants one instrument with non-categorized careers. The other half of the participants received another instrument with career options labeled social or nonsocial. The researcher had directions on both instruments for participants to choose five careers that interested them. A total of 25 participants returned, and the researcher gave the participants the same instrument to compare their results.

Debriefing. When participants finished, they turned in their material, and the researcher debriefed them and provided proof for their participation for extra credit in their psychology classes.

RESULTS

The researcher used multiple predictors and one criterion variable to perform multiple correlations, a bi-variate correlation matrix, and an experimental manipulation in a factorial design. For the correlational design, the researcher did multiple pairwise correlations in a correlation matrix. The researcher also did multiple linear regression analyses to establish criterion validity and Pearson r correlations to establish test-retest reliability. The statistical analysis for the experimental design was a two-way ANOVA (See Table 1 for the multiple pairwise correlations).

Shyness and Self-esteem

A negative correlation, $r(62) = -.53$, existed between shyness ($M = 50.95$, $SD = 15.26$) and self-esteem ($M = 33.03$, $SD = 4.71$), and the results were significant, $p < .001$. This means that as shyness increased, self-esteem decreased and vice versa.

Shyness and Communication Competence

A strong, negative correlation, $r(62) = -.70$, existed between shyness and communication competence. As the level of shyness increased, communication competence significantly decreased, $p < .001$.

Shyness and Career Decisiveness

The test-retest reliability of the career decisiveness scale was .89, $p < .001$. The researcher established criterion validity by using measures of shyness, self-esteem, communication competence, and the participants' ages to predict career decisiveness. The validity of the career decisiveness scale was .43, $p < .05$. In determining the relationship between shyness and career decisiveness, $r(62) = -.23$, the results were not significant. Instead, the results approached statistical significance, $p = .065$.

Career Choice

The test-retest reliability of the experimental manipulation was .61, overall, .59 for the control group, and .61 for experimental group. The researcher established criterion validity by using measures of shyness, self-esteem, and communication competence to predict the number of non-social careers that participants chose. The validity was .46, $p < .01$. Using ANOVA, the researcher had two groups. One group had 30 participants, and another group contained 32 participants. The researcher had two control groups (Median = 47) and two experimental groups (Median = 51). The independent variable was presentation of careers. One control group consisted of shy individuals who received non-categorized presentations of careers; the other control group consisted of non-shy individuals who received non-categorized presentations of careers. One experimental group consisted of shy individuals who received presentations of careers under the categories of either social careers or non-social careers; the other experimental group consisted of non-shy individuals who received presentations of careers under the categories of either social careers or non-social careers. The levels of the independent variable were non-categorized careers versus careers presented to participants under the category of "social" or "non-social" careers and labeled as "social" or "non-social." The participant variable, which the researcher treated as an independent variable, was temperament, and the levels of the participant variable were shy individuals versus non-shy individuals. The control group with shy individuals had a mean of 1.3 and a standard deviation of .90, and the experimental group with shy individuals had a mean of 2.1 and a standard deviation of 1.5. The control group with non-shy individuals had a mean of 1.4 and a standard deviation of .74, and the experimental group with non-shy individuals had a mean of 1.6 and a standard deviation of 1.3. Neither shy individuals nor non-shy individuals chose significantly more non-social careers when they received a presentation of categorized careers than when they received a presentation of non-categorized careers, $F(3,58) = 2.7$, $p = .11$. Also, no interaction occurred between temperament, shy versus non-shy, and group, control group versus experimental group. In the correlation matrix, a weak, positive correlation, $r(61) = .30$, existed between shyness and the number of non-social careers that participants chose. As shyness increased, the number of non-social careers participants chose significantly increased, $p < .05$.

Table 1
Pearson r correlations in a correlation matrix

	Self-esteem	Communication Competence	Decisiveness	Career Choice
Shyness				
Pearson <i>r</i>	-.528	-.702	-.234	.300
Significance	.001**	.001**	.065	.018**
N	63	63	63	62
Self-esteem				
Pearson <i>r</i>		.513	.125	-.428
Significance		.001**	.329	.001**
N		63	63	62
Communication Competence				
Pearson <i>r</i>			.318	-.363
Significance			.011**	.004**
N			63	62
Decisiveness				
Pearson <i>r</i>				-.002
Significance				.986
N				62

* indicates significance at the .05 level

** indicates significance at the .01 level

One participant did not complete the questionnaires.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to see if shy individuals were less decisive about their careers than non-shy individuals and to determine if shy individuals chose non-social careers more readily than social careers. The purpose was also to see if other factors, such as self-esteem and communication competence, played a role in career decisiveness and career choice. The researcher expected shy individuals, especially those with low self-esteem and poor communication competence, to more readily choose non-social careers than social careers and to be less career decisive than individuals with low levels of shyness.

The results were consistent and inconsistent with the researcher's hypotheses. For instance, shy individuals who also had low self-esteem and poor communication competence did not show a decrease or an increase in career decisiveness. This might be the result of self-esteem having no significance on career decisiveness or shyness having

no relationship with career decisiveness. Furthermore, no relationship existed between shy individuals more readily choosing non-social careers when the researcher informed them about the social and non-social careers. This might be the result of the strength of the experimental manipulation, or a fearful reaction did not cause shy individuals to choose non-social careers. The correlation, however, revealed that shy individuals choose more non-social careers than social careers. The other results were consistent with the researcher's hypotheses. For instance, shy individuals had poor social skills, and low self-esteem. Shy individuals' poor social skills may be the result of their lack of practice engaging in interpersonal communication. A suggestion for future research is to provide shy individuals with social skills training to see if the training results in better social skills.

The researcher's results supported most past research and did not support some past research. Past research showed a relationship between shyness and self-esteem (Betz & Smith, 2002) and showed shy individuals experiencing loneliness and depressive symptoms (Joiner, 1997). The researcher also discovered that the current study strongly supported past research in the conclusion that shyness relates to low self-esteem. Past research showed a significant correlation between shyness and career decisiveness. Present research showed no correlation between shyness and career decisiveness. Even though the results showed no relationship between shyness and career decisiveness, the researcher cannot generalize the results to the whole population because all of the participants in the current research were college students. Finally, past research showed that based on Holland's theory shy participants produced fewer interpersonally oriented occupations when they listed occupations that interested them (Bruch & Phillips, 1988). Present research supported this past research finding by showing that based on Holland's theory, shy people chose significantly more non-social careers than social careers that interested them; however, the stimulus words "social" and "non-social" did not produce changes in any responses.

The researcher achieved the expected results for most of the study, but for those results that did not show the expected results, the researcher has possible explanations. The part of the study that dealt with choosing careers may need replication in case the two different presentations of the careers exhibited some bias that the researcher was unaware of. For instance, the researcher may have needed to have more choices of careers for each category to account for the interests of all participants. Moreover, the researcher may have needed participants to choose more careers that interested them. If no bias existed and the experimental manipulation was strong enough, then a fearful reaction or avoidance tendency was not the cause of them choosing more non-social careers than social careers. Another possible explanation is the lack of availability of more participants.

The researcher had problems and limitations generalizing to other populations. First, the participants voluntarily chose to participate and received extra credit in their introductory psychology classes for participating. For instance, some of the volunteers' primary reason for participating may have been to receive extra credit. This may have created the problem of participants not being interested in the researchers study.

Secondly, the participants were from one university. For instance, students from this southern regional university probably differ in their level of shyness, in their manner of expressing themselves, and in many other factors compared to students who attend colleges in large, metropolitan areas. Thirdly, the researcher had practice by holding multiple sessions. The researcher's attitude, for instance, may have differed for each session. Lastly, the researcher did not consider the cultural differences of the students who participated. Comparing differences among various ethnic groups may enhance the validity of the researcher's findings. Various ethnic groups, for instance, probably express their shyness differently.

Besides further research on the reasons shy individuals choose non-social careers, another interesting idea for future research is to see why some shy individuals prefer social careers if they are shy. According to Beer (2002), two types of shy individuals existed. Those with incremental self-theories looked at social interactions as learning experiences. In contrast, shy individuals with implicit self-theories looked at social interactions as punishments and avoided them. Past research showed that treatment using interpersonal processing and graduated exposure produced changes in social activities, and graduated exposure alone produced less changes than interpersonal processing and graduated exposure (Alden & Cappe, 1986). Based on past and present findings, future research might focus on treatment strategies that may improve shy people's social lives. One example of a treatment strategy is social skills training. Social skills training may not only improve their social skills, it may also improve their self-esteem or cause them to choose careers where they interact more with people.

The research was a simple replication of past research. Current and past research did not differ significantly in the findings that revealed that shyness related to self-esteem, communication competence, and the number of non-social careers participants chose. Current and past research differed significantly, on the other hand, in the current finding that no relationship existed between shyness and career decisiveness. How shy individuals differ in terms of career decisiveness and their career choices may be interesting for future research.

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