



Examining Which Friendship Qualities Help Shy Young Adolescents

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Introduction

- **Shyness**, which involves wariness, anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, is moderately stable and a strong risk factor for psychosocial difficulties (e.g., loneliness, depression, peer victimization; Coplan et al., 2004) during childhood and early adolescence.
 - It is suggested that shy youths' internalizing symptoms and peer difficulties both contribute to the maintenance of their shy behavior over time and result from their behavior (Weeks et al., 2014).
 - Little is known about possible *protective* factors in the lives of young adolescents who are shy, but some research suggests that their friendships can function protectively (Oh et al., 2008).
 - However, it is not known which specific aspects or qualities of shy young adolescents' friendships help them the most. This was the focus of the present study – to investigate specific qualities of young adolescents' friendships as moderators of the associations between shyness and peer (victimization) and behavioral (shyness; stability) outcomes.
- **Hypotheses:**
1. It was expected that closeness, security, and companionship would emerge as protective factors by diminishing the associations between shyness and later shyness and peer victimization.
 2. But, conflict was expected to emerge as a risk factor and strengthen the associations between shyness and the outcome variables.

Method & Participants

- N = 273 young adolescents
- $M_{age} = 11.80$ years
- 60% Caucasian, 20% African American, 13% biracial, 3% Hispanic, 2% Arabic, 1% Native American, and 1% Asian.
- Data was collected at two time-points (T1: February, T2: May).

Measures

Peer nomination items were used to assess:

- **Shyness** (T1, T2): 4-items: "Someone who is very shy", "A person who doesn't talk much or who talks quietly", "A person who hardly ever starts up a conversation", "Someone who gets nervous about participating in group discussions"
- **Peer Victimization** (T1, T2): 3-items: "Someone who gets picked on or bullied by other kids", "Someone who gets hit or pushed around by other kids", "Someone who other kids say mean things or gossip about"

Self-reported Friendship Quality Scale was used to assess (T1; Bukowski et. al, 1994):

- **Companionship**: e.g., "My friend and I spend all our free time together"
- **Closeness**: e.g., "If I have a problem at school or at home I can talk to my friend about it"
- **Help**: e.g., "My friend helps me when I am having trouble with something"
- **Conflict**: e.g., "I can get into fights with my friend" "If my friend or I do something that bothers the other one of us, we can make up easily"
- **Security**: e.g.: "My friend would stick up for me if another kid was causing me trouble"

Tables

Table 1: Shyness Predicting Later Shyness with Friendship Qualities as Moderators

| | | Model 1: Shyness T2 | |
|-------------------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------|
| | | B | β |
| Step 1 | Shyness | 0.81 | 0.81** |
| Step 2 | Conflict | 0.07 | 0.07 |
| | Companionship | 0.07 | 0.08 |
| | Closeness | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| | Help | -0.04 | -0.05 |
| | Security | .01 | .01 |
| | Step 3 | Shyness X Conflict | -0.16 |
| Shyness X Companionship | | 0.19 | 0.22** |
| Shyness X Closeness | | -0.21 | -0.39* |
| Shyness X Help | | 0.10 | 0.09 |
| Shyness X Security | | -0.11 | -0.10 |

Table 2: Shyness Predicting Victimization with Friendship Qualities as Moderators

| | | Model 2: Victimization T1 | | Model 3: Victimization T2 | |
|--------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| | | B | β | B | β |
| Step 1 | Victimization T1 | | | 0.73** | 0.69** |
| Step 2 | Conflict | 0.01 | 0.01 | 0.07 | 0.08 |
| | Companionship | 0.13 | 0.16 | 0.07 | 0.08 |
| | Closeness | 0.07 | 0.08 | 0.03 | 0.03 |
| | Help | 0.06 | 0.08 | -0.03 | -0.03 |
| | Security | -0.10 | -0.12 | -0.03 | -0.03 |
| Step 3 | Shyness X Conflict | 0.30 | 0.50** | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| | Shyness X Companionship | -0.06 | -0.07 | 0.08 | 0.09 |
| | Shyness X Closeness | 0.50 | 0.99** | 0.03 | 0.06 |
| | Shyness X Help | 0.05 | 0.06 | -0.04 | -0.04 |
| | Shyness X Security | -0.42 | -0.43* | 0.04 | 0.04 |

Results

Stability of Shyness (Table 1)

- **Interaction effects:** There were three significant interaction effects involving shyness and companionship, closeness, and conflict. Probing of these interactions revealed that at low levels of closeness ($\beta = .92, p = .001$) and conflict ($\beta = .87, p = .001$), and at high levels of companionship ($\beta = .91, p = .001$), shyness at T1 and T2 were most strongly associated.

Predicting Peer Victimization (Table 2)

- **Interactions:** When predicting T1 victimization, three interactions involving shyness, closeness, conflict, and security emerged. At high levels of both closeness ($\beta = .91, p = .001$) and conflict ($\beta = .71, p = .001$), shyness and peer victimization were most strongly associated. At medium levels of security ($\beta = .41, p = .001$), shyness and peer victimization were most associated.
- When predicting T2 victimization, no significant interaction effects were found.

Conclusions

- Unexpectedly, findings suggest that *high* levels of companionship can contribute to the *maintenance* of shy behavior over time.
- Additional research is needed but it may be that shy adolescents who spend a lot of time with one friend do not further develop their social skills thru interaction with other peers. Such a situation may make shy adolescents feel unequipped to interact positively with others and reinforce their avoidant behavior.
- It is not clear why low levels of conflict functioned as a risk factor and promoted the stability of shy behavior but functioned protectively in terms of peer victimization.
- But, it may be that low levels of conflict means little interactions with friends, which in turn, reinforces withdrawal tendencies. However, such a scenario may protect shy young adolescents from peer victimization if they are away and removed from peers.
- Future research should consider possible gender and cultural differences.
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