

## Adolescent Shyness and Social Relationships

*This dissertation is dedicated to my  
mother Zifa and my father Aziz.*

*“Scientists have found the gene for shyness.  
They would have found it years ago, but it was  
hiding behind a couple of other genes”.*

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*Örebro Studies in Psychology 16*



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**At First Blush:  
The Impact of Shyness on Early  
Adolescents' Social Worlds**

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## **Abstract**

Shyness as a behavioral characteristic has been in focus of research in psychology for a number of decades. Adolescent shyness has, however, been relatively overlooked compared with studies conducted on children and adults. This dissertation concentrated on adolescent shyness, aiming to attain a better comprehension about how shyness during this developmental phase might affect, and be affected by social relationships. The first aim of this dissertation was to study in which way shyness influences and is influenced by significant people in adolescents' lives: peers, friends, and parents. Study III showed that shy youths socialized each other over time into becoming even more shy. Study VI demonstrated that youths' shyness affected parenting behaviors, more so than parent's behaviors affected youth shyness. The second aim of this dissertation was to investigate what shyness means for adolescents' choices of relationships with friends, whereas the third aim focused on whether adolescents' ways of dealing with peers would have consequences for their internal and external adjustment. As Study I showed, youths might take on off-putting, startling appearances in order to cope with their shyness. This strategy seemed, nonetheless, not particularly successful for the shy youths in terms of emotional adjustment. Study III showed that adolescents who were shy tended to choose others similar to themselves in shyness as friends. Study II showed that shyness might indeed have some positive implications for adolescent development, as it was found to serve a protective role in the link between advanced maturity and various types of problem behaviors. Overall, the findings point to some gender differences regarding all of the abovementioned processes. In sum then, the studies in this dissertation show that even though youths' shy, socially fearful characteristics affect their emotional adjustment and those around them, shy youths are part of a larger social arena where they are active agents in shaping their own development. Although adolescent shyness might be linked with several negative outcomes, however, it might be other people's reactions to socially fearful behaviors that help create and/or maintain these outcomes over time.

*Keywords:* shyness, adolescence, social relationships, friends, peers, parents, social identity, socialization, problem behaviors

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## List of studies

This dissertation is based on the following studies, which will hereafter be referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

- Study I**      Bešić, N., & Kerr, M. (2009). Punks, Goths, and other eye-catching peer crowds: Do they fulfill a function for shy youths? *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 19, 113-121.
- Study II**      Bešić, N., Kerr, M., & Tilton-Weaver, L. Shyness as protective factor in the link between advanced maturity and early adolescent problem behavior. Manuscript in preparation.
- Study III**     Bešić, N., Selfhout, M. H. W., Kerr, M., & Stattin, H. Shyness as basis for friendship selection and socialization in a youth social network. Manuscript in preparation.
- Study IV**     Bešić, N., & Kerr, M. Shy adolescents' perceptions of parental overcontrol and emotional coldness: Examining bidirectional links. Manuscript to be resubmitted for review.

Study I has been reprinted with kind permission from Journal of Research on Adolescence.



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## I Introduction

*“I’m shy and can’t for the life of me barge around and slap people on the back. I sit in a corner by myself and am tickled to death when someone comes over to talk to me”.*

Alan Ladd, actor

My interest in shyness came from working as a music teacher. I was completing my last year of internship at a local high school, teaching young people to play in ensembles and sing in a choir. In Sweden, high school students can select an aesthetic track, which means that besides the regular set of subjects, they also get their choice of music, dance, or drama classes. It was a wonderful job teaching young people to play and sing, but I noticed early on that a big part of the work was in fact about educating them to relax in front of other people and be able to express themselves. It was as if the primary goal of my lessons was about helping these youths learn social skills and how to function in a group, as opposed to singing or playing together. It struck me as odd that people would come to my classes, looking like they spent three hours in front of a mirror trying to appear as strange as possible and drawing a lot of attention to themselves, and yet they seemed to be very shy. How could that be, I wondered, being a self-proclaimed non-shy person? As human beings, we are undeniably biologically programmed to sense fear in certain conditions. The function of fear is to caution us about some impending threat or danger, and to prepare us to avoid it. It seemed to me that fear was a driving force in how my shy pupils would approach any task I would give them, that would involve some kind of exposure in front of others, or potential judgment or evaluation on my behalf. In fact, when I did start thinking about it, it seemed to me that in my own past during high school or my music academy years, many people that I knew that played music, wrote it, and performed it in some way – seemed to be reserved, timid people. If one were shy, it occurred to me, wouldn’t it be easier to pick a track in life where one does not have to expose oneself to such an extent if one truly finds it all too discomforting? And yet, when googling the matter of shy performers, I realized that the entertainment business is full of self-confessed shy people, even those who really stick out with their appearance and their views. Shyness, it seems then, could also be something inside the individual, something that is not necessarily connected to how people are perceived by others. Perhaps shyness is not only in the eye of the beholder, but also largely within the persons themselves. So if we perceive people as shy, and they view themselves that way, how does shyness affect people’s social lives? That is, in which ways does it matter regarding the surrounding people and the society in general that one is shy? These, among many other questions, were what spurred my interest in the subject of shyness.

In this dissertation, I concentrate on early adolescents. Knowledge about shyness in this period of development, however, is far clearer and more thoroughly researched for children and adults. Thus, I include these populations in the literature review as well, as the collected knowledge about shyness in all phases of life should not be neglected. Generally, I focus on the role of shyness in social relationships of early adolescents. Some of the primary issues in the dissertation concern how shyness

affects, and is in turn affected by people who are key players in the social arena of young people's lives, jointly referred to as adolescents' social worlds: peers, friends, and parents. I explore how others in adolescents' social worlds react to shyness, and whether those reactions seem, in turn, to influence shyness. In addition, I investigate the implications of shyness on adolescent adjustment. Finally, I explore the role of gender regarding all of these issues.

## The definition of shyness

### What is shyness and why should we study it?

*"People assume you can't be shy and be on television. They're wrong."*

Diane Sawyer, television reporter

As one starts to think about shyness in a more systematic fashion, it becomes rather apparent that it will not be as simple as one might have expected in the first place. In fact, the discussion about the meaning of shyness, as I have come to understand it, must be separated into a semantic and an empirical one. The everyday, lay meaning of the word shyness is diverse. According to Merriam-Webster Online, the word shyness stems from a 12<sup>th</sup> century Old English word, which meant "to frighten off" (Merriam-Webster online dictionary). Today, being shy means: "easily frightened or timid; disposed to avoid a person or thing (publicity shy); hesitant in committing oneself (circumspect); sensitively diffident or retiring (reserved); expressive of such a state or nature (e.g., a shy smile); secluded, hidden" (Merriam-Webster online dictionary). Seeing as it is a commonly used word, most people have an idea about what shy means and how a shy person is, or in which way they would behave. To be sure, when asking my friends how they view a shy person, many of them think of someone who is seemingly timid, spends most of their time on their own, and does not have many friends. Others think of a socially awkward person, someone who gets embarrassed easily and blushes all over when being with other people. Certainly all of them get some associations. Thus, shyness as a lay term can mean everything from being timid, or shying away from meeting new people, to showing physical signs of shyness such as blushing. The complexity of the everyday term is partly due to the fact that most of us can admit to being shy at one point or another in our lives. When asking people if they were shy sometime during their lifetime, Zimbardo and colleagues learned that more than eighty percent answered yes (Zimbardo, 1977). In this way, shyness can be something situation-bound that most people experience. A common situation that might evoke feelings of shyness in a lot of people is for example holding a speech in front of one's class. Shyness, however, can also mean different things to different people (Zimbardo, 1977). Consequently, the semantic meaning of the word shyness is diverse and can interfere with the understanding of the empirical definition of the term. In psychology, the concept of shyness has received a lot of attention from the late 1960's and forward, and what is meant by the lay term does not necessarily correspond to the empirical view of shyness – which can potentially be challenging for our understanding of it.

The terms in the psychology literature defining shyness are just as many as are the debates surrounding the use of them. Researchers have admittedly concluded that “*shyness is a fuzzy concept*” (Zimbardo, 1977, p. 13), and “*although there are many theories, nobody knows exactly what shyness is*” (Carducci, 1999, p. 5). Thus, it seems that “*shyness is not a precise term*” (Crozier, 2000, p. 2). As mentioned previously, most people can experience shyness when coming across social situations they might find challenging for some reason (Russell, Cutrona, & Jones, 1986; Zimbardo, 1977). We might feel shy when being in novel social situations, or when approaching a stranger. Or we might win an essay competition in high school and feel very shy when having to read our work out loud in front of the entire class. This type of shyness, so-called *situational shyness* or *state shyness*, is different from shyness as an enduring behavioral characteristic (Asendorpf, 1990c). Simply put, state shyness refers to *intraindividual* differences in shyness (Asendorpf, 1990c). For a person with shy characteristics, however, most new people, places, and situations seem to evoke an inward feeling of shyness. In order to be considered dispositionally shy, one should experience problems connected with shyness on a frequent basis, more intensely, and in a wider variety of social settings compared with people who do not label themselves shy (Cheek & Watson, 1989). Thus, according to some scholars, to be considered dispositional, shyness should be experienced as a problem for the individual. This type of shyness is often referred to as *trait shyness*, and focuses on *interindividual* differences (Asendorpf, 1990c). Thus, there seems to be some confusion regarding how shyness is empirically defined.

In an article attempting to create debate about the problematic features of the word shyness, it was claimed that as psychologists, we need to invent a different term for shyness (Harris, 1984). There is no such thing as real shyness, claimed the author, but one term that is being used in the everyday language, and another which is employed by psychologists (Harris, 1984). Imposing our psychological definition of shyness on the everyday word is an example of psychological imperialism. In an attempt to meet this critique, a study was conducted where one hundred eighty female participants (ages 14-58) were asked about their perceptions of the meaning of being shy (Cheek & Watson, 1989). The authors concluded that the participants provided information very close to that of the psychological definition of shyness, in that shyness was defined as having three components that arise in social situations: a *somatic*, a *behavioral*, and a *cognitive* component (Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999; Cheek & Watson, 1989). The *somatic* component involves having physiological and affective-emotional symptoms such as blushing, trembling, feeling upset, and so forth (Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999; Cheek & Watson, 1989). The *behavioral* component includes quietness, awkward conversations, nonverbal behavior such as gaze aversion, withdrawing from social contacts, and avoiding social interactions (Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999; Cheek & Watson, 1989). Finally, the *cognitive* component involves thoughts and worries, such as fearing rejection or being self-conscious (Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999; Cheek & Watson, 1989). Some co-occurrence of the indicators specified by this three-component model has been identified, in that forty-three percent acknowledged only having symptoms corresponding to one component, thirty-seven percent recognized having symptoms from two components, and twelve percent stated having symptoms relating to all of

the three components (Cheek & Watson, 1989). It was concluded that individuals are shy if they have problems regarding at least one of the components (Cheek & Watson, 1989). In this way, the authors claim, even individuals who do not experience all of the aforementioned symptoms as problematic but still claim to be shy are validated in their own view of their shyness (Cheek & Watson, 1989). Similar findings confirm the notion that lay persons' judgments of shyness, both self- and other-reports, refer to corresponding behavioral criteria to those of the psychological definition of shyness (Asendorpf, 1992). The lay term of shyness is hence compatible to its definition in developmental research.

This characterization of shyness also corresponds to other definitions, such as wariness in new social encounters and novel places, and with unfamiliar people (Asendorpf, 1991; Cheek & Buss, 1981; Cheek & Watson, 1989). It also relates to shyness being “*a tendency to avoid social interactions and to fail to participate appropriately in social situations*” (Pilkonis, 1977b, p. 596), or the tendency to feel tense, worried, or awkward during social interactions, especially with unknown individuals (Cheek, Melchior, & Carpentieri, 1986). This definition also parallels shyness being identified as “*a tendency to respond with heightened anxiety, self-consciousness, and reticence in a variety of social contexts; a person high in the trait of shyness will experience greater arousal than a person low in shyness independent of the level of interpersonal threat in the situation*” (Jones, Briggs, & Smith, 1986, p. 630). Consequently, a number of different explanations or definitions of shyness show conceptual equivalence when intuitively compared with each other. The main feature of shyness, nonetheless, seems to be a fear of novel social situations; a feature that all of the abovementioned definitions encompass.

Besides shyness representing wariness in social situations, there are some additional features of shyness that need to be taken into account. Namely, being shy also involves self-conscious behaviors in situations where one might be socially evaluated by others (Pilkonis, 1977b). As such, shyness is highly related to the desire for social approval by other people, and a fear of negative evaluation and rejection (Jackson, Towson, & Narduzzi, 1997; Jones et al., 1986; Leary & Kowalski, 1993; Miller, 1995; Pilkonis, 1977a; Watson & Friend, 1969). According to some scholars, this fear of social evaluation is essential to dispositional shyness (Asendorpf, 1987). Indeed, research shows that shyness can even be elicited by the mere anticipation of social evaluation (Asendorpf, 1989). In sum then, shyness is not just a way of being and thinking: shyness can impact individual behaviors as well (Crozier, 2001).

### **What is NOT shyness?**

There are some characteristics or behaviors that might be part of people's intuitive notions of shyness, but they are not usually considered part of the construct. For example, shyness should not be equated with a lack of *sociability*, which in turn is defined as a preference for being with others rather than alone (Bruch, Giordano, & Pearl, 1986; Buss, 1986; Cheek & Buss, 1981; Schmidt & Fox, 1994; Schmidt & Robinson, 1992). Similarly, shyness should not be mistaken for *introversion* either, as introverted individuals are not necessarily shy (Carducci, 1999). Being shy is not



merely being unsociable, as shyness and sociability have been found to vary on trait level (Cheek & Buss, 1981). Being shy versus being unsociable are two distinct personality dispositions that differ from one another in terms of correlations with self-esteem and self-consciousness (Cheek & Buss, 1981). Shy individuals report worse self-esteem and higher self-consciousness than those who view themselves as sociable (Cheek & Buss, 1981). Thus, the standoffishness and the bashfulness often regarded as stereotypical shy behaviors might instead be consequences of shyness.

In addition, shyness is not identical to *embarrassment*. People often use the word embarrassed when they describe a shy person in everyday language, and being shy can mean being easily embarrassed in layman's terms (Crozier, 1990). Embarrassment refers to feeling uncomfortable, accompanied by a loss of self-esteem and physical reactions such as blushing, mental confusion, and so forth (Crozier, 1990). It can also refer to emotional arousal suffering from a sense of exposure, followed by a feeling of insufficiency or abashment (Miller, 1986). Scholars have argued that shyness and embarrassment blend into each other when people are faced with undeniable prospects of a predicament that is yet to happen (Miller, 1986). Shyness and embarrassment have, however, been found to differ on trait level, and in other important aspects (Miller, 1995). For example, embarrassable people get easily concerned with the suitability of their behaviors according to the general norms, and are more motivated to avoid rejection by other people (Miller, 1995). Shyness, however, is predicted by low social skills and self-confidence (Miller, 1995). In that sense, shyness is more linked to being competent in social interactions, whereas embarrassability is linked with appropriateness in such situations (Miller, 1995). The link between shyness and embarrassment is, nonetheless, not fully clear.

Finally, shyness may be related to *shame* (Crozier, 1999), but should not be equated with it. Shame can also be thought of as a multifaceted pattern of thoughts, behaviors, and bodily reactions similar to that of shyness. Feelings of shame, however, include thinking about the self in somewhat different ways than typical "shy" feelings. Namely, the self is both the subject and the object of evaluation when feeling ashamed (Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996). That is, people can feel ashamed whether they are with others or alone, whereas shyness typically arises in social situations (Tangney et al., 1996). Nonetheless, there are some similarities between shyness and shame. For example, blushing is often a physical reaction to shame, as is for shyness (Pilkonis, 1977b). The association between shame and shyness is, even so, not firmly established (Crozier, 1999). In sum then, even though certain behaviors such as embarrassment, shame, or lack of sociability might be regarded as typical shy behaviors in everyday terms, they are considered different than shyness in the psychological literature.

## Related terms

There are several additional terms that have either been coined to correspond to the lay term of shyness, are highly correlated with shyness, or sometimes used as if they mean shyness. These concepts often show considerable overlap with the definition of shyness (Crozier, 2000). Even though the aim of this dissertation is not to discuss all

possible related terms to that of shyness, I intend to give a short description of those I feel are relevant or I have referred to in my studies.

**Behavioral inhibition.** A concept very close to that of shyness is *behavioral inhibition to the unfamiliar*. Children classified as inhibited are often distinguishable from other children in that they act distressed, avoidant, and with subdued affect (Kagan, 1999; Kagan, Reznick, & Snidman, 1988). This conception incorporates the idea of social wariness toward novelties, such as people, situations, and events. As such, it can be distinguished in very small children (Kagan, 1999). For example, when faced with new places, events, or people, infants rated as behaviorally inhibited are discernible from non-inhibited counterparts regarding a number of biological aspects, such as crying, heightened heart rate, withdrawal, timidity, and inhibition of vocalization and motor behaviors (Garcia-Coll, Kagan, & Reznick, 1984; Kagan, Reznick, & Snidman, 1988). As being inhibited implies showing avoidant behaviors in one or more contexts, only a proportion of shy children might be classified as inhibited, and some children categorized as inhibited might not be shy with strangers (Kagan, 1999). Being focused on behaviors in new social situations, however, makes inhibition a somewhat different notion than that of shyness, as for example no conception of self-awareness in social situations is included (Gest, 1997). Inhibition in the early years of life is moderately stable over time (Garcia-Coll et al., 1984; Gest, 1997; Kagan, Reznick, & Snidman, 1988; Moehler et al., 2008). Early behavioral inhibition is related to anxiety disorders later on in life (Schwartz, Snidman, & Kagan, 1999; Van Ameringen, Mancini, & Oakman, 1998). Inhibited children differ from non-inhibited children on other interesting features, such as family history of hay fever (Kagan, Snidman, Julia-Sellers, & Johnson, 1991), mothers with pregnancy during times with reduced daylight (Gortmaker, Kagan, Caspi, & Silva, 1997), and a tendency to have blue eyes (Rosenberg & Kagan, 1987), although the latter might only be true for boys (Coplan, Coleman, & Rubin, 1998). Thus, there are apparent biological differences between inhibited and non-inhibited children, and scholars have argued that behavioral inhibition is a basic temperament (Kagan & Snidman, 1991). The view of behavioral inhibition is often a categorical one, however; a person is either inhibited or non-inhibited (Crozier, 2000). Thus, behavioral inhibition, as it has been defined, is highly similar to the basic idea of shyness.

**Social anxiety.** Another term often associated with shyness is *social anxiety*. Social anxiety has been defined as the ongoing occurrence of uneasiness, negative ideation, and inept performance in the expectation and conduct of interpersonal transaction (Hartman, 1986). Social anxiety, then, occurs in social interactions (Blöte, Kint, Miers, & Westenberg, 2009), and is not to be equated with for example speech anxiety (Hartman, 1986). Besides for fear of negative evaluation, social anxiety also involves avoidance of social situations, and perceived social distress in interactions (La Greca & Lopez, 1998). Socially anxious individuals should be impaired to some degree in three routes of experience: feelings, behaviors, and cognitions (Hartman, 1986). In this sense, social anxiety almost completely corresponds to the definition of shyness as having three components that need be present for a classification (Cheek & Watson, 1989), with the main difference that socially anxious individuals need to

be impaired in each of the three components simultaneously. High social anxiety has been found to occur in around eighteen percent of the population (Dell’Osso et al., 2003). Social anxiety can also be viewed as an uneasiness that arises before a social situation (Carducci, 1999). Accordingly, even though the concept of shyness does incorporate social anxiety, it also includes behaviors, thoughts, and emotions during and after social interactions (Carducci, 1999). It is understandable, then, that some scholars would see social anxiety as being a small part of the broader definition of shyness (Leary & Buckley, 2000). Social anxiety, it seems then, is highly related to shyness.

**Social withdrawal.** Another correlate of shyness is *social withdrawal*. Some scholars see social withdrawal as a developmental outcome of behavioral inhibition (Fox, Henderson, Marshall, Nichols, & Ghera, 2005). This concept is mostly studied in childhood. Social withdrawal has been defined as a preference for spending time alone as opposed to being with others (Coplan, Prakash, O’Neil, & Armer, 2004). Withdrawal can, however, also signal rejection, exclusion, or isolation from the peer group, and thus depend solely on a child’s relation to its social world (Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995; Gazelle & Ladd, 2003). Social withdrawal should, nevertheless, not be misinterpreted as social disinterest (Asendorpf, 1990b), and should be differentiated from active isolation, which indicates a process of children being alone around others because they are rejected by their peers (Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993). Instead, socially withdrawn children are those who isolate themselves from the group, due to factors such as anxiety, lack of social skills, and so forth (Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993). Taken together, then, social withdrawal could be a consequence of shyness.

**Social reticence.** *Social reticence* is a correlate of shyness, but the term is often used in literature where children who are observed in play with other children have been found to remain unoccupied in such situations, and hover around others (Coplan, Rubin, Fox, Calkins, & Stewart, 1994). According to some scholars, however, reticence is an end result of shyness (Carducci, 1999). Others, in addition, have used this term interchangeably with that of behavioral inhibition (Rubin, Cheah, & Fox, 2001). Reticence can be described by several socially unsuccessful behaviors, such as refraining from social participation, creating self-fulfilling prophecies about social failure, engaging in social contacts with programmatic activity (such as e.g., learning to nod, and act in a certain way), showing signs of nervous mannerisms (such as e.g., hesitant speech), and a high sensitivity to criticism (Phillips, 1997). As such, the idea and the consequences of social reticence highly resemble those of shyness.

**Social Anxiety Disorder.** *Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD)*, more commonly known as *social phobia*, is a clinical internalizing disorder defined as “a marked and persistent fear of one or more social situations in which the person is exposed to unfamiliar people or to possible scrutiny by others” (p. 416) in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – Fourth Edition* (APA, 1994). Social phobia is debilitating for the individual, and it tends to precede other disorders such as substance abuse and depression (Rapee & Spence, 2004). Some debate exists in the

literature about whether social anxiety disorder is to be considered as a continuous construct, and whether it, similar to shyness, might comprise several subtypes (Rapee & Spence, 2004). Common apprehensions of social phobias include speaking and eating in front of others, using public bathrooms, and engaging in social interactions (Beidel & Turner, 1999). Scholars have claimed a high similarity of this definition to that of shyness (Heiser, Turner, & Beidel, 2003; Turner, Beidel, & Townsley, 1990). Social phobia is, however, much less common than shyness, with prevalence rates ranging from less than half a percent in Taiwan, to around seventeen percent on the island of Gotland, Sweden (Furmark et al., 1999). Thus, even though there are many similarities between social phobia and shyness, social phobia is far more problematic in nature.

### **Overlap between shyness and related terms**

These related terms often show substantial overlap with the definition of shyness. The abundance of different definitions is, however, not uncomplicated (Crozier, 2000). For example, some researchers regard shyness as a form of social withdrawal, in that shyness is motivated by concerns of social evaluation in new situations (Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993). Social withdrawal as a term does not capture shyness entirely, however, as shy people have been found to adopt sociable and extraverted strategies in order to cope with their shyness (Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993). In addition, behavioral inhibition might also be viewed as a type of withdrawal, characterized by being alone and withdrawing from new social situations and places (Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993). For others, behavioral inhibition, shyness, and withdrawal are principally analogous concepts (Beidel & Turner, 1999). Even though inhibition can be viewed as a concept different than shyness, however, researchers have argued that it is essentially similar to shyness in important aspect (Crozier, 2000). For example, children studied in inhibition studies get upset when meeting new people, they are hesitant in approaching adults, and they show a tendency to hover around other children without joining in play – characteristics which are found for shy individuals as well (Crozier, 2000). Others even view behavioral inhibition as one of the core features of shyness (Leary & Buckley, 2000). Thus, according to some scholars, both shyness and behavioral inhibition can be distinguished as various kinds of social withdrawal.

Others have hypothesized about the link between shyness and social anxiety. For example, it has been suggested that the concept of shyness should be limited to a specific syndrome, which includes experiencing anxiety and concurrently showing hesitation and awkwardness, or inhibition (Leary, 1986; Leary & Buckley, 2000). According to this view then, social anxiety is not the same thing as shyness but a broader notion (Crozier, 2000). Others assert, however, that the cognitive component in itself is central to understanding what shyness is, as behavioral problems linked with shyness present a minor problem for some people's perception of their own social fears (Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999). A contrasting view is that of social anxiety being a part of shyness, which in turn is considered as a broader concept (Leary & Buckley, 2000). Thus, there are divergent views regarding the link between social anxiety and shyness, and this issue needs further investigation.

Lastly, there have been several different hypotheses regarding the link between shyness and social anxiety disorder, or social phobia. Some have argued that lack of social fears and social phobia are essentially on the same continuum but on the opposite ends, where social phobia indicates the strongest type of shyness (Turner et al., 1990). A similar hypothesis is that shyness is a mild form of social phobia (Marshall & Lipsett, 1994), or that shyness could be viewed as overlapping or related to social phobia (Heiser et al., 2003; Stemberger, Turner, Beidel, & Calhoun, 1995). Others have argued that as shyness is not listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV*, and is not an illness but a facet of personality, it should not be equated with social phobia at all (Carducci, 1999; Crozier, 2000). The evidence for this claim comes from the notion that an individual can experience shyness or face severe problems in their social life, without anyone else around them noticing it (Crozier, 2000). Thus, there is surely a relation between shyness and social phobia, but the nature of this relation still needs to be examined.

Which is then, the “most appropriate” or the “best” definition of behaviors that pertain to social wariness and awkwardness in social situations? There is no easy answer to this question. The different starting points for viewing shyness and its overlapping terms can have an impact on our study of it, and are thus not unproblematic. On the one hand, if shyness is defined solely by asking people how they feel, we are ignoring the behavioral consequences of this phenomenon (Crozier, 2001). On the other hand, if we assume that shyness only occurs in social interactions, we might be placing the importance solely on the salience of the experience of those interactions, and ignoring the emotions behind them (Crozier, 2001). One common factor that researchers do seem to agree on, however, is that the focal point of shyness is a fear of novel social situations. By focusing on reported fears or wariness in new social situations and encounters, one is able to capture the core of what being shy is mainly about.

In this dissertation, I have used the term behavioral inhibition intertwined with that of shyness in Study I, as I have been of the opinion that the measure of shyness used in that study corresponded well to the idea of inhibition. I have, however, abandoned that term in the remaining studies even though I have continued to use the same measure, because of additional issues. First, I have come to believe that the term shyness is more semantically intuitive, as it is also used in everyday language. In fact, instead of seeing it as a dilemma as others have (Harris, 1984), I have come to believe that there are definite advantages to using that term above others. One important advantage is primarily being able to communicate more easily to the surrounding public the nature of my research. Second, I have lacked information about distinctive biological responses that might have measured behavioral inhibition in a more correct way, typically assessed by laboratory observations. Thus, shyness is the term used in the subsequent studies.

Trait shyness, however, is not a characteristic that is similar in all individuals. On the contrary, shyness varies for different people depending on diverse types of factors. There are, indeed, as many disparities in shyness as there are human beings that define themselves as shy. In the next part of the introduction, I will focus on the stability of shyness, some diversity in shyness characteristics, and variations on shyness between genders and cultures.

## Variations in shyness

### Temperamental bases of shyness

*“The desire to annoy no one, to harm no one, can equally well be the sign of a just as of an anxious disposition”.*

Friedrich Nietzsche, philosopher

As shy children grow older, shyness can become a central part of who they are, both in terms of their personality but also in how they view themselves, or their self-concept (Crozier, 2000). Hence, shyness can develop into a stable characteristic. Many view shyness as a trait (Asendorpf, 1989; Buss, 1986) or a basic temperament (Buss & Plomin, 1984). A personality trait can be defined as descriptive or/and explanatory concept, referring to long-lasting, characteristic, and general aspects relating to an individual (Briggs, 1985; Briggs & Smith, 1986). Similarly, temperament can be defined as individual differences that appear from early on in life, which are stable over time, lead to predictable models of behaviors, and pertain to a biological foundation (Crozier, 2001). Already in early work on personality traits, shyness was identified as a basic trait. Seminal works by Mosier, Comrey, Cattell, and Eysenck have recognized a shyness factor in the research on human personality (Cattell, 1973; Comrey, 1965; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1969; Mosier, 1937). Some researchers take the standpoint that shyness is a primary, unitary trait, which cannot be divided into additional traits (Briggs, 1988). Others claim that the shyness trait might indeed be divided into several subtypes (Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999). Evidence supports the notion of shyness stability. Previous studies have shown, for example, that mother-rated shyness at ages 8-10 predicts shyness in adulthood for both men and women in an American sample (Caspi, Elder, & Bem, 1988). Similar findings were obtained for women, but not men, in a Swedish sample of shy individuals (Kerr, Lambert, & Bem, 1996). Other findings show that late-developing shyness is more stable throughout adulthood than is early-developing shyness (Kerr, 2000). Research on inhibited temperaments shows that inhibited children differ from non-inhibited counterparts on several biological facets (Kagan & Reznick, 1986; Kagan, Reznick, & Gibbons, 1989), even though far from all children who are classified as having inhibited temperaments remain inhibited as adults (Kagan, 2000). There are, however, not many other behaviors that exhibit long-term persistence from childhood and throughout adulthood either (Caspi & Silva, 1995). Finally, shyness shows a certain degree of heritability (Plomin & Daniels, 1986). The estimates of the prevalence of shyness for adults range between twenty to forty-eight percent (Carducci & Zimbardo, 1995; Lazarus, 1982; Zimbardo, 1977). The number is similar for children, with thirty-eight percent considering themselves to be shy (Lazarus, 1982). A more extreme type of shyness has been reported by fifteen percent of the population (Schmidt & Fox, 1999). In general then, support has been shown regarding the stability of shyness across the lifespan. As others have pointed out, however, because humans are such complex living organisms, shyness cannot be

studied from a single, narrow approach based on either genetics, bodily processes, or other aspects (Cheek & Briggs, 1990). Instead, the study of shyness ought to comprise all of these approaches.

### **Subgroups of shyness: Dual approaches**

Throughout the history of shyness research, interindividual differences have been recognized in several ways. Attempts have thus been made to further clarify the concept by identifying subgroups of shy individuals. For example, some scholars maintain that shyness can be divided into *public* and *private* shyness (Pilkonis, 1977a). Publicly shy people are more concerned about behaving awkwardly in social situations (Pilkonis, 1977a). Privately shy people, on the other hand, focus on their own feelings of discomfort (Pilkonis, 1977a). Some empirical work supports this notion, as studies with children show that some might act more shy when in public settings, but not with familiar peers (Asendorpf, 1990b). Thus, shyness can be thought of as having two sets of individual starting points: some shy individuals might be more affected by social fears in public, whereas others might mostly focus on their inner sensations of uneasiness.

Furthermore, others have proposed a view of shyness as *early-* vs. *late-developing* shyness (Bruch et al., 1986; Buss, 1980; Buss, 1986). The early-developing shyness can be seen as fearful, typically emerging during the 1<sup>st</sup> year of life, and influenced by temperamental features of wariness and emotionality (Kagan & Reznick, 1986). As a further clarification of early and late shyness, Buss claimed that shyness which emerges early in childhood is temperamentally *fear-based*. This type of shyness is prevalent in the first 4–5 years of life, prior to children developing the capacity to take another person's standpoint and begin to worry how others see them (Buss, 1986). Empirical studies of small children and toddlers support the idea of temperamentally fear-based shyness (Kagan & Reznick, 1986). Later-developing shyness, on the other hand, emerges in middle childhood or early adolescence, and can be viewed as *self-conscious* (Bruch et al., 1986; Buss, 1980; Buss, 1986). This type of shyness appears once children have started to think of themselves as social objects, is based on self-consciousness rather than fear (Buss, 1986), and might be stimulated by changes that occur during puberty (Cheek, Carpentieri, Smith, Rierdan, & Koff, 1986). Shyness in adolescence might be embedded in the strong self-consciousness that occurs in middle childhood and early adolescence (Bruch, 1989). Studies show that from middle childhood and forward, shyness is linked with poor self-esteem, low social self-confidence, and poor social skills (Cheek & Melchior, 1990; Crozier, 1981; Crozier, 1995; Jones & Russell, 1982; Lawrence & Bennett, 1992; Miller, 1995). In an attempt to compare early- and later-developing shyness in one study, Kerr found that shyness that emerges in adolescence was more important for adjustment in adulthood (Kerr, 2000). Early-developing shyness was less problematic in almost all domains regarding relationships, psychological well-being, and occupational and economic circumstances (Kerr, 2000). On the other hand, later-developing shyness was related to more depressed mood, lower self-esteem, poorer attitudes about one's appearance, lower life satisfaction, and less positive affect (Kerr, 2000). Contrary to this view, nonetheless, it has been argued

that shyness should not be divided in early- and late-developing shyness, as these two types of shyness are consistently correlated when measured separately (Briggs, 1988; Briggs & Smith, 1986). Thus, some studies support the suggestion that children who become shy later on are worse off than children who are shy in early childhood, even though few attempts have been made to investigate this view.

Shyness has also been divided into *withdrawn* shyness and *dependent* shyness (Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999). Withdrawn shyness is characterized by inhibition, reticence, and avoiding social situations (Caspi et al., 1988; Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999). Dependent shyness, on the other hand, is characterized by conforming ideas and neutral attitudes often adopted by shy people, described as “*going along to get along*” (Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999; Leary & Kowalski, 1995; Lewinsky, 1941). These dissimilarities pertain mainly to individual differences in how shy people approach others, or in their interpersonal styles. According to several scholars, these might be two different patterns of behaviors or social solutions for shy people (Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999; Crozier, 2001). Some empirical work has focused on these subtypes by distinguishing between *shy-sociable* and *shy-unsociable* individuals (Cheek & Buss, 1981). Mere sociability, however, might not be enough to differentiate between the subtypes (Asendorpf & Meier, 1993; Bruch, Rivet, Heimberg, Hunt, & McIntosh, 1999; Page, 1990; Schmidt & Fox, 1994, 1995). Finally, some claim temperamental differences with diverse developmental significance between *conflicted* and *avoidant* subtypes of shyness (Asendorpf, 1990a; Schmidt & Fox, 1999). Conflicted shy children are characterized by an approach-avoidant conflict, in that they are highly self-conscious and generally want to socialize but are not able to due to their characteristics (Schmidt & Fox, 1999). In contrast, avoidant shy children are typically high in avoidant but low in approach behavior, and show avoidant and anxious behaviors towards others (Schmidt & Fox, 1999). Even though most of these approaches have received some empirical support, the duality of shyness still mainly remains an issue for future explorations. In sum then, some research suggests that shyness is not a unitary concept, and some subgroups of shyness have been recognized in previous studies.

## Gender differences

Generally speaking, studies reporting mean differences on shyness often find that girls demonstrate more shy behaviors compared with boys. This pattern has been identified in early and late childhood (Burgess, Wojslawowicz, Rubin, Rose-Krasnor, & Booth-LaForce, 2006; Crozier, 1995; Kim, Brody, & Murry, 2003; Lemerise, 1997), in adolescence (Zimbardo, 1977), and in adulthood (Dell’Osso et al., 2003). These mean differences are, albeit, not always significant. In contrast, other work on shyness has not been able to identify differences between girls and boys regarding the development of shyness and related concepts (Booth-LaForce & Oxford, 2008; Coplan et al., 1998; Coplan, Gavinski-Molina, Lagacé-Séguin, & Wichmann, 2001; Coplan et al., 1994; Rubin, 1993). More notably, however, shyness can have rather different consequences for men and women (Kerr, 2000). For example, it might be more acceptable to be shy for women than for men, as men might be more pressured to change their behaviors in order to fit in (Buss & Plomin, 1984; Kerr, Lambert,



Stattin, & Klackenberg-Larsson, 1994). Women might be more expected to socialize than men, however, as not interacting with others might be more accepted for men (Kerr, 2000). Another explanation could be that as men deal with their own early shyness, women could be given the signal that they should not prefer isolated activities, and in that way become self-conscious about their usual preferences and develop the self-conscious type of shyness as they grow up (Kerr, 2000). Research confirms these ideas, showing gender differences in how shy women and men interact with others. For example, in opposite-sex interactions, men are usually expected to take the lead, and this has been shown to be more difficult for shy men as they tend to look and talk less with their female peers (Pilkonis, 1977b). Shy women nod and smile more often in conversations, are seemingly anxious about leaving a good impression, and have a need to be pleasing (Pilkonis, 1977b). In comparison with shy women, however, shy men report having more negative thoughts regarding themselves in interactions with others (Bruch, Gorsky, Collins, & Berger, 1989). Thus, shyness is linked with some concurrent differences between men and women.

Some longitudinal work focusing on gender differences in shyness has been reported. In one study where participants were followed over the course of 35 years, shy men married and became fathers later than non-shy men, but this was not true for women (Kerr et al., 1996). The shy women, on the other hand, attained a lower level of education compared with non-shy women (Kerr et al., 1996). A similar pattern has been established elsewhere (Caspi et al., 1988). Girls with early-developing shyness are still more shy than average until the age of 16, whereas boys are not (Kerr et al., 1994). In addition, women that develop shyness early on show signs of poorer psychological well-being and poorer self-esteem over time, whereas men do not (Kerr, 2000). This difference between the genders was not found for later-developing shyness, however (Kerr, 2000). Thus, gender differences in shyness concern both to the way shy men and women interact with others, but also the social consequences this might have concurrently and over the life span.

## **Cultural aspects and differences**

The characteristics of shyness can be perceived differently according to culture (Kerr, 2001). On the one hand, in some societies, shyness is viewed as social stigma, both for shy and non-shy persons. In cultures where individuality is valued, shyness is seen as a negative trait (Kerr, 2001; Leary & Buckley, 2000). In the US, for example, a lively and outgoing interaction style is preferred over subdued and inhibited styles (Leary & Buckley, 2000). In such individualistic societies, shy people are generally viewed as less friendly and likable (Zimbardo, 1977), less affectionate, warm, happy, and physically attractive (Jones & Carpenter, 1986; Pilkonis, 1977b). This seems, however, only to be the case in cultures where extraverted interpersonal styles are valued, such as North America and Western Europe (Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1995; Leary & Buckley, 2000). On the contrary, in the more collectivistic China, for example, calm and unassertive behavior is more highly valued (Chen et al., 1998; Pearson, 1991; Shenkar & Ronen, 1987). Chinese children who are shy and inhibited are more acknowledged by their peers, and more likely to be regarded as fitting for roles of admiration and leadership (Chen et al., 1995). These children are

also more encouraged to be shy by peers and parents (Chen et al., 1998; Chen et al., 1995). Hence, shyness might have diverse consequences depending on individuals' surrounding culture and society.

As I have shown, the term shyness is related to and shows overlap with many different terms, all of which measure social fears in their own way. In addition, shyness has diverse significance for different kinds of people. As shyness seems to affect people's way of being, surely it has great impact on one of the most important part of most people's lives: their social worlds.

## **Shyness and social worlds**

### **Implications of shyness on social relationships**

*"I was really kind of shy as a child. But I would do things for attention."*

Little Richard, musician

Human beings are sociable animals. We spend most of our time in closeness to others, and our social interactions and relationships with the people around us are a fundamental part of most of our lives (Leary & Buckley, 2000). This propensity to be with others might indeed stem from the fact that humans need each other more for plain survival than other animals do (Leary & Buckley, 2000). In order for us to have good relationships with other people, we must appear to be the kind of person with whom others would want to have a relationship with. This can mean everything from friendships, forming groups, and finding romantic partners, to developing other relationships (Leary & Buckley, 2000). It is perhaps this need to belong with someone or some other people that has lead the human kind to seek the social acceptance of others as much as we do, even though this might not be true for all people and all situations (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Buckley, 2000). In this sense, nonetheless, shyness seems to get in the way with development of interpersonal relationships (Kerr, 2001; Leary & Buckley, 2000). Scholars suggest that shyness might be more of an issue in today's modern society than it might have been for people in earlier times, because nowadays we are more subjected to a continually changing array of relationships and social interactions (Leary & Buckley, 2000). As our society changes and the means of communication and interactions with others constantly grow, it is of significance to understand in which way this might impact shy individuals.

Needless to say, some people are satisfied with not having so much contacts and interpersonal relationships (Cheek & Buss, 1981). Some individuals are relatively unsociable, and might feel perfectly at ease with living their lives just the way they are. Research shows that many shy people, however, are not as content with their social lives as non-shy people (Leary & Buckley, 2000). For example, empirical work has recognized that shy people feel more lonely compared with non-shy individuals (Cheek & Busch, 1981; Jones, Freeman, & Goswick, 1981; Jones & Russell, 1982; Neto, 1992). This implies that shy people themselves perceive their loneliness as problematic (Leary & Buckley, 2000). Notably, shy people feel lonely

concerning all types of relationships, regardless of whether it is with friends and romantic partners, within groups, or within the family (Leary & Buckley, 2000). As shyness seems to affect many people's social lives in a way that is perceived as negative by the individuals themselves, it warrants further consideration.

### **Shyness as a barrier for social interactions**

There are several things we know about the way that shyness can impact social relationships. Generally speaking, shyness might obstruct the possibilities for engaging in social interactions and being socially accepted (Leary & Buckley, 2000). First, shyness might limit people's prospects for social interactions, which in turn are essential for the development of social relationships (Leary & Buckley, 2000). Shy individuals tend to avoid social interactions, in order to circumvent the possible prospect of anxiety or embarrassing situations. Research shows that shy people interact less with others socially, both over time and on a daily basis. In general, shy people have fewer friends, and it takes a longer time for them to develop their friendships compared with non-shy people (Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998). Moreover, once shy individuals dare attend social gatherings, they do not talk as much with other people and tend to spend less time at such events (Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998; Dodge, Heimberg, Nyman, & O'Brien, 1987; Himadi, Arkowitz, Hinton, & Perl, 1980; Twentyman & McFall, 1975; Watson & Friend, 1969). In addition, shy individuals tend to feel less supported by their friends and loved ones (Jones & Carpenter, 1986), and are more dissatisfied with their social lives in general (Neto, 1993). They also perceive themselves as less likable by others compared to non-shy people (Jones & Carpenter, 1986; Leary, Kowalski, & Campbell, 1988; Pozo, Carver, Wellens, & Scheier, 1991). Regarding romantic relationships, shy people go on fewer dates, get involved in fewer sexual encounters, and are less likely to be involved in a romantic relationship at any point in time compared with non-shy people (Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998; Jones & Carpenter, 1986; Leary & Dobbins, 1983; Prisbell, 1991; Zimbardo, 1977). Thus, shyness seems to impact the opportunities for shy individuals to meet other people.

Second, shy people are associated with behavioral patterns that do not aid approval and closeness by others (Leary & Buckley, 2000). That is, when shy individuals interact with other people, their ways of behaving and acting in these social situations might simply work against them. For example, compared with less shy individuals, shy people speak less, they take longer to respond to others' dialogue, they have more difficulties in speaking their mind, they permit more silences to develop in conversations, they are less likely to break these silences, and act more inhibited and passive (Asendorpf, 1989; Borkovec, Fleischmann, & Caputo, 1973; Cheek & Buss, 1981; Mandel & Shrauger, 1980; Natale, Entin, & Jaffe, 1979; Paulsen, Bru, & Murberg, 2006; Pilkonis, 1977b; Prisbell, 1991). As research has shown that simply talking to other people endorses being liked by others (Insko & Wilson, 1977), it is perhaps no wonder that shy people do poorly in social encounters. According to the self-presentational theory, people tend to feel shy when they are stimulated to make a desired impression on other people but doubt that they will be successful (Arkin, Lake, & Baumgardner, 1986; Leary & Buckley, 2000;

Schlenker & Leary, 1982). In these situations, shy people want to avoid possible unwanted effects by acting inhibited, because inhibited behavior is a practical reaction in situations where one is fearful of making an undesired impression (Leary & Buckley, 2000; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Thus, being shy and not talking to others seems a sure path towards less social acceptance.

Third, individuals who are shy might come across as less appealing in terms of attracting other people's awareness and attention (Leary & Buckley, 2000). Other people might not form the best opinions of shy individuals when interacting with them. It is important to point out that it is not the case that others in general dislike shy people. Not being able to communicate very well with others, however, has been shown to be a nuisance for shy people who aspire to engage in social interactions. Children who are quiet and less talkative are perceived as less socially competent and less desirable as friends by their peers (Evans, 1993). Shy children differ from their non-shy counterparts in that they tend to watch from the side when everyone else is playing, they speak less than other children, and when they do speak they are slower at initiating conversation (Asendorpf, 1990d). A similar pattern emerges in shy children's interactions with unfamiliar adults (Crozier, 2001). Peer-ratings show that shy children are commonly viewed as less easy to approach and have low social competence, making them less socially desirable than non-shy children (Evans, 1993). As a result, shy children can be treated more negatively by their peers (Blöte & Westenberg, 2007). In adolescence, shy youths might have learned to avoid social interactions, particularly in cases where they are unsure how to behave in an appropriate manner (Crozier, 1979; Pilkonis, 1977b). As adults, shy individuals might not know what to say in social circumstances, especially when it comes to initiating conversations (Pilkonis, 1977b). They tend to sit more far away from others during social situations, are often seen as less friendly and less assertive towards others, and are distinguishable from non-shy people by independent observers (Pilkonis, 1977b). In addition, shy people feel awkward or hesitant in social interactions, are self-conscious, put too much effort into how they behave, and might practice things to say beforehand (Crozier, 2000). Shy people might often appear anxious to others, and will behave in a way that might reduce the potential of social interactions by for example not speaking freely or speaking their mind (Crozier, 2000). Hence, shyness is essentially connected to social experiences, and is expressed in ways that can have consequences for those experiences (Crozier, 2001). Compared with less shy people, shy individuals are less skilled at starting and maintaining conversations, and they find it more difficult to demonstrate their feelings and attitudes to others (Bruch et al., 1999; Miller, 1995). Shy people also have problems with showing empathy and warmth when interacting with others, and believe they have poorer skills to manage these interactions (Prisbell, 1991). The negative features of shyness such as anxiety and awkwardness are related to how much an individual is liked by people (Gough & Thorne, 1986). Thus, not appealing to other people when interacting socially seems to be an additional problem for shy people. Shyness, it seems, is easily identified by other individuals, and affects others' views of shy people from childhood into adulthood.

## Situations that evoke shyness

There are several situations that might evoke the feelings of shyness for shy people. In an attempt to find out what these were, Zimbardo and colleagues asked more than five thousand individuals about their perceptions of situations they might shy away from (Zimbardo, 1977). Among those individuals who reported being shy, most stated that strangers made them shy, followed by the opposite sex, authorities in knowledge, and authorities in virtue (Zimbardo, 1977). A smaller percentage of people stated elderly people, friends, children, and parents to evoke such feelings (Zimbardo, 1977). Regarding situations that make individuals shy, many were made shy by being the center of attention in a large group, followed by being in large groups, being of lower status, being in social and new situations in general, in situations that require assertiveness, and being evaluated (Zimbardo, 1977). Almost half of the participants felt shy when being the center of attention in a small group or just being in small groups, in having one-to-one opposite sex interactions, and in situations where they felt vulnerable or needed help (Zimbardo, 1977). Finally, a third stated they felt shy in situations involving small task-oriented groups, and one-to-one same sex interactions (Zimbardo, 1977). Similar results have been found elsewhere (Russell et al., 1986). Shyness might manifest itself differently in different situations, nonetheless (Russell et al., 1986). For example, children who speak less in unfamiliar situations might speak more in familiar settings (Asendorpf & Meier, 1993; Kagan, Reznick, Snidman, Gibbons, & Johnson, 1988). In addition, when shy people hold a speech in an unstructured, novel experience, shyness has a larger impact on the behavior in this situation than when being in a familiar setting (Pilkonis, 1977b). Hence, different types of people and settings can evoke feelings of shyness or social fears. In sum, shyness affects how individuals interrelate with others in that it limits the prospect for social interactions, and makes people less socially skilled and socially desirable.

## Shyness and relationships in adolescence

Most of the research reviewed thus far has been on children or adults, including university samples. A quick PsycInfo database search with the terms *shy*\* and *adolesc*\* as keywords results in merely 173 studies in peer-reviewed journals, many of which actually involve emerging adults or small children. In contrast, removing the term *adolesc*\* and searching only the term *shy*\* results in 1427 hits. That means that the studies that potentially include shy adolescents as a main focus of interest amount to a maximum of twelve percent of the total amount of studies on shyness. This lack of studies on adolescents is reflected when searching related terms to that of shyness as well, such as social anxiety or social withdrawal. Surprisingly then, research on shyness during adolescence is unexpectedly slim, even though there are several reasons for studying this specific group.

One of the more important reasons to study youths is that adolescence is a period of great transformation. As children make the transition from childhood into early adolescence, they go through a large number of changes. First, they change physically and hormonally, acquiring a more adult-like appearance (Buchanan,

Eccles, & Becker, 1992). Second, with these bodily changes come emotional and cognitive adaptations that early adolescents must deal with (Damon, 1983). Third, early adolescents' roles in the society change; they have different expectations placed upon them, with expanding social roles and changing relationships (Damon, 1983). Their roles within the family change as well (Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995); youths start spending more time with peers and less with parents (Fuligni, Eccles, Barber, & Clements, 2001). The significance of peers increases during early adolescence (Bukowski, Gauze, Hoza, & Newcomb, 1991). Thus, there are many new experiences for early adolescents. Novel occurrences of all kinds are a prominent issue for shy individuals (Buss, 1980). It is then perhaps no wonder that early adolescents might be specifically prone to shyness in this period of personality and social development (Zimbardo, 1977). For that reason, it seems probable that the large amount of changes and novelties linked with the transition into adulthood might reinforce early adolescents' shyness.

Another important reason to study adolescents, and especially early adolescents, is because self-consciousness starts to arise during this phase of development. For example, children have been found to be significantly less self-conscious than early adolescents (Simmons, Rosenberg, & Rosenberg, 1973). The transition to junior high school might greatly contribute to this rise in self-consciousness (Simmons et al., 1973). The occurrence of self-consciousness seems to coincide with adolescent shyness, and scholars have argued that it is during late childhood and adolescence that self-conscious shyness as such first appears (Buss, 1986). These findings also support the conception that novelty is the most influential situational cause of shyness (Buss, 1980). Moreover, shyness that develops in adolescence has been associated with poor romantic and sexual relationships, low self-esteem, and low subjective wellbeing in middle adulthood, whereas this has not been found for childhood shyness (Kerr, 2000). Consequently, it is of specific interest to concentrate on this population when addressing social fears. Despite these notions, however, childhood shyness has been the focus of a large amount of studies on behavioral inhibition, social withdrawal, and social reticence, whereas a good number of studies on social anxiety and shyness have employed adult, or university samples. Hence, more spotlight on adolescents, and specifically early adolescents, seems necessary for our understanding of the development of shyness and its consequences across the lifespan.

**Peer crowds.** In adolescence, affiliating with peer crowds becomes very important, perhaps more so than ever before. Young people start to identify and categorize themselves and each other based on stereotypes and reputations. Such categories are often referred to as peer crowds (Brown, Lohr, & Trujillo, 1990). Several peer crowds have been identified in previous research, such as Jocks (athletically oriented), Nerds and Brains (academically oriented), Populars (oriented towards social status), Burnouts (normbreaking), Loners (youths who keep to themselves, social misfits), and Alternatives (youths rebelling against social conventions). Youths belonging to different peer crowds do not necessarily have to befriend or spend time with others in the same crowd, but they might still feel they belong with a crowd (Urberg, 1992), and can nonetheless be recognized by others as associated with that crowd (Stone &

Brown, 1998). Where do shy youths fit into adolescent crowds? Are they without a crowd, or do they belong to the crowds that are stereotypically associated with shyness, such as Nerds and Brains? There are some hints about this in the literature. For example, youths identify other peers who are not as “*sociable*” or “*not with it*” as belonging to a Nobody crowd or to Brains, and these youths are reported to spend time alone or with their family, and not with other peers at school (Brown et al., 1990; Stone & Brown, 1998). However, these studies did not specifically focus on shyness, and there are some characteristics of adolescent peer crowds that offer a new way of thinking about where shy youths fit in and why.

One interesting aspect of peer crowds is that for the most part, membership is not voluntary, but there are some crowds to which adolescents can intentionally belong. Youths cannot choose by themselves whether they will be popular or not, for instance, so being part of the Popular crowd is not entirely under their control. Similarly, they might not want to be defined as a Nerd, but others might associate them with that crowd anyway. Being identified as part of a more distinct peer crowd such as a Punk or a Goth, on the other hand, means constructing a unique external appearance—one that is easily identifiable with the crowd and easily distinguishable from the norm. They might be called *radical*, because they often involve shocking makeup and hair styles—white face paint, painted-on blood stains, blue or green hair, for example. Without such an appearance, it would be improbable for a youth to be recognized as belonging to crowds such as Punks and Goths. Hence, there seems to be an intentional decision behind identifying with peer crowds that are well known for their staggering or even shocking appearances. Would identifying with such crowds be a way of coping with shyness for youths? As far as I know, this issue has never been focused on in the literature on peer crowd identification nor shyness.

There are reasons to believe that assuming a shocking, even offensive style of dress and makeup might be a means of coping for shy youths. This notion is based on two theoretical reasons found in the literature on shyness. First, shy youths might adopt a radical style in order to draw the social boundaries needed to alleviate pressure and expectations of interacting with unfamiliar peers. Childhood studies confirm that shy children find it difficult to interact with unfamiliar peers, as those children have been found to talk as much as non-shy children do in familiar, but not unfamiliar situations (Asendorpf & Meier, 1993; Kagan, Reznick, Snidman et al., 1988). Being in a small, familiar group might create less anxiety for shy youths. Along these lines, shy youths might also adopt radical styles in order to signal to the social mainstream that they do not want any social contact, thus relieving themselves of the pressure to socialize with others. A second explanation is based on the theory of self-handicapping. This means doing something obvious to ensure one’s failure in some domain so that if, or when, failure comes, it can be attributed to the action itself as opposed to the person’s own abilities (Berglas & Jones, 1978). In this sense, shy radicals might assign any possible embarrassment or negative responses by others to their startling appearances, rather than to their shyness. Whether an alternative style of dress might be a way for shy youths to cope with social fears, and how it might affect their emotional adjustment, has been unanswered in previous literature.

**Problem behaviors with peers.** Adolescents' relationships with peers are positive in many ways, but they are also connected to problem behaviors. What this would mean for shy adolescents is not well understood. During early adolescence, problem behaviors increase, and many adolescents become involved in behaviors such as drinking alcohol, shoplifting, vandalism, and risky sexual activity. These acts usually take place in the company of peers, and early adolescents are particularly susceptible to peer pressure to engage in problem behavior (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005). Shyness has been shown to reduce the risk of becoming involved in delinquency for boys who were considered at risk because of their own disruptive behavior (Kerr, Tremblay, Pagani, & Vitaro, 1997). Theoretically, this was attributed to a tendency seen in shy, behaviorally inhibited children to hesitate for some time before taking action in unfamiliar situations (e.g., Kagan et al., 1989). The authors suggested that the same tendency might inhibit action in the kinds of settings in which delinquent acts take place. Such reasoning works well for delinquency, but it might not apply as well for problem behaviors such as alcohol drinking and sexual activity. First, these activities might take place in familiar settings with romantic partners, so the behaviorally inhibited response would not necessarily be evoked. In early adolescence, these problem behaviors are especially linked to advanced maturity relative to peers—early pubertal timing or feeling more mature than peers—and there is evidence that early adolescent girls get involved in these behaviors through relationships with older boyfriends (Stattin & Magnusson, 1989). Second, there are some indications in the literature that shy people might use alcohol to lower their inhibitions (Hartman, 1986; O'Hare, 1990). Thus, the questions arise: (a) whether shyness plays any moderating role in early adolescence for youths who are at risk of engaging in drinking and risky sexual activity by virtue of early maturity and (b) if so, what the nature of the moderation would be.

Regarding the link between shyness and alcohol use, previous research suggests conflicting predictions. On the one hand, drinking alcohol is seen as a potential means to reduce anxiety that comes with socializing (Burke & Stevens, 1999; Conger, 1956; Hartman, 1986; O'Hare, 1990). On the other hand, another body of research demonstrates that shy individuals might come to refrain from drinking alcohol because they fear losing control in social settings (Bruch et al., 1992; Bruch, Rivet, Heimberg, & Levin, 1997; Dubow, Boxer, & Huesmann, 2008; Eggleston, Woolaway-Bickel, & Schmidt, 2004; Ham & Hope, 2005; LaBrie, Pedersen, Neighbors, & Hummer, 2008; Park, Sher, & Krull, 2006; Rogosch, Chassin, & Sher, 1990; Rohsenow, 1983; Tran, Haaga, & Chambless, 1997). There are several problems with this research, however, for the present purposes. First, most studies are cross-sectional and as such do not reveal anything about the processes involved. Second, most studies have been conducted using college students or adults (Crawford & Novak, 2004; Eggleston et al., 2004; Ham, Bonin, & Hope, 2007; Kidorf & Lang, 1999; LaBrie et al., 2008; O'Hare, 1990; Park et al., 2006), so the issues relevant in early adolescence—peer pressure, risks associated with early maturity—are not present. For example, during early adolescence, shyness is linked to low self-esteem (Cheek & Melchior, 1990; Crozier, 1995; Kemple, 1995; Schmidt & Robinson, 1992; Smith & Betz, 2002), and youths with poor self-esteem are especially vulnerable to negative peer pressures (Brown, 1990; Brown, Clasen, &



Eicher, 1986). Some shy individuals adopt behavioral styles which can be described as “going along to get along” (Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999; Leary & Kowalski, 1995; Lewinsky, 1941) or “too shy to say no”, and may be characterized by conform ideas and neutral attitudes. For shy youths, then, it might be particularly difficult to say no to engaging in problem behaviors.

Shyness could also act as a buffer in reducing problem behaviors by restricting youths’ chances to get romantically involved. Being in a steady relationship might act as a gateway into engaging in more advanced behavior, particularly if the romantic partner is older. Studies show that youths who are mature have older friends (Kerr, Stattin, & Kiesner, 2007), and start having sex earlier than peers (Jessor, 1992). For example, early adolescents might, through their boyfriend/girlfriend, start affiliating with peer groups where having sex and drinking alcohol is common. In these cases, shyness might prevent drinking or having sex in a number of ways. Research shows that shy youths and adults go on fewer dates, have fewer sexual encounters, and are less likely than non-shy people to be involved in a romantic relationship at any given point in time (Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998; Jones & Carpenter, 1986; Leary & Dobbins, 1983; Prisbell, 1991; Zimbardo, 1977). When shy individuals conquer their social fears and partake in social occasions, they do not talk as much with others and tend to spend less time at such events (Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998; Dodge et al., 1987; Himadi et al., 1980; Twentyman & McFall, 1975; Watson & Friend, 1969). Hence, shyness might constrain the prospects for youths to engage in problem behaviors.

Drinking and having sex in early adolescence might not necessarily be considered deviant, or even extreme, as much as it might for parents and other adults. Many youths in Western societies today see intercourse and drinking alcohol as rather normative behaviors (Vazsonyi, Trejos-Castillo, & Huang, 2006). Having one-night stands or doing things one would regret after drinking are more extreme variants of intercourse and drinking, as they involve a higher level of peril for youths. On the one hand, if shyness might moderate, in one way or another, the link between advanced maturity and problem behaviors, it might probably with more certainty moderate behaviors of an even riskier nature. It might be that these types of behaviors demand far too much disinhibition and impulsiveness than is generally not part of a socially fearful behavioral profile. On the other hand, as shy individuals have previously been found to adhere to conforming attitudes and behaviors (Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999; Leary & Kowalski, 1995; Lewinsky, 1941), perhaps they might be more prone to engage in very risky behaviors after they would initiate more “normative” levels of problem behaviors. These issues have, to my knowledge, not been given any attention in the literature on shyness, and still remain unclear.

***Peer selection and influence based on shyness.*** As humans are generally social animals, relationships with others play a major role in most people’s existence. People spend a lot of time together, and gather around holidays and celebrations in order to be with family and friends. Indeed, to be entirely alone might be seen as a harsh punishment in a society that so fully gravitates towards social relationships. In middle childhood, more than a third of children’s social interactions starts to involve people outside the family: friends and other peers (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003).

By spending time with peers, children develop their self-definitions and self-esteem (Bukowski et al., 1991), and learn to take other social perspectives and practice their social skills (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). In adolescence, youths spend more time with peers than they do with their families (Bukowski et al., 1991; Fuligni et al., 2001), making peer interactions increasingly important during this developmental phase. Shy individuals, however, have much more difficulty with social contacts, and their social fears obstruct smooth social relationships.

The knowledge about whether or in which way peers might socialize adolescent shyness is scarce. Socialization might stem from two types of processes: initial friendship selection, and friendship influence over time (Kandel, 1978). In the case of shy youths, this means they would choose friends similar to themselves on shy, socially fearful behaviors. As shyness is closely related to a desire for other's approval and fear of negative evaluation and rejection (Asendorpf, 1987; Jackson et al., 1997; Jones et al., 1986; Leary & Kowalski, 1993; Miller, 1995; Pilkonis, 1977a; Watson & Friend, 1969), it might be more simple for shy youths to seek out those similar to themselves on shy characteristics. Some previous research on children has viewed the issue of shyness as a criterion for friendship selection, and it was found that those who were shy or socially withdrawn were indeed friends with similarly shy children (Güroglu, Van Lieshout, Haselager, & Scholte, 2007; Haselager, Hartup, Van Lieshout, & Riksen-Walraven, 1998; Rubin, Wojslawowicz, Rose-Krasnor, Booth-LaForce, & Burgess, 2006). Same results have been found in middle childhood (Haselager et al., 1998) and adolescence as well (Güroglu et al., 2007). Similarity to friends can also be a result of over-time influence, however (Kandel, 1978). Shy friends might socialize one another into becoming more shy over time, through several types of processes. They might for example extensively co-ruminate their feelings and social problems, which might lead to avoiding social situations. This type of process has been identified for adolescent girls' depression (Prinstein, Borelli, Cheah, Simon, & Aikins, 2005; Rose, 2002). Shy friends could also reinforce one another by encouraging shy, avoidant behaviors, which might make them feel better about their own social fears. Spending time with a similarly shy peer might make it difficult to model efficient social interactions. To my knowledge, only one study has viewed the influence of friends' social withdrawal on one another, showing that having a withdrawn friend when transiting to middle school increases social withdrawal over time (Oh et al., 2008). Thus, whether or not friends in early adolescence might socialize one another's shyness over time is still unclear.

There are several empirical problems with the current research, as well. First, shyness socialization has only been viewed in one study, including middle school children (Oh et al., 2008). Thus, this has generally been uninvestigated in the developmental literature. One reason for this might be that longitudinal data are required for the study of influence (Kandel, 1978). Second, the study of socialization poses demands on the ecological validity of the variables measured. One such demand is to assess all relevant peers in a social network, including in *and* out of school friends, and to get reports of shyness that are independent of the individual who named the youths as friends. As youths tend to overrate how similar they are to their friends (Furnham & Henderson, 1983; Morry, 2005), this aspect is of specific consequence. One way to meet this empirical challenge is by including school grades

or classrooms in which everyone reports on their own behaviors. Including the friends outside of school, and thus including the youths who do not have in-school friends, is another. Third, a sound way of viewing friendships is from a larger perspective, as embedded in social networks. Standard friendship studies limit friendships to having participants name a best friend, thereby excluding other friendships of a non-dyadic nature. Merely three studies on shy youths have been conducted using a social network approach (Brendenstein-Cutspec & Goering, 1989; Goering & Brendenstein-Cutspec, 1989, 1990). Whether friends might socialize one another into becoming more shy over time was, however, not the focus of these studies. Consequently, several questions regarding shyness socialization in early adolescent friendships still remain.

***Shyness and parenting.*** Concerning the relationships youths have with their parents, not much is known about what influence parents have on the development of youth shyness, as most empirical studies on the development and preservation of shy behavior have concentrated on small children. Parental treatment of shy children has been one of the most studied factors in this literature. Different types of socially anxious behaviors in young children, such as shyness, behavioral inhibition, social anxiety, reticence, and social withdrawal, have been linked with two kinds of parental behavior: overcontrol and emotional coldness (Dadds & Barrett, 2001; Masia & Morris, 1998; Rapee, 1997; Wood, McLeod, Sigman, Hwang, & Chu, 2003). It is believed that parents who protect their children from challenging events or take control in demanding situations might train their children to believe that the world is an unsafe place from which they need protection and over which they have no control (Rapee, 2001). Additionally, overcontrol might also hinder the development of children's self-regulation and feelings of self-efficacy and autonomy (Hastings, Rubin, & DeRose, 2005; Mills & Rubin, 1998; Rubin et al., 2001; Rubin, Stewart, & Chen, 1995), which might consequently make children's shyness worse. Concerning emotional coldness, the hypothetical idea is that as shy children are growing up, if they recognize their parents' behaviors as rejecting, they might grow up to be preoccupied with others' evaluative comments. This, in turn, may lead to a general fear of negative evaluation, which is regarded as an important element of shy behavior (Bruch, 1989). The idea is further that parents' overcontrolling and rejecting behaviors might, in that case, exacerbate their children's shyness. Research on small children partially confirms this notion, as studies have shown that mothers of shy children are inclined to overcontrol and overprotect them (Hastings et al., 2005; Rubin, Burgess, & Hastings, 2002; Rubin et al., 2001). In turn, mothers of shy children lack warmth towards their children and tend to be cold or rejecting in their manner (Grüner, Muris, & Merckelbach, 1999; Hudson & Rapee, 2001). Thus, two types of parenting behaviors are known to have an effect on childhood shyness.

The few studies conducted with adolescents have rested on parallel ideas, but shyness has not been examined to the same degree as more generalized anxiety or internalizing problems. For example, rejection and lack of warmth by parents appear to enhance the risk of developing internalizing problems for early adolescents (Muris & Merckelbach, 1998), and parental overcontrol and the absence of autonomy

encouragement is thought to contribute to anxiety disorders (Siqueland, Kendall, & Steinberg, 1996). In addition, parents of anxious youths have also been found to allow youths less personal independence, and youths report their parents as more overcontrolling than do non-anxious youths (Siqueland et al., 1996). Anxious youths report their parents as less warm, less supportive, and more rejecting than non-anxious youths (Siqueland et al., 1996; Whaley, Pinto, & Sigman, 1999). It has also been shown that the link between shyness and parental behaviors is considerably weaker than the equivalent link involving anxiety (Van Brakel, Muris, Bögels, & Thomassen, 2006). Hence, even though childhood shyness has been strongly linked to parental behaviors, and adolescent anxiety has been linked to similar facets of parenting, the relation between adolescent shyness and parenting cannot be regarded as established.

Conversely, whether shyness might influence parental behavior as much as parental behavior influences shyness has largely been uninvestigated. Suggestions have been expressed in the literature regarding this link, as it has been shown that small, temperamentally shy children most likely elicit different behavioral reactions from their parents than children who are not as shy (Rubin & Mills, 1991). Research on inhibition shows that inhibited children who get exposed to unknown social circumstances are regularly more “difficult” and more easily aroused (Kagan, Reznick, & Snidman, 1987). Parents might, in turn, find it difficult to calm and comfort such children, and this might result in cold, rejecting behaviors from parents (Rapee, 2001; Rubin & Mills, 1991). Similar suggestions have been made regarding overcontrol, in that early shyness may induce overprotective or overcontrolling reactions on behalf of parents (Rubin & Mills, 1991). Overprotection might be a response to children’s social timidity and the anxiety that comes along with it (Rubin et al., 2002; Rubin & Mills, 1990, 1991; Rubin et al., 1995). By being firm or directive, parents might believe they are helping their shy child, but they might instead help maintain or even worsen shyness (Rubin et al., 2002; Rubin & Mills, 1990, 1991; Rubin et al., 1995). Despite these theoretical ideas, however, few empirical studies have investigated bidirectional links between parenting and shyness in childhood and adolescence. In one study with children, for example, it was found that shyness predicted a lack of encouragement from parents over two years, but not the other way around (Rubin, Nelson, Hastings, & Asendorpf, 1999). In the only longitudinal study including adolescents, the subject of attention was how the associations relating social anxiety and parenting changed over the shift to the teenage years, so the data were examined within time points, and prediction of change across time was not attended to (Papini & Roggman, 1992). Consequently, the question remains whether parents influence youth shyness, whether youth’s shyness has an effect on parental behaviors toward their children, or both.

## Summary

In sum then, even though many things are known about how shyness affects and is affected by social relationships in childhood and adulthood, quite a few questions remain unanswered about shyness and relationships in early adolescence. Those regard different types of social relationships, such as those with peers, friends, and

parents. There are several features of early adolescence that make these questions relevant. One is that in early adolescence peers begin to take on a more important role than ever before. Early adolescents spend more time with peers than with their families (Bukowski et al., 1991; Fuligni et al., 2001), and they increasingly confide in their peers about intimate matters (Berndt & Perry, 1986; Buhrmester, 1990). They start to become associated with reputation-based peer crowds, which are not entirely of their own choosing, but which determine to a great extent how others see them. Little is known about where shy youths might fit into these peer crowds—whether they are typically left out, whether they belong to crowds that are stereotypically shy, or whether they might intentionally choose to align themselves with peer crowds that set them apart, socially, from the mainstream. Another feature of early adolescence is that problem behaviors and pressures to conform to peers begin to develop, often in combination (Allen, Porter, & McFarland, 2006). Some research suggests that shy people have trouble standing up to others, as they often have poor self-esteem, which in turn is highly linked with high susceptibility to peer pressure (Brown, 1990; Brown et al., 1986). Problem behaviors that are associated with early maturation—alcohol drinking and intercourse, as well as high-risk behaviors—are particularly relevant for early adolescents, and the kinds of peer settings in which they take place raise questions about whether and how shyness might moderate the risk of early maturing adolescents engaging in these behaviors. On the one hand, shy youths might be reluctant to be in party situations where drinking occurs, and they might not engage in drinking for fear of losing control (Bruch et al., 1992; Bruch et al., 1997; Eggleston et al., 2004). On the other hand, they might drink to lessen their inhibitions (Hartman, 1986; O'Hare, 1990). Partly because having sex is often linked to substance use, it might be affected in the same way. Another question about peers derives from the phenomenon in early adolescence that selection of friends is, more than in childhood, based on characteristics such as shared interests, opinions, and intimacy, rather than more superficial features such as proximity and joint activities (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). This, together with findings that youths select their friends based on similarity, raises the possibility that youths might select friends based on similar levels of shyness. If so, then they might influence each other's shyness, as suggested by recent studies of depression. There is a small, recent literature suggesting that girls increase each others' depression levels through discussing, or ruminating, together about their problems (Rose, 2002). It is reasonable to think that shy youths might increase each others' social fears by talking and dwelling upon them together as well. Some evidence exists that shy youths would choose friends similar to themselves (Güroglu et al., 2007), but whether shy friends, in turn, might influence each other's shyness over time has not been thoroughly investigated. Finally, although peer relationships are important in adolescence, parent's social support also remains important (Rueger, Malecki, & Demaray, 2008), but little is known about the possible role of parents' behaviors in the maintenance of adolescent shyness. Most studies on the subject have been carried out with children, showing that parents tend to overcontrol shy children, and treat them in an emotionally cold manner. Very few studies have explored the possibility that shyness, in turn, might play an important role in this relationship as well. No studies thus far have tested bidirectional links between adolescent shyness and

parenting behaviors. Thus, there are several unanswered questions regarding the role of shyness in young people's social worlds. These unanswered questions will be the focus of this dissertation.

### **The aim of this dissertation**

The main aim of this dissertation is to achieve a better understanding of how adolescent shyness can affect and be affected by social relationships over time. The dissertation consists of four studies. Study I offers an innovative theoretical explanation to why shy youths might choose to affiliate with crowds that adopt off-putting, startling appearances, and it also tests this idea. Study II tests whether shyness can function as a protective factor in early adolescence against problem behaviors such as risky drinking and risky sexual behaviors. Study III focuses on shyness in a social network of youths, testing whether those who are shy prefer to become friends with others who are shy. Additionally, it is also tested whether this influences their shyness for the worse across time. Finally, Study IV examines the bidirectional links between youths' shyness and their perceptions of parenting, testing parenting aspects such as overcontrol and emotional coldness. In addition, it is also tested whether these processes differ for girls and boys. Moreover, differences between the genders are tested regarding all of these processes. The following research questions were presented: Focusing on the period of early adolescence,

1. How do people with whom adolescents have important relationships – parents and peers – affect adolescents' shyness, and how are these people, in turn, affected by adolescent's shyness? (Studies III and IV)
2. What does shyness mean for adolescents' choices of relationships with peers? (Studies I and III)
3. Do shy adolescents' ways of dealing with peer interactions have consequences for their internal and external adjustment? (Studies I and II)
4. Could shyness or youths' ways of coping with it have positive impact on their development? (Studies I and II)

## II Method

### Participants and procedure

#### Sample 1

This sample has been used in Studies I, III, and IV. The data are from a 5-wave, longitudinal study, conducted on community level in a city in central Sweden. The first data collection took place in the fall of 2001, and the town population was about 26,000 during this time. At the start of the longitudinal study, the city had similar unemployment rates as the rest of the country (4%). The average income (214,000 Swedish Crowns) was, however, lower compared to the rest of Sweden (223,000 Swedish Crowns). In addition, 12% of the inhabitants in the town had a foreign background. The main goals of the study were to understand the combined roles of parents, peers, and individual characteristics in the development of adolescent adjustment problems and delinquency.

All students in grades 4 through 10 (roughly, aged 10 to 18) were asked to participate in the study each year. As one cohort of participants graduated high school and left the study, another cohort of 4<sup>th</sup> graders came into the study each year. Parents participated biannually, by filling out questionnaires we sent to them and returning them in the mail. Only parents of 4<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> graders participated, however, as youths attending 11<sup>th</sup> and higher grades would by Swedish standards have reached the legal age of independence (18), or would be living on their own, or both. As all the youths in the community were targeted, we were able to identify their nominated friends, as these were likely involved in the study. In this way, the peers' self-reported information about behaviors and relationships were available to us, and were independent of the youths who named them, thus reducing the risk of inflated similarity (Iannotti, Bush, & Weinfurt, 1996).

Youths were recruited in classrooms during school time. They were informed about what kinds of questions would be part of the questionnaires, and how long it would take to finish them. They were also told that participation was voluntary and that they could do something else, should they choose not to take part. They were guaranteed that if they did participate, their answers would not be revealed to anyone else (for example, parents or teachers). Parents were informed about the study beforehand in meetings held in the community and by a letter in the mail. With the letter, they received a postage-paid card to return in case they did not want their children to take part of the study (1% of the parents did so). They were also told that they could withdraw their child from the study any time they pleased. Youths filled out the questionnaires during regular school hours in sessions administered by trained research assistants. Teachers were not present at that time. No one was paid for participating, but for each of the classes in grades 4 to 6 we donated to the class fund, and in each of the classes in grades 7 through 12 we held a drawing for movie tickets. Everyone who stayed in the room, whether participating or not, was qualified for the drawing. Overall youth participation rates were over 90% each year. The

procedures and measures were approved by the University's Ethics Review Board at the start and again at the mid-point of the longitudinal study.

In Studies I, III, and IV, the data used was starting from Wave 3 and onward, as the shyness measure was available from that timepoint. In Study I, all 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> graders (aged 13 through 18) at Wave 3 were included in the analyses. For Study III, all 8<sup>th</sup> graders (age 14) at Wave 3 who had reported on their friends were included. In Study IV, we included all the 7<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> graders (aged 13 through 15) at Wave 3.

## Sample 2

This sample was used in Study II. The data are from an ongoing longitudinal study, with two waves of data collected thus far. The study began in the spring of 2007, and two waves of data have been collected since. The study is conducted in a large Swedish city, with a current population of about 131,200. The mean unemployment rate in the city was 7.2% at the start of the study, which was somewhat higher than the average unemployment rate of 6.1% in the entire country. The average income in the municipality was 4% lower than the country average. In addition, 13.5% of the inhabitants had an immigrant background. The primary purpose of the study was to examine children's views of harsh conditions in three domains: the family, the neighborhood, and the school, and to assess how these three domains co-interact in affecting children's development. Schools known to be more successful with their students, as well as schools known to have problems, were targeted in the study.

We recruited the youths in their classrooms during school time. We informed them about the study, told them what kinds of questions they would be asked, and how long it would take to fill out the questionnaires. The youths were informed that their participation was voluntary, and if they did not want to participate, they could withdraw at any time during the data collection. If they chose not to participate, they were free to do something else instead. The youths were assured that their answers would not be shown to anyone outside of the study, such as parents, teachers, or the police. The parents were informed prior to the start of the study via letters, asking for their consent. They were informed that they could withdraw their child from the study at any time. Only 1% of the parents did not give consent for their children to participate. Thus, youths took part in the study only if they and their parents wished to do so. Participation rates were over 80% each year. The questionnaires were filled out during regular school hours, and were administered by qualified research assistants. Teachers were not present during the data collection, but were available in case some students were problematic (which occasionally happened in the "problem" schools). Youths were not paid for their participation. They received small gifts, however, such as pens and calculators. For Study II, we used data from 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> graders (roughly aged 13 to 15 years) participating at the first wave of the study.



## Measures

The measures used in the four studies are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.  
The measures used in Studies I through IV

	Study I	Study II	Study III	Study IV
Shyness and other characteristics	<p><i>Shyness</i> Behavioral inhibition (Gren-Landell et al., 2009)</p>	<p><i>Shyness and maturity</i> Shyness (Gren-Landell et al., 2009) Subjective age (Galambos, Kolaric, Sears, &amp; Maggs, 1999) Pubertal status (Williams &amp; Dunlop, 1999)</p>	<p><i>Shyness</i> Shyness (Gren-Landell et al., 2009)</p>	<p><i>Shyness</i> Shyness (Gren-Landell et al., 2009)</p>
Social relationships	<p><i>Peers</i> Self-perceptions of crowd affiliation</p>	<p><i>Romantic Partners</i> Romantic involvement</p>	<p><i>Friends</i> Friendship nominations (Kerr et al., 2007)</p>	<p><i>Parents</i> Feeling overly controlled by parents (Kerr &amp; Stattin, 2000) Influence in family decisions Parental warmth (Kerr &amp; Stattin, 2003) Parental coldness-rejection</p>
Adjustment	<p><i>Emotional adjustment</i> Depression (Radloff, 1977) Self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1979)</p>	<p><i>Problem behaviors</i> Drunkennes Intercourse Risky drinking behaviors One-night stands</p>	<p><i>Emotional adjustment</i> Depression (Radloff, 1977)</p>	

## Shyness and other characteristics

**Shyness/Behavioral inhibition.** For all the studies included in this dissertation, the same measure of shyness was used. The measure consisted of 8 questions about fears in social situations: speaking in front of the class, putting a hand up during class, making a phone call to someone one does not know, being with classmates during breaks, going to a party, initiating conversation with someone one does not know very well, eating with others during lunch, and looking in someone's eyes while speaking. The participants rated themselves on a three-point scale, ranging from having *No fear* (1) to *A lot of fear* (3) of the aforementioned situations. This measure is part of a larger measure of social anxiety, first developed for adults (Furmark et al., 1999), and later adapted for adolescents (Gren-Landell et al., 2009). The larger measure contains measures of other aspects of social anxiety, including items about being handicapped by social fears, which allows researchers to infer which people meet the criteria for social phobia; however, all of the items included in the 8-item scale I have used involve situations or behaviors similar to those that reliably distinguish shy individuals from non-shy individuals, as they assess a wariness in social situations (Cheek, Melchior et al., 1986). Thus, they capture the central feature of shyness.

In Study I, The Cronbach's alpha reliability for this scale was .75. In Study II, the Cronbach's alpha was .74. In Study III, the alphas were .75 for Time 1, .73 for Time 2, and .75 for Time 3. The cross-year correlations ranged from .36 to .52. Finally, for Study IV, the Cronbach's alphas were .74 for Time 1, .72 for Time 2, and .74 for Time 3. The cross-year correlations ranged from .48 to .64.

## Maturity

In Study II, we assessed advanced maturity in two different ways. Primarily, we measured girls' and boys' respective subjective age, to establish how old or young youths perceived themselves to be relative to other peers. In addition, we asked girls and boys independently about present pubertal status, to determine how biologically developed they were.

**Subjective age.** In Study II, four questions about how boys and girls saw themselves compared to peers their age measured subjective age (Galambos et al., 1999). The first three questions pertained to feeling, looking, and being treated by other same-sex peers according to one's age, whereas the fourth question was about being treated according to age by other-sex peers. The response items ranged from *Much Younger* (1) to *Much older* (7). The alpha reliability for Time 1 was .89.

**Pubertal status.** We asked youths about the present state of their physical characteristics in order to measure pubertal maturity (Williams & Dunlop, 1999). Girls and boys were asked four separate questions, three of which were identical, and one that differed between the genders. As the impending analyses in the study required combining boys' and girls' answers into the same scale, the two differing items were taken out. For both boys and girls, the three identical questions regarded having grown in height very quickly, having body hair (e.g., pubic hair/armpit hair),

and experiencing skin change (e.g., oily skin and pimples). For girls, the fourth item regarded breast growth, whereas boys were asked about voice change. Response items ranged from *No development* (1) to *Development completed* (4). Cronbach's alpha for Time 1 for the three-item scale was .91, and .94 for the four-item scale. The three-item scale correlated with the four-item scale at .94. Consequently, using the three-item scale was considered appropriate.

## Social Relationships

### Peers

***Self-perceptions of crowd affiliation.*** The measure of self-perceptions of crowd affiliation was included in Study I. Information about crowds prior to assessing peer crowd affiliation was gathered by talking to teachers, students, and youth leaders in the community. These individuals reported on the types of crowds present. From that information we developed a list of peer crowds. During the data collections, youths were asked to choose from a list the peer crowd that they most identified with. They were also given a choice to indicate that they did not identify with any crowd, or they could write in a crowd if the one they identified with was not on the list. From the crowds generated during the data collection, we selected a number of crowds for a *Radical* group. For this group, we chose peer crowds that were collectively considered by those who had spent time in the schools teaching and gathering data as eye-catching in a way that seemed intended to shock, startle, or put people off. Four crowds fit this description. Two of these, *Punks* and *Goths*, have been documented in many previous studies of peer crowds. The other two might be particular to Swedish youth culture, as they have, to our knowledge, not appeared in previous research. The third crowd, *Synths*, were named for their interest in electronically synthesized music, and they are recognized by severe, all-black clothing and dyed-black, often dramatically styled hair. For example, half of the head might be shaved and the dyed-black hair on the other half might be made to stand up like a Viking horn. The fourth crowd, *Aesthetics*, are typically found among youths who have chosen the music, drama, and art high school track (or among younger youths who intend choosing this track later). They make startling appearances in a variety of creative ways. They might adopt a Goth-like appearance with a lot of makeup used by girls and boys alike; they might create space-alien-type sculptures of their hair; they might put on welder's goggles and vampire teeth and shave the hair off half of their heads; or they might wear tails or other animal-like features. Thus, these four crowds fitted our idea of a radical group, the so-called Radicals. We compared the Radicals with three theoretically relevant crowd groups. The first one, *Academics*, consisted of Computer Nerds and Brains, crowds which have previously been shown to be shy (Kinney, 1993). Another comparison group, *Independents*, consisted of youths who answered "None of the above [identities]" to the crowd question. We chose to group these youths into the same category, as independents have been found previously to have higher levels of social anxiety than youths in other typical crowds (Prinstein & La Greca, 2002). Thus, our goal was to determine whether the Radicals were more shy than these groups that have been identified previously as

inhibited, shy or socially anxious. The third comparison group, *Non-Radicals*, comprised crowds that might be recognized by their clothing and hairstyles, but which we did not consider Radical because their appearances were not shocking or off-putting: “Sports,” “Role-Players,” “Vegans,” “Skaters,” “Teenyboppers,” “Feminists,” “Poppers,” “Hip Hoppers,” “Ravers,” “Snobs,” and “Environmental Activists.”

## Romantic partners

**Romantic involvement.** We asked youths about their recent romantic relationship status in Study II. The question was: Do you have or have you had a boyfriend/girlfriend? The response items ranged from *Have never had and don't want to have now* (1) to *Have now and have had before* (5).

## Friends

**Friendship nominations.** In Study III, youths were asked to identify up to three very important peers, which we defined as “someone you talk with, hang out with, and do things with” (Kerr et al., 2007). Youths were told that these should be very important persons in their lives, but not their parents or other adults. We also informed them that these important peers could be boys or girls, could live anywhere, and did not have to be of the same age. In addition, the youths reported on each important peer’s school and relationship (friend, sibling, or romantic partner). Although siblings and romantic partners could be nominated, only friends were included in the analyses for Study III. Thus, the friendship network in this study consisted of up to 3 nominations of friends each participant considered important to him or her.

## Parents

We asked youths about their relationship with their parents in a number of ways, and these measures were used in Study IV. First, we assessed perceptions of parents’ overly controlling behaviors. This included questions about feeling overly controlled and perceiving a lack of influence in family decisions. Second, we used positive and negative indicators of parental emotional coldness: parental warmth and coldness/rejection. The aforementioned measures included separate reports about mothers and fathers. These emotional reactions towards the adolescents were regarded as likely to vary between mothers and fathers, whereas the overcontrol measures were considered to reflect a family management tactic largely shared by both parents.

**Feeling overly controlled.** In Study IV, five items measured whether youths felt overly controlled by their parents (Kerr & Stattin, 2000). The items were: “Do you think your parents give you enough freedom to do what you want during your free time,” “Does it feel like your parents demand to know everything,” “Do you think your parents control everything in your life,” “Do you think your parents butt into what

you do in your free time,” and “Do you feel like you can’t keep anything to yourself, because your parents want to know everything?” The five-point scale ranged from *Yes, always* (1) to *No, never* (5). The alpha reliabilities were .80 for Time 1, .82 for Time 2, and .88 for Time 3. The cross-year correlations between the scales ranged from .50 to .62.

***Influence in family decisions.*** For Study IV, we used a scale that was developed in this project. There were six items measuring how much influence the youths felt they had at home, on a four-point scale ranging from *Don’t agree at all* (1) to *Agree completely* (4). The items were “Your parents listen to you when decisions are to be made in the family,” “You feel like you have influence and are partaking in things that happen in your family,” “Your parents let you take part when you are going to decide something in the family,” “If you have other points of view, then these viewpoints can change decisions taken in the family,” “Your parents ask you when decisions are to be made in the family,” and “When you are having a discussion at home, you usually get to finish what you have to say.” The items were reversed, so that higher score meant less influence (and thus more overcontrol). The alpha reliabilities were .88 for Time 1, .88 for Time 2, and .89 for Time 3. The cross-year correlations between the scales ranged from .44 to .59.

***Warmth.*** Indicating parental emotional coldness in Study IV, youths were asked six questions about how warm they perceived their mothers and fathers to be, respectively (Kerr & Stattin, 2003). The items were “Your mom/Your dad”: “Praises you for no special reason,” “Shows he/she cares for you with words and gestures,” “Does small things to make you feel special (e.g., winks, smiles),” “Constantly shows how proud he/she is of you,” “Focuses on the positive and seldom on the negative things you do,” and “Always shows his/her love to you without any reason – almost regardless of what you do.” The response items ranged from *Never* (1) to *Most often* (3) on a three-point scale. The alpha reliabilities for the items about mothers were .84 for Time 1, .85 for Time 2, and .87 for Time 3. The alpha reliabilities for the items about fathers were .86 for Time 1, .86 for Time 2, and .88 for Time 3. The cross-year correlations ranged from .49 to .58 for the measures about mothers, and from .48 to .55 for the measures about fathers. The correlations between fathers’ and mothers’ scales ranged from .34 to .69.

***Coldness-rejection.*** The youths were asked four questions in Study IV about their mothers and fathers acting cold and rejecting towards them, and how their respective parent typically reacted when they had done something they really did not like. The items were part of a measure created in the project to tap parents’ negative and positive responses to adolescents’ misconduct. The items were “Doesn’t talk to you until after a long while,” “Is silent and cold towards you,” “Disregards your views or ideas,” and “Avoids you”. The response items were on a three-point scale, ranging from *Never* (1) to *Most often* (3). The alpha reliabilities for the scales concerning mothers were .78 for Time 1, .75 for Time 2, and .81 for Time 3. The alpha reliabilities for the scales concerning fathers were .79 for Time 1, .78 for Time 2, and .82 for Time 3. The cross-year correlations between the scales ranged from .35 to .40 for the mothers’ measures, and from .40 to .42 for the fathers’ measures. The correlations between the fathers’ and mothers’ scales ranged from .22 to .71.

## Adjustment

### Emotional adjustment

**Depression.** In Studies I and III, we used the Child Depression Scale from the Center for Epidemiological Studies (Radloff, 1977) to measure depressive symptoms. The scale assesses symptoms such as worry, sadness, hopelessness, lethargy, and poor appetite. The 20 items were rated on four-point scales from *Not at all* (1) to *Often* (4). Youths were instructed to think about the past week. Examples of items are: I have “Worried about things I don’t usually worry about,” “Felt scared,” “Felt down and unhappy,” “Did not sleep as well as usual,” and “Felt lonely and without friends.” The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale used in Study I was .90. The Cronbach’s alphas for the scale used in Study III were .91 for Time 1, .92 for Time 2, and .91 for Time 3. The cross-year correlations ranged from .51 to .60.

**Self-esteem.** Self-esteem was measured in Study I with a widely used scale (Rosenberg, 1979). The four-point response scale ranged from *Not true at all* (1) to *Very true* (4), and the ten items assessed self-perceptions such as: “Considering all things, you are pleased with yourself,” “You really feel worthless sometimes,” “You feel like you have many good qualities”, “You wish you could think more highly of yourself,” and “Sometimes you feel you are of no use.” The Cronbach’s alpha reliability was .77.

### Problematic Behaviors

In Study II, we assessed two types of problematic behaviors. The first set of behaviors regarded drunkenness and intercourse - behaviors that, even though adults might consider them as problematic, might not be seen that way by youths themselves. The second set of questions regarded behaviors of a high-risk nature that even youths might see as perilous, pertaining to risky behaviors after drinking and having one-night stands.

**Drunkenness.** We asked youths’ about their drinking practices via one item. This item was: “Have you had so much beer, liquor, or wine that you got drunk – during the past year?” The five-item response scale ranged from *No, it has not happened* (1) to *More than 10 times* (5). The cross-year correlation between the items at Times 1 and 2 was .62.

**Intercourse.** We assessed youths’ sexual activities with one item, which was: “Have you had intercourse?” The response items ranged from *No* (1) to *Several times* (3). The cross-year correlation between the two items at Times 1 and 2 was .61.

**Risky drinking behaviors.** To assess drinking behaviors of a more risky nature, youths were asked about situations that had happened after they had been drinking. The items were: “You don’t remember what you said nor did the day after,” “You ended up in a fight or row,” “You said stupid things to others that you were ashamed of afterwards,” “Your personality changed – you became a whole different person than you usually are,” “You destroyed things such as windows, street lamps, phone booths, furniture, benches, etc.”, and “You did other things that you regretted the

day after.” The three-item response scale ranged from *No, it has not happened* (1) to *Several times* (3). The alpha reliabilities for this scale were .84 for Time 1, and .88 for Time 2. The cross-year correlation between the scales was .56.

**One-night stands.** As further indication of high-risk behaviors, we assessed risky sexual behaviors with one item. The item was: “If you have had intercourse, has it happened that you’ve slept with someone on the first night?” The response items ranged from *Have not had intercourse* (1) to *Yes, it has happened several times* (4). The cross-year correlation between the two items was .59.





## III Results

### Study I

Previous research has shown that children view shyness as something negative (Fox, Sobel, Calkins, & Cole, 1996) and young people actively try to deal with it by adopting several coping strategies (Carducci, 2000). Among many different tactics employed by shy persons to cope with their shyness, changing their appearance has been identified as one (Carducci, 2000). Associating with peer crowds becomes significant for young adolescents in this period of their lives. They start to think about who they are, and categorize both themselves and other people based on stereotypic images and reputations. Such categories, so-called peer crowds, have been identified in previous research (Brown et al., 1990). Crowds such as athletically oriented Jocks, academically oriented Nerds and Brains, socially accepted and admired Populars, normbreaking Burnouts, socially isolated Loners, and rebellious Alternatives have all been recognized as part of youth culture before. Even though youths might not hang out or be friends with others in the same crowd, however, they still might categorize themselves (Urberg, 1992) and be recognized by others (Stone & Brown, 1998) as belonging to such a crowd. Youths might identify with crowds on many grounds, such as sharing the same taste in music or enjoying different kinds of sports. Affiliation with some crowds is, nonetheless, not something one can necessarily be in charge of. Crowds such as Populars, for example, have members that have risen in social status – a process not completely under one's own control. One can, however, choose to affiliate with a crowd such as Punks, as such affiliation might imply constructing a distinctive outward appearance, and without such an appearance it would be unlikely for a youth to be acknowledged as a Punk. To our knowledge, the reasons for youths to identify with such peer crowds have not been explored in the literature on peer crowd affiliation. We hypothesized that identifying with crowds with off-putting appearances might be a way for shy youths to deal with their shyness.

To determine whether such an alternative crowd, or what we term as Radicals, were more shy than other crowd groups, we conducted planned comparisons with Radicals as the reference group. They were compared with three theoretically valid comparison groups: Independents, Academics, and Non-Radicals. The Radicals ( $M = .42$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) were significantly more shy than the Independents ( $M = .09$ ,  $SD = .93$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .05$ ), the Academics ( $M = .05$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and the Non-Radicals ( $M = -.13$ ,  $SD = .98$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These differences were true for boys and girls alike as shown by a non-significant Gender x Crowd interaction ( $F = .22$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p > .10$ ). Academically oriented crowds resembling the Academics in this study have been found to be highly shy in previous research (Kinney, 1993). We found the Radicals to be even more shy than the Academics in our data. Thus, it seems that the Radicals were most shy compared with the youths in the other crowd groups.

To further investigate the idea that adopting a Radical style serves as coping strategy for shy youths, we reasoned that if adopting such an appearance and manner of dress would be a successful strategy for shy individuals, then the shy

Radicals should be better adjusted than shy youths in the other crowd groups. To examine this, youths who scored in the top 30% on the shyness measure were categorized as highly shy (Kerr et al., 1997). Then, within this highly shy group, we compared the Radicals ( $n = 26$ ) with youths in the other crowd groups (99 Independents, 63 Academics, and 177 Non-Radicals). The results showed that the most shy Radicals ( $M = 1.06$ ,  $SD = .37$ ) were not more shy than the most shy Independents ( $M = 1.14$ ,  $SD = .57$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p > .10$ ), Academics ( $M = 1.21$ ,  $SD = .65$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p > .10$ ), and Non-Radicals ( $M = 1.13$ ,  $SD = .62$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p > .10$ ). The shy Radicals, however, felt significantly more depressed ( $M = .74$ ,  $SD = .98$ ) than shy Academics ( $M = .22$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and Non-Radicals ( $M = .24$ ,  $SD = .95$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Additionally, the highly shy Radicals had significantly worse self-esteem ( $M = -.85$ ,  $SD = .77$ ) than highly shy Independents ( $M = -.38$ ;  $SD = .94$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .05$ ), Academics ( $M = -.25$ ,  $SD = .88$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and Non-Radicals ( $M = -.28$ ,  $SD = .84$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Consequently, the shy Radicals did not differ from other shy youths on their levels of shyness, but they were worse adjusted compared with shy youths in the other crowd groups. We concluded that if some shy youths are in fact adopting Radical appearances to cope with their shyness, their strategy seems rather unsuccessful. Indeed, previous research has found some coping strategies adopted by shy individuals as restricted in efficiency, or even counterproductive (Carducci, 2000). Thus, these results are in accord with earlier findings.

Study I provided additional knowledge about shy early adolescents' potential choices of social identities. These youths do not merely spend time with peers, however. Trying out new things, getting romantically involved, or attending typical youth social events such as parties often characterize the teenage years. These characteristic adolescent activities do not always have positive consequences, nonetheless, and might lead the way to problem behaviors. What influence might shyness have during this period in people's lives? Study II focuses on this issue.

## Study II

In Study I, it was shown that shy youths were willing to take to extreme measures in order to fit in somewhere. This is, perhaps, no wonder, as early adolescence is inevitably a period of turmoil for young people, for several reasons. Youths go through puberty and physically change to resemble adults. Many youths do this seemingly over night, and suddenly become all "grown up". Whether or not they act mature, however, can depend on how old they feel in relation to others their age, and how far along their pubertal maturity they are. That is, youths' advanced maturity plays a role in their development as well. More advanced maturity has previously been linked with many negative outcomes, as youths who feel older and are more pubertally advanced than their same age mates get involved in problem behaviors more often than youths whose maturity either matches their actual age, or who are late maturers (Galambos et al., 1999). Another important part of early adolescence is the increased significance of friends. Problem behaviors are often initiated with friends, however. Typical problem behaviors during early adolescence are for

example drinking and engaging in sexual activities. Such activities, nonetheless, often require presence of others, and can be more easily initiated when youths attend parties and other social get-togethers, or if they are romantically involved, for example. As was illustrated in Study I, shy youths were more likely to choose an alternative social identity, perhaps as means of coping with their shyness. This strategy was not successful, however, possibly because with these styles might come a certain level of impulsivity or disinhibition that shy youths would not find comfortable. For example, drinking a lot or having sex might be problematic for very shy early adolescents. We wondered if shyness, in that case, might serve as a protective factor for problem behaviors such as drinking and intercourse, but also high-risk behaviors such as risky sexual pursuits and risky drinking behaviors over time – despite youths' advanced maturity. We also wanted to find out whether this would differ for boys and girls.

In Study II, youths were assessed for two consecutive years. We first examined the assumption that advanced physical or subjective maturity might act as a risky condition for problem and risky behaviors. Second, we wanted to know whether one type of problem behavior (e.g., intercourse) would lead to another (e.g., drinking), and the other way around (see Figure 1, Study II). Using structural equation modeling, we found that advanced maturity, as defined by subjective age and pubertal status, was related to both drunkenness and intercourse. These indicators of advanced maturity were also linked to each other. Moreover, problem behaviors seemed to predict one another over time ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 15.27$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p < .05$ ; RMSEA = .06; CFI = .99). Similar patterns were found when using high-risk indicators of problem behaviors in the model ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 21.33$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA = .07; CFI = .98). The difference was that pubertal status, in this case, was not predictive of engaging in one-night stands, and was only marginally linked to risky drinking behaviors. Even in the case of the high-risk behaviors, however, engaging in one high-risk behavior seemed to lead to engaging in the other, and the other way around. Our questions were then directed to whether, and how, these links might be moderated by shyness. That is, could shyness serve as a protective factor on the links between advanced maturity and problem behaviors?

As a second step, we examined the possible moderating effects of shyness, as well as gender, on the link between advanced maturity and problem behaviors. After dividing the shyness variable by the median (the lower 50% were non-shy, the top 50% shy), and further dividing it by gender, we thus compared four groups: non-shy girls, shy girls, non-shy boys and shy boys (see Figure 2, Study II). We conducted multiple group differences in MPlus to ascertain whether these groups differed on the different links in the model described previously. Shyness was protective for girls on the link between subjective age and having intercourse. Advanced pubertal status at Time 1 was predictive of drunkenness for non-shy boys, whereas this link was not significant for the three other groups. Shyness was also protective on the link between drunkenness at Time 1 and intercourse at Time 2, in this case only for boys. In the second set of analyses using risky drinking and one-night stands as indicators of high-risk behaviors, shyness was mostly a protective factor for boys, and non-shy boys seemed to be in the danger zone regarding most of the links (see Figure 3, Study II). The link between pubertal status and subjective age at Time 1 and one-night

stands, as well as the link between pubertal status and risky drinking was moderated by shyness for boys. Time 1 risky drinking was also a significant predictor of increase in having one-night stands at Time 2 for non-shy and shy boys, although the link was the strongest for non-shy boys. In addition, having one-night stands at Time 1 was also a significant predictor of risky drinking at Time 2 for non-shy boys, and shyness was thus protective for boys. Thus, it seems that shyness as a protective characteristic plays a more central role in the relation between advanced maturity and high-risk behaviors for boys.

In the third and final step, we wondered whether taking into consideration youths romantic involvement might in some way alter or diminish the effects of shyness and gender on the association between advanced maturity and problem behaviors. That is, if youths are of an advanced age, and are romantically involved, this might serve as a gateway into social networks where drinking and having sex might be more normative, or even expected, of youths. Thus, the protective effects of shyness might be diminished. To test this idea, we conducted the same models as described previously, only we also included romantic involvement as control at Time 1 (see Figure 4, Study II). As one would expect, romantic involvement was in itself a strong predictor of both problem behaviors, as well as high-risk behaviors. Overall, however, the results did not support the idea that controlling for romantic involvement would diminish the protective role of shyness. On the contrary, the results in the conducted models showed very similar patterns to those found previously. For problem behaviors, shyness was still protective regarding similar links for both boys and girls. And for high-risk behaviors, like previously, shyness was mainly protective for boys (see Figure 5, Study II). In sum then, the findings from Study II supported moderating effects of shyness on the link between advanced maturity and various problematic behaviors, although the findings generally varied for boys and girls. The patterns of results were overall quite similar to those with problem behaviors, even after controlling for adolescents' romantic involvement. We concluded that shyness, in combination with gender, was indeed a protective factor for problem behaviors in early adolescence regardless of subjective age, pubertal status, or participant's romantic involvement.

It seems then, that shyness as a characteristic might be protective against problem behaviors. Hence, shyness might serve as a buffer against being socialized into typical youth problem behaviors during early adolescence, which potentially might lead to more problems later on in life. What is not so well-known, however, is how shyness in itself might be socialized by friends and peers. What are important characteristics of friends that shy youths choose? And might their shyness influence these friendships in some way? These and additional questions were attended to in Study III.

### **Study III**

Study II investigated whether shyness might be protective for the socialization of problem behaviors in early adolescence. Study III, on the other hand, focused on the socialization of shyness itself. Peers and friends start to play an increasingly

important role in early adolescence, as youths spend less time with family and more with friends. Whether or how friends' might socialize or influence each other's shyness has, to our knowledge, not received much focus in previous research. Socialization can be the result of two types of processes, however. First, youths can select one another as friends on the basis of for example interests, behavioral characteristics, attitudes, and so forth. Several previous studies on children, and one study on adolescents, report that those with shy, socially withdrawn characteristics tend to choose similar friends. What impact choosing a shy friend might have on shy adolescents over time, however, still remains unclear. The study of socialization, however, requires ecologically valid assessments of friends. Studying classroom peers or limiting friends to reciprocated best friendships generates problems. Assessing all relevant peers in a social network, both in and out of school, and getting independent reports of shyness are crucial in order to meet such challenges. All possible friends, regardless of ages, gender, or being in *and* outside of school, should be incorporated so as to achieve the most ecologically sound way of measuring youth friendships. Finally, viewing friendships embedded in a larger network allows a better look at the whole picture. Indeed, friendships are not merely dyadic, and being a friend of a friends' friend is common. Thus, all of these factors should be taken into consideration, to be able view socialization processes in a suitable way.

As a first step, we conducted our analyses using recently developed software called SIENA (Simulation Investigation for Empirical Network Analyses; Snijders, Steglich, Schweinberger, & Huisman, 2007), which allowed for following the development of friendships in a social network of early adolescents. The advantage of SIENA is that it controls for various selection effects in friendships. In our study, we chose gender and depressive symptoms, but also being a friend of a friend (i.e., associated in a triadic relationship). We followed the development of youths' friendships three years in a row. Overall results for all adolescents in the study showed that the youths in the social network had a tendency to keep the friends they already had, as opposed to acquiring new ones. Additionally, around sixty percent of youths at each of the three time points in our network had mutual dyadic friendships. Almost forty percent of the youths had relationships that involved triads (or being a friend of a friend) at Times 1 and 2, with a slight decrease at Time 3.

As a second step, we wondered whether shyness as a characteristic might be a motivation for choosing other shy friends. As the results from this study illustrated, shy youths in our study had a tendency to select others who are shy as friends, they were selected less by others, and selected fewer friends themselves over time. That is, regarding the selection effects of shyness on friendships on the one hand, we found that shy youths nominated fewer friends, and they also had a lower tendency to be nominated as friends in the network. Hence, as would be expected, shy youths did not have as many friends as their less shy peers, and they were not as popular in the network. Finally, we found that shy youths had a tendency to choose other shy youths as friends. We also found some interesting gender effects. For example, girls had a tendency to nominate friends more than boys. Girls, however, also had a lower tendency to be nominated as friends in the network. Or, put differently, girls were more active in the network than boys, but were not as popular as boys. Boys had a tendency to nominate boys, and girls had a tendency to nominate girls as friends in

the network. Regarding the socialization effects of shyness on friendships, we found that friends tended to influence each other's shyness over time. Hence, if shy youths chose shy friends, they became more shy over time. In addition, we found the girls to be influenced more than boys by their friends' shyness. All of these aforementioned results were true over and above other selection and influence effects, such as gender, depressive symptoms, and the tendency to form triadic relationships.

Thus, as Study III showed, shyness as a behavioral characteristic can certainly affect youths' choices of friends, which in turn have shown to be socially unfavorable in terms of making them more shy over time. As we have shown thus far, being shy might alter one's social identity (Study I), might serve as a protective factor for problem behaviors (Study II), and might change the way youths function in a larger social network of people. In all of the abovementioned studies, we showed that shy behaviors could ultimately change the way youths interact with their surrounding social worlds, in both positive and negative ways. Even though early adolescents might share increasingly large parts of their social worlds with peers and friends, however, their world outside the one with friends is most likely shared with parents. How youths' shyness might impact parenting or the other way around, however, is not clearly understood. The fourth and final study addresses this issue.

## Study IV

In the previous studies, we showed that early adolescents' shyness changed their relationships with peers and friends. It is inevitable that young people share their social worlds with others, and these others will influence how they feel about themselves. Youths can, to a certain extent, choose crowds to identify with, and they can certainly select the friends they want to spend time with. They cannot, however, choose their parents. How parents' treatment might affect shyness during early adolescence is, nonetheless, not so well understood. There are several theories on how parenting might impact shyness. These theories have mostly been applied in studies examining the link between parenting and shyness in childhood. For example, research shows that mothers of shy, anxious children tend to overcontrol them and act in a cold, rejecting, manner towards their children (Dadds & Barrett, 2001; Masia & Morris, 1998; Wood et al., 2003). Not much is known about whether this association is still present in adolescence, and whether shyness, in turn, might impact parenting as well. Testing such associations, however, demands the use of longitudinal data. Study IV is among the few studies that has employed such data in order to explore bidirectional effects on the links between shyness and parenting in early adolescence.

In Study IV we tested the mutual effects between youths' shyness on the one hand, and parental overcontrol and emotional coldness on the other hand. We used longitudinal data over three subsequent years. Youths reported on shyness and three types of parenting behaviors often linked with shyness in childhood studies: feeling overly controlled by parents, parental warmth, and parental coldness-rejection (see Figure 1, Study IV). We found that youths' shyness at Time 1 predicted an increase in feeling overly controlled, lack of parental warmth, and coldness-rejection at Time 2

( $\chi^2 = 870.39$ ;  $df = 149$ ;  $p < .0001$ ; RMSEA = .07; CFI = .91). Reversely, feeling overly controlled at Time 2 predicted shyness at Time 3. We also found that shyness at Time 2 predicted an increase in lack of parental warmth at Time 3. On the other hand, lack of parental warmth at Time 1 predicted shyness at Time 2, albeit this effect was marginally significant. Overall then, there was some support for bidirectional effects between shyness and parenting across time. These pertained primarily to overcontrol and parental warmth. Regarding most of the significant paths in the model, however, youths' shyness seemed to be the driving force in their relationship with their parents. In addition, the strongest link in our model was between shyness and coldness-rejection, showing that shyness might evoke cold, rejecting responses from parents more vividly compared with overcontrol and lack of warmth. Finally, we did not find differences between girls and boys on this model ( $\chi^2_{\text{difference}} = 13.63$ ;  $df_{\text{difference}} = 14$ ;  $p > .10$ ). Thus, we concluded that the processes of shyness impacting parents' behaviors, and parents' behaviors reversely impacting parenting were not different for boys and girls. Overall then, the effects of shyness on early adolescents' social worlds might be detrimental in some ways (Study I, III, and IV), but not necessarily regarding all aspects of development (Study II). To be sure, shyness could also act as a buffer against problem behaviors during this particular phase of life.





## IV Discussion

### Findings and previous research

*“The world doesn’t understand me and I don’t understand the world, that’s why I’ve withdrawn from it”.*

Paul Cezanne, painter

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to gain a clearer knowledge about how adolescent shyness affects, and is affected by social interactions, situations, and relationships, which are in this dissertation jointly referred to as social worlds. An additional focus was the influence of shyness on adolescent emotional adjustment. In general, it has been found that shyness in early adolescence can change social worlds and impact youths’ emotional adjustment in a number of unconstructive ways. Shyness can, however, also play an important protective role in that it can shield adolescents from getting involved in problem behaviors. One of the core messages from all of the findings taken together is that shy adolescents are active agents in their own lives. They are not merely submissive partakers of what their behavioral characteristics might evoke in others around them. They try to cope with their shyness, whether or not these attempts are successful. Contrary to common belief, their shyness is an important driving force in the relationships with parents, and not the other way around. They choose their friends the way they see fit. Ultimately, shy individuals are not passive recipients of whatever the world throws at them; they interact with their social worlds in the manners they know how. Indeed, some previous research shows that shyness in itself might even be used as a strategy to avoid things that seem unpleasant, and in that way shyness might not only be a problem – but also a solution in itself (Snyder & Smith, 1986). That is not to say that shy youths are not affected by the world around them, as we also have shown. It is merely stating that being shy does not necessarily mean fulfilling the prophecy of being the nervous, friendless person in the back of the classroom with nothing to say.

This dissertation adds to the knowledge about early adolescents’ shyness and its effect on social worlds in several significant ways. Most importantly, it portrays shy youths as active agents in social relationships. First, the findings from this dissertation further clarify the link between shyness and parenting in early adolescence. Previous research has focused on childhood, showing that for example mothers of shy, anxious children tend to overcontrol them, (Hastings et al., 2005; Rubin et al., 2002; Rubin et al., 2001), and act in a cold, rejecting manner (Grüner et al., 1999; Hudson & Rapee, 2001). The findings in this dissertation demonstrate, however, that adolescent shyness might have more impact on parents’ behaviors than was previously assumed. Indeed, it was hypothesized that in adolescence, the relationships with parents might be the main driving force in maintaining or exacerbating youths’ shyness. Some evidence for bidirectional links, however, was also found, in that some aspects of parenting, such as overcontrol, also influenced youths’ shyness for the worse. The results confirm, nonetheless, that in this period in

their lives, youths' shyness is a prominent characteristic, influencing relationships with others. Whereas shy children are inevitably more under the control of their parents, early adolescents are seeking more and more independence. This dissertation, thus, adds, to the current growing view of youths being portrayed as active agents in their relationships with parents. In addition to these findings, this dissertation shows that shy youths seek out others who are shy, making them less compliant in friendships than one might think. We found that shy youths' friendship selection had a tendency to, either consciously or unconsciously, largely be based on others' socially bashful characteristics. We hypothesized that perhaps in this way, shy youths can "be themselves" and feel relaxed from the otherwise overwhelming social pressures from other, non-shy people. Thus, this dissertation points to the importance of studying shy youths over time, embedded in social networks, and taking into account both their social timidity alongside others' responses to such characteristics.

Consequently, the current dissertation goes hand in hand with contemporary theories about transactional processes in social relationships. As children are growing up, they will progressively develop and operate on a variety of short-term and long-term goals that influence their own socialization and their relationships with parents (Kuczynski, 2003; Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006). Children are, in this sense, active agents in their own socialization. Likewise, parents partake in their own socialization processes together with children (Kuczynski, 2003; Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006). Hence, instead of contributing socialization processes to specific behaviors, traits, or variables, the relationships between children and parents are transactional by nature in that they comprise mutual exchanges between parents and children across time (Kuczynski, 2003; Sameroff, 1975). Or put differently, parents affect their children and children affect their parents, and together they partake in each other's socialization and development. This same idea could most likely be applied to youths' relationships with their friends. As was shown in Study III, friends influence each other's shyness over time. They select each other on certain bases, and in doing so they will inevitably partake in one another's socialization processes. Another contribution of this dissertation is that it yields more understanding about shy youths surrounded by a larger social network of people. Even though previous studies of shy individuals' social interactions have offered insights about how they function under such conditions (Crozier, 1979; Pilkonis, 1977b), very little research has attempted to view shy youths from a bird perspective (Breidenstein-Cutspec & Goering, 1989; Goering & Breidenstein-Cutspec, 1989, 1990). Additional literature has examined the characteristics of shy individuals' friends (Schneider, 1999), with the conclusion that they tend to be shy. Former research has, nonetheless, seldom followed shy individuals over time, thus making it impossible to draw conclusions about directions of effects. For such attempts to be made paired with a social network approach, large amounts of data gathered over time are necessary. In this dissertation, we have showed that shy youths have fewer friends, they tend to select friends who also are shy, and they influence each other's shyness over time for the worse. By using a novel approach while studying social networks, this dissertation makes a unique contribution to the literature on shy youths' social worlds. Overall

then, the results from this dissertation maintain the notion about transactional influences in shy youths' social relationships.

This dissertation also expands the knowledge about the impact of shyness on adolescent adjustment. For example, shyness can impact social worlds in some beneficial ways as well. Indeed, focusing on positive and not only negative aspects of shyness is far more customary in research of the subject matter (Pilkonis & Zimbardo, 1979). This dissertation has studied problem behaviors such as alcohol use and engaging in sexual activities in early adolescence. Previous research has found that shyness can serve as a barrier (Bruch et al., 1992; Dubow et al., 2008; Ham & Hope, 2005; LaBrie et al., 2008; Park et al., 2006; Rogosch et al., 1990; Rohsenow, 1983; Tran et al., 1997), but also as incentive (Burke & Stevens, 1999; Hartman, 1986; Lewis & O'Neill, 2000; O'Hare, 1990) for drinking alcohol. In addition, studies of sexual activities have shown similar results, in that non-shy individuals were found to engage in sexual activities earlier and more frequently (Udry, Kovenock, Morris, & Van den Berg, 1995). As the results in this dissertation exemplify, shyness in early adolescence can serve as protective factor, in that it can buffer young people from problem as well as high-risk behaviors. Thus, this dissertation highlights certain positive facets of shyness that might not come across as quite so apparent when considering its role in youth adjustment.

Another key contribution regarding the impact of shyness on youth adjustment is that shy youths' attempts to cope with their social wariness might result in adopting a social identity, which, to say the least, is out of the ordinary. This finding might seem counterintuitive at first, as previous research on shyness has linked shy behaviors with clichéd interactions where shy individuals say bizarre things out of nervousness, sit on their own, have trouble looking into other people's eyes, and act socially inept in general (Pilkonis, 1977b). Shy individuals are thought of as persons that don't draw too much attention to themselves in any noteworthy way. The findings in this dissertation illuminate, nonetheless, that this might not necessarily be the case. The shy youths in our data attempted to cope with their shyness in the most colorful of ways, making themselves decidedly noticeable to others, and in that way perhaps scaring off new potential social contacts. Indeed, most of us might feel hesitant in approaching a person with an appearance so very far from the social norms; an appearance that might signal that the person wants no communication with others. Needless to say, shyness is not automatically the only driving force in this progression. Even if shyness might be very present as a characteristic, there are inevitably other things that might impact youths' choices of social identities. From the point of view that shyness is a stable characteristic or a trait, however, this dissertation shows that it will unavoidably steer individuals' social lives in certain directions.

Finally, little is known about shyness in adolescence. For the most part, studies involving shyness have employed either children or adults. In many cases, the participants have been university students. There are several theoretical reasons that make adolescents a population of interest. Adolescents go through physical changes that make them look and feel more mature (Buchanan et al., 1992). They also go through emotional and cognitive adjustment they need to deal with at the same time (Damon, 1983). In addition to these changes, adolescents' societal roles change

drastically, as people around them might expect different things compared to children; their social roles develop and relationships change, both in general (Damon, 1983) and within their family (Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995). Thus, it seems that early adolescents experience many new things. Such novel experiences of different sorts are a well-known problem for individuals who are shy (Buss, 1980). It has been suggested that it is therefore conceivably no wonder that shy youths might be specifically prone to develop social fears during this period of their lives (Zimbardo, 1977). Studies show differences regarding several aspects of emotional adjustment between childhood and adolescent shyness, where later-developing shyness seems to have more detrimental effects (Kerr, 2000). The research on shyness in adolescence, however, has been rather slim in the literature compared with childhood and adult studies.

### **Strengths and limitations**

This dissertation has certain limitations that warrant recognition. One important limitation pertains to generally over-estimating the direction of effects in the studies. All individuals are embedded in different development periods of their lives. In this dissertation, we have only followed early adolescents for a short number of years, and can thus generalize these findings to this specific phase in their lives. Accordingly, what ever happened previously in childhood, and what might result later on from the interactions we followed during early adolescence is difficult to say anything about. In addition, these youths have preceding histories of social interactions with their parents and friends. What has occurred in these interactions prior to our assessment of the youths also remains unknown. We have, nonetheless, found effects of shyness on social relationships during the period of early adolescence that are of directional, and in certain cases bidirectional nature.

In addition, we are not able to account for all kinds of social circumstances that the early adolescents in our data might have been, or still are, subjected to in their lives. All people partake in their own realities, surrounded by specific contextual factors such as the types of neighborhoods they live in, whether they have wealthy or poor parents, or what the society around them looks like and what kinds of demands it poses on individuals. Narrower social contexts are, in turn, the youths' family. Their relationships with parents, siblings, relatives, and other significant persons were not automatically taken into account in all of the studies in this dissertation, nor have we observed how these youths actually function in their everyday lives. All we have is their own narratives of their own lives, their personal statements in the form of questionnaires. Nonetheless, these personal stories might yield insight into their lives that no observation or experiment might. Accordingly, this dissertation has assessed and illustrated the impact of shyness on early adolescents social worlds in a way that provides us with new information about the trials and tribulations of being shy in a world that promotes contrasting qualities.

Regarding the individual studies in the dissertation, there are some overlapping limitations that ought to be mentioned. First, the lack of other observers' reports of shy youths' behaviors is a limitation in almost all studies. Parents, teachers, friends, and other adults might have provided useful facts on shy

youths' behaviors, and helped to avoid the issue of informant bias. Such information was, nonetheless, unavailable to us. Some scholars have argued, however, that youths' own reports of their relationships might be the most accurate, compared with other observers, because for example parents' reports often contradict youths' reports (Sessa, Avenevoli, Steinberg, & Morris, 2001). Others have argued that parental information might not even be valid for descriptions of children's behavioral characteristics (Kagan, Snidman, McManis, Woodward, & Hardway, 2002; Seifer, Sameroff, Barrett, & Krafchuk, 1994). It has also been shown that children might sometimes be better reporters of what goes on inside the family compared with their parents, as the children's own reports have been found to correlate more highly with other observer's reports of parental behaviors than the parent's own reports (Sessa et al., 2001). Thus, even though it would have been ideal to have other-observer reports on the youths in our studies, we have tried dealing with informant bias in certain ways, under the circumstances of the nature of our data. For example, we have included reciprocated friend nominations in one study. In addition, sometimes we had youths' reports available separately for parents, which might have added more information than would be available with reports on both parents simultaneously. In general, even though our data might mainly be representing youths' own perceptions of what is going on in their lives, the consistency of the findings across the studies shows that our results might indeed be taking into account genuine developmental processes in the lives of shy youths.

Finally, a limitation not dealt with in the studies overall, is the lack of distinction between childhood and adolescent shyness. As both of the samples used in the dissertation comprised early adolescents, it is difficult to know whether these youths were already shy as children, or whether their shyness started blooming as a result of self-conscious concerns that arise during late childhood and early adolescence (Bruch et al., 1986; Buss, 1980; Buss, 1986; Schmidt & Robinson, 1992), possibly intensified by the transformations that take place throughout puberty (Cheek, Carpentieri et al., 1986). As adolescent shyness has, in comparison with childhood shyness, been related to more depressive symptoms, poor self-esteem, less favorable attitudes regarding one's appearance, low life satisfaction, and less positive affect in adulthood (Kerr, 2000), then depending on when individuals became shy, the findings in this dissertation might have very different outcomes. For example, parents might not have been treating children whose shyness was initiated during middle childhood any different compared with other children. In that case, our findings might have been stronger for an early onset group. In addition, if youths were not shy as children, but became so during middle childhood or early adolescence, they might not have had issues with either peers or parents of the kind typically connected with shy behaviors. They might have had as many friends as non-shy children, thus making several of the hypotheses in the studies less valid. This limitation has largely been due to the nature of the datasets used in the dissertation. Knowing when social fears get established would be a larger endeavor, as we would need to follow individuals from early childhood until at least adolescence. Hypothetically speaking, nonetheless, temperamentally shy children might develop self-conscious shyness later on in life. Even so, not knowing when the participants

developed shyness might have had an effect on the overall findings in this dissertation.

There are, conversely, several strengths to the studies in the dissertation. First, except for Study I, longitudinal data were predominantly used. This has allowed us to study processes over time, and also assess directions of effects. The nature of the data thus permitted a closer look on the impact of shyness on friendships, problem behaviors, and parenting, as well as the other way around. Second, the data used in all studies were from community-based samples, with high participation rates. Third, we have dealt with relatively large samples in our studies, which has given us the statistical power to conduct the comparatively complex tests of data, which might not have been possible with small numbers of participants. Each study has certain limitations, respectively. Despite of these limitations, however, the dissertation provides new insights into the development of youths' shyness and its influence on their social worlds.

### **What IS shyness?**

An important issue to return to is the definition of shyness. Partially, this topic still remains a bit of a puzzle, even though I have learned a lot about shyness, what it is, and how it affects people's lives. The puzzle, however, regards the meaning of shyness. Even though I have consistently decided to stick to a definition of shyness as wariness in new social encounters, novel places, and unknown people (Asendorpf, 1991; Cheek & Buss, 1981; Cheek & Watson, 1989), and even though I fully concur with that description, there is still some confusion that remains in my mind. This puzzlement on my behalf mainly pertains to how one should approach the fact that shyness, as it has been defined in these studies, might differ from what meaning people who are not necessarily developmental psychologists might bestow the word. Or put differently, I often get concerned that some form of psychological imperialism as suggested by Harris (Harris, 1984) might in fact be at hand in my own studies. According to Harris' gloomy observation, we only measure our own idea of shyness as psychologists, but we choose to call it shyness in any case.

There are, however, some facts that I as a researcher comfort myself with. First, if shyness indeed were a completely fuzzy or vague concept, it would be difficult to identify any kinds of tendencies that regard more than a few people at once. In this dissertation, however, we have shown clear developmental processes that involve many individuals in chorus. Thus, if shyness as we define it were only present in our own heads as scientists, it would be improbable that the young people we addressed in our questionnaires would have made any true sense of the questions we asked them to tap this behavioral characteristic. We certainly would not have been able to correlate this measure with other, well-known correlates such as depression (Elovainio et al., 2004) in a way that made sense to us either. Thus, I believe that our measure was conceptually good for assessing shyness, and that it made sense to the participants in our study what we meant when asking them about their social fears. In addition, and as I have argued before, I would also like to believe that using the word shyness might make findings such as the ones in this dissertation more easily accessible to other people. The word shyness brings to mind associations in people's

minds. If Harris saw this as something unconstructive, I find that the positive sides to using the word far outweigh the negative ones. Associations are not necessarily wrong per se. Without us being able to think about shyness, we would not have been able to research it in a constructive way either. Making up a new word, as Harris suggests (Harris, 1984), does not necessarily solve the problem and make the concept suddenly clear. Instead, I suggest a further clarification of the processes linked with shyness and its related terms, and the effects these terms altogether have on people.

## Positive aspects of shyness

*“I want to resume the life of a shy person”.*

Garrison Keillor, author

In addition to being a proponent of the term shyness, I also want to lift up the fairly neglected positive sides of shyness. From what can be implied from the literature concerned with the subject, shyness is viewed as something negative. It affects behaviors, thoughts, and feelings, and can change people's everyday lives in the most unhelpful of ways. Yet, one cannot help but think whether there is any value in being shy? Could shyness be a good thing in certain situations and for some people? Scholars have argued that shyness must indeed have had some positive function throughout the human evolution, or it would have not endured as a trait for such a long time (Carducci, 1999). In fact, situational shyness might serve as means to keep us in line, and to make us think twice about things to say or do in social interactions (Carducci, 1999). This, in turn, might prevent us from embarrassing ourselves or hurting other people's feelings (Carducci, 1999). If there weren't any shyness in the human race, we would live in a world where everyone says exactly what they want to, and would not care about the consequences of their social actions (Carducci, 1999). Thus, it seems that shyness to a certain extent or in some situations might fulfill a positive function in our society by shielding us from social stigma.

In addition, some people might even view shyness as a desirable trait (Carducci, 1999; Zimbardo, 1977). Several scholars have argued that many features of shyness could be viewed as valuable (Gough & Thorne, 1986; Leary & Buckley, 2000; Schmidt & Tasker, 2000; Zimbardo, 1977). For example, shy people are often perceived as modest, self-controlled, and discreet (Leary, Bednarski, Hammon, & Duncan, 1997). They are also often perceived to be non-impulsive people, who make up good listeners (Schmidt & Tasker, 2000). Indeed, whatever other negative perceptions of shy people, they are not perceived as selfish, arrogant, or domineering (Leary et al., 1997). Shy people might be thought of as showing modest reserve, and such quiet social styles might often be associated with for example certain celebrities (Pilkonis & Zimbardo, 1979). Research shows that if shy people themselves report social fears, doubts about personal worth, and an indecisiveness in dealing with others as some of their primary facets of behaviors, then others tend to attribute less positive characteristics to shy people such as timidity and weakness (Gough & Thorne, 1986). In contrast, if shy individuals' self-descriptions of shyness are more inclined towards endurance, self-control, or moderation, then others will view

shyness in a far more positive light: as reserved, cautious, modest, and self-restrained (Gough & Thorne, 1986). In this dissertation, it was also shown that shyness might have developmental significance by protecting young people from getting involved in problem behaviors at an early age. Thus, there are positive features to shyness that are easily forgotten in the search of its less positive outcomes.

## **The developmental significance of shyness in adolescence**

*“To the timid soul, nothing is possible”.*

John Bach, actor

One of the main focal points of this dissertation has been the role of shyness in early adolescence. Adolescents have been a generally overlooked population in shyness research. Yet, there are several reasons to believe that shyness should certainly be considered at this particular stage of development. Among those, as previously discussed, is the large amount of developmental, emotional, and cognitive transitions that characterize adolescence. There are hence several ways in how previous research might not apply to adolescents. Regarding the issue of how shyness impacts adolescent adjustment, the previous childhood and adult studies cannot fully capture these processes in a proper manner. Even though both childhood and adulthood are developmental phases typified by their own problems and characteristics, neither of the two is comparable with the complexity of for example entering puberty in middle childhood and early adolescence. The sense of novelty that portrays adolescent experiences is unique in many ways. Young people are expected to do completely different things compared to children. They are to assume more responsibilities, achieve well-functioning social roles, behave as adults, and resemble other grown-ups in terms of for example following societal norms or expectations. Conversely however, compared with adults, adolescents are still allowed a great deal of freedom in the way they behave, in anticipations from others, and other facets of maturity. Indeed, recent research shows a delayed sense of adolescence in today's modern society, termed as *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2004, 2007). Young people are nowadays allowed to remain and act as adolescents for a great deal longer period of time, throughout their twenties, compared with earlier generations (Arnett, 2004, 2007). Thus, not only can we not fully compare adolescents with children or adults, the youth's roles as young people have also been altered and are constantly modified in the ever-changing society. Adolescents are thus a distinct group, with specific features that need to be taken into consideration when studying social fears.



## Future directions

*“Powdermilk biscuits: Heavens, they’re tasty and expeditious! They’re made from whole wheat, to give shy persons the strength to get up and do what needs to be done.”*

Garrison Keillor, author

Even though some new aspects of adolescent shyness have been highlighted in this dissertation, some salient topics have been raised. For example, measuring shyness can be done in numerous ways. In addition, there are several diverse concepts related to shyness in some way or another, as was illustrated in the introduction of this dissertation. Revising the literature and getting a clear picture of the current knowledge about shyness becomes a challenge once one includes research using several of the additional terms related to and overlapping with that of shyness, which in turn can affect the attempts to understand the processes of interest. The question is how different definitions of shy, reticent behaviors might affect the conclusions gained from the research results. Even though many of the terms or definitions of socially fearful behaviors are associated and have common characteristics on a conceptual level, little is understood about how research participants’ understanding of the different types of questions in questionnaires and interviews referring to diverse correlates of shyness influence the findings. That is, will using a shyness scale compared to a social anxiety scale yield different results, even though the two are essentially similar? Cross-validating several measures of shy, socially inhibited behaviors in one and the same study might in future research be one solution to this pending matter.

Another essential issue to understand is other mechanisms that might be at hand in the link between adolescent shyness and emotional adjustment. Primarily, it would be of interest to achieve a clearer insight about how this link is affected by different social and cultural contexts. On the one hand, socially fearful behaviors might be perceived differently in dissimilar social contexts and thus have various consequences for individuals. Shy youths who grow up in other cultures than the Western ones might be more appreciated as individuals due to their seemingly timid behaviors. The question is then in which, if any ways, socially fearful behaviors might be detrimental for emotional adjustment in those cultures. Youths living in the Western societies might be more subjected to unconstructive aspects of shyness because their surrounding environment stigmatizes reticent behaviors. In that case, instead of changing the shy individuals to fit in into the more accepted patterns of social behaviors, perhaps we should strive for change on societal level by advocating higher collective tolerance regarding all kinds of unwelcome intricate behavioral characteristics that are inexorably part of the variety of the human existence. Perhaps future research might consider strategies of changing the attitudes towards shy individuals in those who are not shy or socially fearful.

An additional important topic regards adolescent shyness and the bidirectional nature of the behaviors we have measured in this dissertation. Taking the example of parents, it is commonly believed that they play the main part in how their children turn out. In addition, parents have been thought to assert greater

influence on their children when these are younger, as small children are commonly under more parental control than adolescents are. As was demonstrated in this dissertation, however, youths' characteristics seemed to have more overall influence on their interactions with parents and peers alike. Even though peers, friends, and romantic partners start to enter the social worlds of early adolescents in a more significant manner than before, however, this dissertation shows that parents' behaviors consequently still have some effect over their children's behavioral characteristics. Nonetheless, in order to ascertain just how significant this influence is over time, a longer time period than yearly measurement over the course of three years in adolescents' lives is to be preferred. As actions and reactions of all kinds of active agents in social relationships change, capturing youths once per year does not necessarily do these processes justice. Instead, future research might focus on obtaining information about shy individuals more accurately by increasing the number of measurement points and measuring these behaviors and feelings more often.

Finally, a matter worth notice for future research is distinguishing between participants' early or late onset of shyness. Having grown up with being shy from very early childhood, versus developing shyness during middle childhood or early adolescence almost certainly has different consequences for individuals. It is tempting to think that shy children who have likely grown up with fewer friends, worse social relationships, and a social status as the "shy kid", would be worse off in the long run. Nonetheless, research does show that shyness developed during early adolescence has far worse consequences in adulthood than childhood shyness (Kerr, 2000). Besides from a few studies on the subject, not much research attention has been given to this issue, even though it seems of great importance for our understanding of social fears. Indeed, if childhood shyness does not affect so many adult outcomes, should it be a source of concern at all? What are the differences between how individuals with early- versus late-developing shyness deal with parents, peers, romantic relationships – in short, their social worlds? Are there any, and if there are – what are their consequences for these individuals lives? And how likely is it that shy children might build up self-conscious concerns, similar to those developed by individuals with late onset shyness? These questions, among other related ones, remain more or less unexplored for the time being, and should be given more consideration in future research ventures.

### **What should be done about shyness?**

What advice then could be given to concerned parents, teachers, and significant people in shy youths' lives, who worry that the youths' social fears might be detrimental for future development? What recommendations might be made to shy individuals themselves for improving their current conditions? First, there is help to be had if one needs it. There are as many different therapies attempting to help problematic shyness as there are therapists, with several types of therapies more known than others. Second, there are many things one can do by oneself. Googling the words *shyness* and *book* results in 1,350,000 hits on the Internet. Many books offer different types of coping strategies for shy individuals to improve various

aspects of their personalities. In addition, countless online self-help sites give advice to painfully shy individuals. Most importantly, however, shyness should be “treated” if the individuals themselves perceive it as a problem. That is, if the negative sides of shyness far outweigh any positive ones, and if the individuals themselves perceive these to be troublesome and of consequence for their own lives, then shy individuals should probably be facilitated in some way or another, regardless of which way they prefer to receive assistance.

In his book *Shyness: How Normal Behavior Became a Sickness*, Christopher Lane paints a dismal picture of how social anxiety disorder came to be a disorder in the first place (Lane, 2007). According to Lane, the socially awkward behaviors attributed to shyness were historically acknowledged and accepted in earlier times. These behaviors became a problem, however, when a group of psychiatrists in the US decided to revise the first version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Lane, 2007). According to these scholars, social anxiety became nothing more than an imbalance of chemicals in the brain, which could conveniently be aided by medicines. The pharmaceutical industry, Lane claims, thrived from this, and millions of Americans were given pills because they were told that their anxiety and their social fears were in fact a disease (Lane, 2007). On a similar note, other scholars have shown concern about drug therapies of shyness, advising parents and educators not to rush and treat normal personality characteristics in children (Schmidt & Schulkin, 1999). Indeed, despite devoting an entire book to negative outcomes of shyness, the authors claim that they in no way want to “pathologize” shy children – they want to celebrate and not eliminate personality differences (Schmidt & Schulkin, 1999). In this dissertation, I have arrived at the same conclusion. Generally speaking, our society places high demands on striving for uniformity. There are everything from beauty ideals to social ideals that youths feel they need to live up to, in one way or another. Understandably, however, shyness should not be seen as merely adding to societal variation if those suffering from it undeniably perceive it as something negative in their lives. If the shy individuals themselves do not “suffer” from their predisposition, however, their shyness should preferably be accepted as a behavioral characteristic that adds to the variety of the human reality.

Should parents worry at all, then? Whether one believes that shyness is a nuisance or not, it might appear evident to parents that their children feel bad about themselves in some way. Indeed, most parents try hard to create the best possibilities for their children to develop and grow into healthy, happy human beings, who have confidence in their abilities and can live up to their fullest potentials. In this sense, having an overly shy child might be worrisome for many parents. The question is then what advice we should give troubled parents. There are certain things that parents could think about, both regarding their own reactions to their shy children, but also about what kinds of behaviors they might value and promote in children. Recent research on how mothers react to their shy children attempts to answer this question with a simple message: “*Don’t fret, be supportive!*” (Coplan, Arbeau, & Armer, 2008). The study showed that parents of shy children who were warm and supportive, for example, helped reduce children’s risk of psychosocial maladjustment linked with shyness during kindergarten years. Even though this research was

conducted on small children, nonetheless, it does not mean that the same idea would not be pertinent during adolescence as well. Parents' warm and supportive behaviors will not make youths less shy, but they seem to make things better by providing a secure base for those who tend to feel insecure in unfamiliar social contexts. In addition, and as research from this dissertation shows, parents might try to refrain from behaviors that signal coldness or rejection towards their shy children. Instead of losing too much sleep over their children's social inabilities or trying to control them so as to help them be less shy, maybe encouraging them to see the more positive sides of shyness might increase their confidence and even help them to dare taking the crucial social leaps that are essential for personal and emotional development.

### Closing remarks

*“Would anyone dare to say to a woman or a Third World person, “Oh, don’t be a woman! Oh, don’t be so Third! And yet people make bold with us whenever they please and put an arm around us and tell us not to be shy.”*

Garrison Keillor, author

As persons living in the Western world today, we face many demands and requirements in order to fit in. We should be confident, wear our hearts on our sleeves, have many friends, be involved in romantic relationships, and be successful in our social lives. Even though this is a very stereotypical, perhaps even cynical view of the modern Western society, this dismal stance is most probably not that far from the truth. People who lack social skills, show seemingly timid, reticent behaviors, blush all over when being spoken to or appear as though they have nothing interesting to say do not fit into this picture. What is worse, others' might even assume that these behaviors are something that the person should but cannot change; they could be deemed as personal inadequacies or proof of meagerness. Historically seen, it might indeed have been more accepted to be socially fearful. As the English poet William Wordsworth put it about 150 years ago, *“The flower that smells the sweetest is shy and lowly.”* Such views of behaviors, however, might seem old-fashioned, or outdated these days. But are they? Might it be something wrong with the judgment passed on shy individuals, instead of the shy individuals' social fears? In this dissertation, we did find many detrimental outcomes related to shy behaviors. But we also found that these behaviors are not isolated events; they are preceded and followed by reactions and further actions in communication between shy youths and friends, peers, and parents. Shy youths in this dissertation took active part in their social worlds, even though they might seem passive in terms of character to those who do not know or understand them. Though there are no simple truths nor answers regarding how we should view shyness, one thing is for certain: shy characteristics and behaviors have always been part of humankind, and they are here to stay. It is perhaps up to us as self-proclaimed non-shy or not-so-shy individuals to deal with such presumed social “inadequacies” of others around us. When we come across people who seem not to want to take part in everything that is going on, are not good at cracking jokes, seem distant, reticent, or socially awkward – perhaps our bewilderment about such behaviors says something more about

ourselves than about the object of our frustration. Perhaps we are too quick to judge  
– at first blush.



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