

Shyness, Parenting and Parent-Child Relationships

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INTRODUCTION

The mother and her daughter were seated on the floor, looking at a set of dolls and toys set before them. The experimenter had just set up a situation in which the mother and daughter arrived late at daycare to find three other children playing while the teacher looked on. The experimenter looked at them and said “Now you finish the story. What happens next?”

In response, the 2 ½ year-old girl happily moved ‘her doll’ toward the other doll ‘children’. She took the ball from the other ‘children’ and showed her mother how she could kick it. Her mother said “You can kick it to the other kids,” and the girl did. As she continued to play with the dolls, her mother said: “Okay, it’s time for Mommy to go to work.” “No!” the girl said, her eyes wide. She took the ‘mother’ doll and moved it further into the room, beside her own doll. “No, you stay,” the girl asserted, and then resumed her play with the ball. The mother turned to the experimenter with a surprised expression and said “Well, I guess I know what to expect in September when she starts daycare!”

Three months later, the girl was visited at daycare, and she was observed to be calm and happy, sometimes playing with her classmates and sometimes coloring on her own. According to her teacher, this was a normal day for this sociable little girl.

This anecdote was taken from one family that participated in one of our studies of young children’s early social and emotional development. Most children are socially competent and comfortable with engaging in mutually pleasing interactions with their peers, like this little girl. Some children are not. An expression of distress at the prospect of being separated from their parents can foretell such children’s difficulty with social activities, their reluctance to play, and their tendency to withdraw from others – although this was not the case with this girl. There has been a great deal of interest in understanding why some children are shy whereas others are sociable, even though they

might show some early “warning signs” for shyness. In this chapter, we consider the evidence that parents play a substantial role in shaping their children’s development of shyness and social withdrawal.

RELEVANT THEORY

In paraphrasing an old African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child,” Hilary Clinton (1996) emphasized that children are socialized not only by parents and families, but also by their surrounding community and culture. In doing so, she echoed the tenets of Bronfenbrenner’s (2006) bioecological model of development. A child’s direct interactions with parents and other people in day-to-day life form a social microsystem, which is embedded within ever broader social structures such as neighborhoods and schools (mesosystem), community resources (exosystem), and cultural practices and values (macrosystem). Connections between and across these systems unfold over time (chronosystem), shaping the child’s immediate behavior and longer-term development. Until later childhood or adolescence, however, children have less direct contact with the broader, external systems than with the microsystem, and therefore many of these broader systems’ influences are filtered through the child’s day-to-day social partners. Thus, the stresses and strengths of neighborhoods, communities and cultures principally have indirect effects on young children, via their effects upon parents. Children’s parents are their first and most enduring social partners, and for most children, parents have the greatest responsibility and opportunity to contribute to the course of their development.

This is not to disregard the active roles of children themselves in their own development. The individual temperaments of children, their innate behavioral and emotional tendencies, make them more or less prone to shyness, or a consistent and persistent tendency to avoid or withdraw from others in social situations (e.g., Degnan & Fox, 2007; Fox, Henderson, Marshall, Nichols, & Ghera, 2005). Children’s characteristics also serve as stimuli that elicit parental responses and create

opportunities for socialization (e.g., Rubin, Nelson, Hastings, & Asendorpf, 1999). Thus, as well as being influenced by parents, children influence their parents' child-rearing behaviors, in accord with bidirectional (Bell, 1979) and transactional (Sameroff, 1975) perspectives on socialization. A child and a parent are continuously acting and reacting to each other, creating a dynamic and developing relationship that can be regarded as the context of socialization (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007). These transactional processes are nested within the history of the parent-child relationship; parents and children perceive, interpret, respond to and learn from each other's actions based on their past shared experiences and their future expectations.

PARENTING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SHYNESS

Socialization researchers have approached the study of parenting from myriad perspectives, each of which has informed our understanding of the links between parenting and children's shyness. More than 40 years ago, Schaeffer (1959) and Becker (1964) identified parental psychological control, reflected in such practices as manipulating the parent-child emotional bond (e.g., love withdrawal) and anxious over-intrusiveness, as likely to undermine children's development of autonomy. Psychological control was somewhat neglected by parenting researchers for almost 30 years, however, before renewed interest began to confirm its role in children's risk for shyness (e.g., Barber et al., 1994; Rubin & Mills, 1998). Rather, the majority of socialization research in the latter quarter of the 20th century used the framework of broad parenting styles, and particularly Baumrind's (1971) conceptualization of authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful parenting (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). This approach identified authoritarian parenting, or a pattern of rigid, punitive, or harsh restrictive control, as likely to lead to withdrawal and shyness in children – along with a host of other emotional and behavioral problems. Simultaneously, attachment researchers examined young children's sense of security within the parent-child relationship as the foundation for their confident engagement with the social world (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Failing to establish a secure

working relationship with the primary care-giver was expected to set a child on a path toward social difficulties. These three lines of research – attachment, parenting styles, and psychological control – continue to dominate the study of the socialization of shyness.

In addition, researchers have recently begun to consider how a range of more specific parenting behaviors might contribute to children’s development of shyness and related problems (e.g., Bayer et al., 2006; McLeod et al., 2007). In accord with risk and protective models that characterize developmental psychopathology (Cummings, Davies, & Campbell, 2000), these studies are focused not only on maladaptive parenting, but also include consideration of such positive parenting practices as warmth and induction that might diminish children’s shyness and promote social competence. Studying specific parenting practices can complement the other lines of research by identifying which particular components of, for example, authoritarian styles are most closely linked to children’s risk of developing shyness, rather than other adjustment problems. Knowing what aspects of parenting “matter most” for shyness, in turn, can help to inform the design of targeted prevention and intervention efforts to address maladaptive parenting.

We now consider the literature on the links between children’s shyness and parenting styles, attachment relationships, psychological control, and other parenting behaviors. This review is organized developmentally, from infancy through adolescence. It should be recognized that the vast majority of research on parental socialization of shyness has involved mothers but not fathers; thus, less is known about the possible contributions of paternal socialization to the development of shyness. We consider the limited research on fathers after reviewing the more substantive literature on mothers’ parenting.

Infancy and toddlerhood (0-24 mo)

The earliest roots of shyness and social withdrawal lie in infants’ temperamental reactivity, the sensitivity and appropriateness of maternal care, and the formation of the mother-infant attachment

relationship. Young infants who show strongly negative emotional reactions are likely to develop inhibited temperaments, showing wariness to novelty and withdrawal from unfamiliar people (Degnan & Fox, 2007). Caring for these infants is demanding for parents, and some mothers of reactive and inhibited infants can have difficulty being sensitive, responsive and appropriately supportive of their infants' needs (Kiang, Moreno, & Robinson, 2004). This combination of temperamental vulnerability and maternal insensitivity increases the likelihood that infants will fail to establish a secure attachment (Bowlby, 1980). Securely attached infants appear capable of using their mothers as a trustworthy source of support and assurance, such that they can leave the mothers' immediate proximity to explore their surroundings with a sense of safety. Infants who form an insecure attachment relationship do not benefit from these competencies, and it has been suggested that temperamentally inhibited infants with insensitive mothers may be particularly likely to form an ambivalent ("C") attachment (Booth-LaForce & Oxford, 2008). Ambivalently attached infants do not seem able to cope with new challenges or social situations and thus, fearing failure or rejection, they withdraw from interactions.

Several studies have provided support for this model. Insecurely attached infants, and particularly infants with ambivalent attachments, are more likely to be fearful and inhibited toddlers (Fox & Calkins, 1992; Kochanska, 1998; Matas, Arend, & Sroufe, 1978; Spangler & Schieche, 1998) and to be withdrawn or lacking confidence in the preschool and school-age years (Erickson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 1985; Renken, Egeland, Marvinney, Sroufe, & Mangelsdorf, 1989). Recently, Booth-LaForce and Oxford (2008) demonstrated that children with less secure attachment at 24 months were described by teachers as more shy throughout the elementary school-age period. Clearly, children's early attachment relationships are important foundations for their later social development. This does not imply that children's social proclivities have been set in stone by 24 months, regardless of subsequent parental socialization experiences. In fact, Booth-LaForce and

Oxford (2008) showed that early attachment did not directly predict later shyness when maternal parenting in the preschool years was taken into account. Thus, children's social tendencies continue to be malleable and subject to influence by maternal socialization.

Psychological control is particularly linked to young children's propensity for shyness and social withdrawal. Rubin, Hastings, et al. (1997) identified a pattern of over-protective control, or oversolicitous parenting, that includes intrusive and unnecessary micromanagement of a child's independent activities, and strong affection in the absence of child distress or need for comforting. This pattern of parenting undermines the young child's autonomy by denying opportunities to practice coping with developmentally normative challenges and by communicating that the child is incapable of handling tasks without parental assistance. More oversolicitous mothers had 24 month-old children who were more withdrawn from an unfamiliar peer and inhibited with an unfamiliar adult (Rubin et al., 1997). This was particularly true of toddlers who were highly temperamentally fearful, indicating that vulnerable children might be more prone to the adverse effects of inappropriate maternal socialization. Recently, Bayer and colleagues (2006) replicated the association between mothers' over-protective control and toddlers' anxious difficulties, including withdrawal from unfamiliar peers.

Mothers' psychological control also contributes to toddlers' later development of shyness. Rubin, Burgess, and Hastings (2002) found that withdrawn toddlers with highly oversolicitous mothers were likely to still be reticent with unfamiliar peers two years hence, but withdrawn toddlers with less solicitous mothers were not. Similarly, Bayer and colleagues (2006) found that mothers who were over-protective of toddlers had children with more anxiety-related problems two years later. In addition, Rubin and colleagues (2002) noted parallel relations for a second feature of psychological control, derisive or over-critical parenting. Parents who are derogatory and rejecting threaten their children's confidence in the parent-child relationship, eroding children's self-worth

and trust in others (Barber & Harmon, 2002). Withdrawn toddlers with derisive mothers were likely to become reticent preschoolers, but withdrawn toddlers with mothers who did not express derision were not likely to maintain reticent behaviors (Rubin et al., 2002). Thus, emotionally manipulative overcontrol, whether effusively affectionate or chillingly negative, appears to keep toddlers on stable trajectories toward shyness and withdrawal.

One group of researchers has reported that mothers who were more intrusive during interactions with their 18 month-old boys at home had sons who were less inhibited during laboratory tasks when they were 3 years old, especially if boys had shown high negative emotionality in infancy (Park, Belsky, Putnam, & Crnic, 1997). On first glance, this might appear to contradict the previously-described studies of psychological control. However, their conceptualization of “intrusive parenting” reflected mothers making their infant sons engage in activities that appeared to be counter to the boys’ wishes, which is rather the opposite of placing limits on children’s activities (which is characteristic of over-protective control). Emotionally reactive children might show some distress from being made to handle normative events which they would rather not, but when mothers provide these experiences they might promote their children’s ability to cope with such everyday challenges.

It is fortunate that research has not only identified ‘poor parenting’ that increases children’s risk for the development of shyness. Importantly, we know that there are also maternal actions that might protect young children from following trajectories toward shyness. For example, mothers’ sensitivity to infants’ cues diminished the likelihood that highly wary infants would be nervous and withdrawn in kindergarten (Early et al., 2002). Similarly, mothers who were engaged with their toddlers, appropriately structuring activities and showing warmth through praise and positive affect, had children who displayed fewer anxiety-related problems as preschoolers (Bayer et al., 2006).

These positive features of mothers' care for infants and toddlers appear to set the stage for young children's progression toward the development of greater social competence.

Preschool (2 – 5 yr)

The research on the associations between maternal socialization and shyness in the preschool period is largely consistent with the pattern just described in infancy. More shy, withdrawn and inhibited preschoolers have more overprotective mothers (e.g., McShane & Hastings, in press), less authoritative mothers (e.g., Coplan, Findlay, & Nelson, 2004), or mothers who are less sensitive, supportive and encouraging of autonomous activities (e.g., Dumas, LaFreniere, & Serketich, 1995), and the children and mothers are less likely to have secure attachment relationships (LaFreniere, Provost, & Dubeau, 1992; Shamir-Essakow et al., 2005). Studies have also indicated the contexts in which inappropriate maternal parenting has greater influence on children's shyness, how various child vulnerabilities make children more susceptible to maternal influence, and that socialization in preschool continues to shape children's social behavior in later years.

One aspect of over-protective or oversolicitous parenting that has confounded some socialization researchers is that it appears to contain elements of "good" parenting. Are not parents *supposed* to be highly involved and affectionate with their young children? Alas, mothers who are *too* contingent (Malatesta, Culver, Tesman, & Shepard, 1989) or *too* comforting (Denham, 1993) can undermine children's social-emotional competence. Thomasgard and Metz (1993) proposed that one of the features distinguishing normative and appropriate parental protection from maladaptive overprotection was the extent to which the situation or context of parent-child interaction warranted high levels of parental direction and affection. Rubin, Cheah, and Fox (2001) examined mothers' patterns of being physically close, warm and controlling with their 4 year-old children in two contexts, free play and a structured teaching task that was quite difficult for children. Interestingly, mothers were not consistent in their displays of such 'solicitous' behaviors across contexts. Mothers

who were more solicitous during free play – when children could be expected to be calm and not needing such actions – had preschoolers who were more reticent during interactions with peers. Conversely, mothers who used more of these same behaviors during the teaching task – when children might be challenged and distressed – had preschoolers who were less reticent, especially if children had relatively weak emotional self-regulation and thus greater need for maternal involvement during stressful tasks. Thus, the demands of a situation and the child's needs in that situation appear to define whether a given maternal response will be effective or detrimental for supporting a child's competent behavior and positive development.

Preschoolers' capacities for self-regulation of emotional arousal appear to affect the extent to which they might be influenced by parental socialization (Hastings & De, 2008). Well-regulated children respond to challenging social situations more appropriately and calmly, such that are more likely to cope competently even without the benefit of effective socialization. Conversely, children who are relatively poor at self-regulation are more dependent upon external sources of support for effective regulation, such as appropriately supportive parenting, in order to develop comparable levels of positive functioning. They are also more susceptible to the adverse effects of psychological control, placing them at greater risk for shyness and withdrawal. Hastings, Sullivan and colleagues (2008) examined this proposal using children's cardiac vagal tone as an indicator of their physiological capacity for self-regulation through parasympathetic control of autonomic arousal. Children with lower vagal tone (less parasympathetic self-regulation) were more reticent with peers only if they had more overprotective mothers. Further, maternal socialization might even affect preschoolers' physiological capacity for self-regulation. Mothers who were more negative, critical and restrictive had preschoolers who manifested lower vagal tone during play interactions with unfamiliar children (Hastings, Nuselovici et al., 2008), suggesting they responded to the situation as a

threat rather than an opportunity for social engagement. This state of under-regulated arousal could motivate children to withdraw from peers.

The adverse affects of mothers' psychological control of preschoolers also continue over time, contributing to children's shyness in the elementary school period. Paralleling what has been found over the transition from toddler to preschool-age (Rubin et al., 2002), it has also been reported that socially withdrawn preschoolers with more oversolicitous mothers are, three years later, likely to be more shy and withdrawn, compared to children with less solicitous mothers (Degnan, Henderson, Fox, & Rubin, 2008). Examining the links between parenting of preschoolers and social withdrawal in grades 1 to 6, Booth-LaForce and Oxford (2008) found that mothers who were more supportive and respectful of preschoolers' autonomy, and expressed less hostility, had children who were the least socially withdrawn throughout the elementary school years. Conversely, children who were highly withdrawn during the elementary school years were more likely to have experienced maternal parenting in preschool that was hostile, unsupportive, and discouraged autonomy. These children were also more likely to be unpopular, excluded from peer activities, and lonely (Booth-LaForce & Oxford, 2008). Clearly, inappropriate maternal socialization in the preschool period can set the stage for lasting social difficulties and distress.

Childhood (6 – 10 yr)

Compared to the literature on younger children, there have been fewer studies of the links between shyness and parental socialization during childhood and beyond. Of course, as children proceed through elementary school and toward adolescence, other agents of socialization become increasingly involved in their lives. Children spend more time at school and in extracurricular activities that do not include parents. Peers and friends, teachers, and non-familial adults (e.g., coaches) all help to shape children's ongoing development. However, parents do not stop their

involvement in their children's lives, and parental socialization continues to make important contributions to social and emotional functioning as children age.

Maternal parenting in childhood can affect the stability of children's earlier shy characteristics. Shyness and reticence in preschoolers was found to predict social withdrawal at 7 years only if children's mothers were more negatively controlling and showed less positive affect during their interactions with their school-age children (Hane, Cheah, Rubin, & Fox, 2008). Control, warmth and responsiveness are also concurrently associated with children's shyness. Compared to mothers of sociable children, mothers of highly withdrawn children use more strong imperatives and are less likely to respond to children's bids during interactions involving another child (Mills & Rubin, 1998). Similarly, mothers who issue more directives and are less warm when discussing solutions to hypothetical social problems have children who are lonely, and described by peers as sad, alone and disliked, both concurrently and one year later (McDowell, Parke, & Wang, 2003). The quality of family relationships also continues to be important, as ambivalent attachment continues to be particularly characteristic of socially anxious children (Brumariu & Kerns, 2008), and socially withdrawn children's perceptions of their families as negative and emotionally distant increases their risk for depression (Gullone, Ollendick, & King, 2006).

Considering these studies, it would appear that the parenting experiences of shy and withdrawn children have changed by school-age. There is less evidence that shy children continue to experience overly affectionate parenting, or intrusive control coupled with very high warmth. Rather than being oversolicitous, the mothers of shy school-age children appear to behave in a more "classically authoritarian" style, continuing to be very controlling but showing less warmth or positive affect toward their children. It might be the case that, as children reach an age when most parents would expect more autonomy and competence, mothers of shy children become less

accepting or patient with the continued neediness or distress of their children. This is a theme we will return to when we examine the belief systems of parents of shy children.

Adolescence (11 – 16 yr)

There have been very few studies in which the relations between parenting and shyness or withdrawal have been studied in adolescence. However, some insight might be gleaned from the larger body of clinical studies that have examined the parenting experiences of adolescents with anxiety problems, given that withdrawal is a symptom of social anxiety disorder. Hudson and Rapee (2001, 2002) studied children and youth with diagnosed anxiety disorders and their mothers during cognitively challenging tasks, and found that these mothers displayed more negativity and intrusive involvement than mothers of non-clinically diagnosed children. Normatively, one would expect maternal control to decrease from childhood to adolescence, as children's capacity for autonomous activity increases. This developmental difference in maternal involvement was found only for the mothers of typical children; mothers of clinically anxious 12-15 year-old adolescents were likely to be just as intrusive and over-involved as mothers of clinically anxious 7-11 year-old children (Hudson & Rapee, 2001). Furthermore, this pattern of parenting appeared to be more attributable to mothers' approach to child-rearing than to anxious children's elicitation of over-involvement, because these mothers were just as intrusive with the undiagnosed (typical) siblings of anxious children and adolescents (Hudson & Rapee, 2002). These studies support earlier retrospective studies that socially phobic adults remember their parents as overcontrolling and less affectionate than non-phobic adults (e.g., Arrindell, Emmelkamp, Monsma, & Brilman, 1983).

Among non-clinical community samples, Barber, Olsen, and Shagle (1994) found that maternal- and child-reported psychological control, incorporating overprotection, criticism and love withdrawal, was related to self-reported internalizing difficulties in 5th-, 8th-, and 10th- graders. McCabe, Clark, and Barnett (1999) reported a negative relation between maternally reported

supportive behavior and teacher-reported social withdrawal and shyness in 6th graders. More recently, van Brakel, Muris, Bogels and Thomassen (2006), found that for 11-to-15 year-olds identified as inhibited *and* insecure, parental control was significantly associated with anxiety. Finally, in a longitudinal study, Rubin and colleagues (Rubin, Chen, et al., 1995) reported that 11 year-olds who were more socially withdrawn were more likely to report feeling insecure and disconnected with parents when they were 14 years old. Thus, similar to the research with shy children and anxious adolescents, the family contexts of shy and withdrawn youth appear to involve unsupportive, negative and overcontrolling parents.

To date, there have been virtually no dedicated studies of the contributions of parenting in childhood to the development of shyness and withdrawal from childhood into adolescence. In a recent study of the transition from elementary-to-middle school, Kennedy Root and Rubin (2009) hypothesized that the stability of children's shyness from elementary school to middle school (early adolescence) would be moderated by children's experiences of intrusive or enmeshed parenting. Peers in the two school contexts reported on children's behaviors, and indeed, the stability of shyness was highest for children whose mothers were the most intrusive or enmeshed – and also for those children whose mothers were the most punitive. Clearly, these findings are consistent with previous research (e.g., Hane et al., 2008), and support the conclusion that a continued pattern of intrusively over-involved, restrictive and negative parenting maintains or exacerbates the stability of shy and withdrawn behavior through childhood and into adolescence.

Fathering and children's shyness and social withdrawal

Although there have been far fewer investigations of paternal socialization, a small number of studies provide some insight into the associations between fathers' parenting and the development of children's shyness. Although some researchers have reported that paternal attachment and parenting are not associated with children's shyness (LaFreniere, Provost, & Dubeau, 1992), more

have documented support for the potential importance of fathers' contributions to children's shyness. In general, the pattern of associations is consistent with those noted for maternal socialization.

As they reported for mothers, Park and colleagues (1997) found that fathers who were less supportive, less affectionate, more negative and more intrusive with their 18 and 30 month-old sons had boys who were less inhibited at 3 years, especially if the boys had been emotionally negative infants. This study stands in stark contrast to most research, but as the investigators acknowledged, this might have been due to the nature of their observational and coding procedures. What was characterized as being unresponsive and demanding might have "actually reflected a parent's sensitive awareness that a child was inhibited, which motivated the parent to 'push' or otherwise encourage the child to master his anxieties" (p. 225).

In early childhood, McShane and Hastings (in press) found that fathers who were more critical and less supportive had children who were more anxious and isolated at preschool. The benefits of fathers' supportive parenting and the risks of fathers' psychological control for young children's reticent behavior were strongest for children with poor self-regulatory abilities (Hastings, Sullivan et al., 2008). In both of these examinations, fathers' parenting added incrementally to the prediction of children's behavior, after accounting for maternal socialization. Thus, children's experiences of paternal socialization appear to be important for their development of shyness and social withdrawal.

With school-age children, Parke and colleagues (McDowell et al., 2003; Rah & Parke, 2008) have also found that children who experience greater directive control or less responsive parenting from fathers are less liked by and involved with peers, and are less able to generate positive goals and effective strategies to resolve social dilemmas. Again, these paternal contributions were independent of any effects of maternal parenting. Finally, working with pre-adolescents, Miller and

colleagues (2005) found that boys with fathers who were less responsive and supportive during discussions were shyer at school, whereas mothers' behavior was not associated with sons' shyness.

Overall, this small set of studies indicates that children's shyness is associated with fathers' parenting in ways that are similar to its link with mothers' parenting. There is less consistent evidence for the risk entailed by fathers' oversolicitousness (McShane & Hastings, in press) than for derision and strict over-control, which might reflect differences between parents in their likelihood to shelter children (Parke & Buriel, 1998). Further, it is clear that paternal socialization is not just a "by-product" of maternal child-rearing. At least for children with both a mother and a father, fathers' parenting might be just as important as mothers' parenting for shaping children's social comfort and competence with peers (Parke, 1995). It is evident that more attention to the roles of fathers in the socialization of children's shyness is warranted.

Looking at the parents of shy children

Parent characteristics. Recognizing that research has documented consistent associations between specific patterns of parenting and children's likelihood of being shy, it is important to understand why some parents adopt the maladaptive socialization practices that put their children at risk. Some researchers have considered maternal personality and psychopathology. Mothers who are neurotic, or easily psychologically distressed, or who themselves have anxiety or affective problems, are more likely to have inhibited, shy or anxious children (Ellenbogen & Hodgins, 2004; Zahn-Waxler, Klimes-Dougan & Slattery, 2000). While there are undoubtedly genetic commonalities contributing to mother and child similarity in social wariness, the socialization behaviors of anxiety-prone mothers might also convey risk for shyness to their children. Mothers who are shy, anxious, prone to psychological distress, or neurotic have been found to be more controlling, overprotective and derisive in their parenting, and also less responsive (Bögels, van Oosten, Muris, & Smulders, 2001; Clark, Kochanska, & Ready, 2000; Coplan, Arbeau, & Armer, 2008; Mills et al., 2007),

particularly if their children are shy (Coplan, Reichel, & Rowan, 2009). The links between maternal anxiety and children's anxious difficulties have been found to be at least partly attributable to anxious mothers' greater use of overprotective parenting (Bayer et al., 2006).

Clearly, mothers with neurotic personalities or anxious tendencies appear likely to engage in socialization practices that would inculcate anxiety or shyness in their own children. There are also other direct and indirect ways in which these maternal characteristics could affect children's social and emotional development. Neurotic or anxious mothers are likely to experience and express more distress and negative affect in the context of parenting. Repeated exposure to maternal distress might undermine children's sense of security, and children might model mothers' maladaptive behaviors in their own social interactions with others. As well, anxious mothers might avoid social situations that they could find stressful, such as play-groups, sporting teams or public events, and thereby deny their children the opportunities to experience and successfully cope with group activities. Additional research will be needed to determine the extent to which such mechanisms contribute to the links between mothers' personal characteristics and children's likelihood of becoming shy.

Parental beliefs. Considerable work has also gone into examining the parental belief systems, or parenting cognitions, that can underlie socialization practices that inculcate shyness. Parental beliefs comprise the ways in which parents think and feel about their children and themselves as parents. This includes the causal explanations or attributions parents make for children's behavior, the socialization goals they have while parenting, the strategies they consider appropriate to use with children, their sense of efficacy or competency as parents, and the emotions they experience in the context of child-rearing. These dynamic belief systems contribute to how parents respond to children's behaviors during interactions, and to broader aspects of child-rearing such as the ways in which parents establish the home environment (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). They are also

contextually-bound and malleable, as parental beliefs change adaptively across child-rearing situations, and children's behaviors and characteristics contribute to parental beliefs (Hastings & Rubin, 1999).

When asked to think about their young children displaying shyness or social withdrawal, most mothers (and fathers) have reported that they would feel surprised or confused, that they would expect the behavior to be transient or a passing stage, that they would want their children to feel better, and that they would avoid being overtly controlling by using indirect responses, such as planning future play dates (Hastings & Rubin, 1999; Mills & Rubin, 1990). However, mothers of socially withdrawn preschoolers respond quite differently when asked to think about their children being shy with peers. These mothers report more negative emotions including disappointment and guilt, view the shy behavior as dispositional or characteristic of their children, and suggest becoming directly involved to change their children's immediate behavior (Rubin & Mills, 1990). These parental beliefs appear, at least in part, to be reactions to parents' experiences of raising inhibited or shy children. Indeed, more inhibited or fearful toddlers have mothers and fathers who become increasingly less encouraging of their children's independence over time (Rubin, Nelson, Hastings, & Asendorpf, 1999), and mothers who are less confused by preschoolers' shyness and more likely to become directly involved by comforting and playing (Hastings & Rubin, 1999). Thus, although their actions are likely motivated by compassion and the desire to prevent their children becoming distressed, parents appear to react to their young children's early displays of social difficulty in ways that could be expected to exacerbate, rather than ameliorate, shyness.

The picture presented above appears to change after the preschool period, however. Most parents know that social skills should improve with age, and they feel increasingly negatively about socially inappropriate behaviors from older children (Dix, 1991). Compared to mothers of socially competent elementary school-age children, mothers of withdrawn children report shyness as less

surprising (probably due to their children's dispositional characteristics), and less amenable to change through parental efforts (Mills & Rubin, 1993). When mothers of highly withdrawn preschoolers were interviewed two years later, they saw their children as responsible for their shy behavior, which they expected to remain stable over time (Rubin & Mills, 1992). These studies suggest that mothers of shy children become more resigned or pessimistic over time, and less patient with their older children's social difficulties. This might contribute to the afore-noted developmental shift in the associations of parenting with children's shyness, with the coddling oversolicitousness of preschoolers becoming replaced with critical authoritarian control of school-age and older children. Unfortunately, neither pattern of socialization would be likely to help shy children cope better with their social wariness and develop greater social confidence and competence.

Contexts of parenting: Culture and the socialization of shyness

From Bronfenbrenner's (2006) bioecological perspective, the surrounding community and culture serve as contexts of parenting and socialization. How parents of shy children think, feel and act are shaped by their cultural milieus, and parents in turn transfer those cultural messages about shyness to their children (see Chen, this volume). Although the majority of research on the socialization of shyness has been conducted in North America and Western Europe, the past decade has seen the emergence of interest in cross-cultural perspectives.

In Western culture, autonomy and assertiveness are valued, and shyness in children is considered socially immature, maladaptive and undesirable (Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993). Conversely, the traditional Confucian and Taoist philosophies of China promote self-restraint and discourage individualism or self-promotion (King & Bond, 1985), and inhibited and wary behaviors in children have been viewed as appropriate and valued (Chen, Rubin, & Sun, 1992). Research has shown this difference in cultural values to be reflected in parenting. Comparing mothers in Canada and Mainland China, Chen, Hastings, Rubin and colleagues (1998) found that Chinese mothers were

more accepting and encouraging of achievement, and less controlling, of more inhibited toddlers; Canadian mothers of inhibited toddlers were more controlling and protective, and less accepting and encouraging of achievement. Chinese mothers' more positive responses to inhibition might contribute to the more competent and socially accepted trajectories shown by shy Chinese children, compared to their Western counterparts (Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1995).

Just like people, though, cultures can change as they develop, and there has been a rapid course of 'Westernization' in contemporary Chinese society, such that shyness may now be viewed as less adaptive and beneficial. Examining the correlates of shyness in Chinese children over 12 years, Chen, Cen, Li, and He (2005) found that shyness was more strongly associated with social and academic achievement in a 1990 than in a 1998 cohort, and by 2002 shyness was associated with peer rejection, school problems and depression. Paralleling this, a more recent study of parenting and shyness in China showed that children's withdrawal, reticence and solitary behaviors were associated with mothers' coercion, directiveness, overprotection and shaming (Nelson, Hart, Wu, Yang, & Olsen, 2008).

South Korea's ties to Western cultures and values predate those of China, and research on shyness and parenting beliefs in Korea, China and North America indicate several points of convergence and divergence across the three cultures (Cheah & Rubin, 2004; Park & Cheah, 2006). Although all mothers report negative emotional responses to withdrawal, Chinese and Korean mothers are more likely than European American mothers to attribute withdrawal to external causes than are European American mothers. Conversely, both South Korean and European American mothers prioritize goals of making the child feel happy and more self-confident in response to social withdrawal, which they approach by trying to obtain the child's perspectives regarding his or her solitary behavior, whereas Chinese mothers seek to promote the child's functioning for the betterment of the peer group. These differences suggest Chinese mothers still approach parenting

from Confucian perspectives more strongly than do Korean mothers, who blend Eastern and Western values in their beliefs about shyness. These findings are augmented by a recent report by Park, Song, and Rubin (2008) who found that Korean toddlers' inhibition predicted their shyness and reticence at preschool-age when their mothers had been more overprotective, mirroring findings in Western samples (Rubin et al., 2002).

The cultural perspectives on children and family in Southern Europe differ in many ways from those of Northern Europe and North America (Rubin et al., 2006). Luck or fate is seen as a dominant force in shaping development, and strong connections with extended family are favored over ties with peers, which might account for Italian mothers reporting less strong emotional responses to children's shyness than did English-Canadian mothers, but more internal attributions (e.g., stable, hard to change) (Schneider, Attili, Vermigli, & Younger, 1997). However, it might also be the case that cultural beliefs around socialization not only vary between countries, but even between communities within a country. Sicilian parents value assertiveness and sociability (Casiglia, LoCoco, & Zappulla, 1998), and report less acceptance and more authoritarian parenting of inhibited toddlers (Rubin et al., 2006). Analogously, differences between accepting versus protective responses to children's shyness have been noted in communities in Yucatan, Mexico that differ in their attributions about the sources of problems (Cervera & Méndez, 2006).

Taken together, these findings suggest that parents' approaches to the rearing of shy children are nested within the broader cultural context that dictates whether inhibited, withdrawn and shy behaviors are seen as problematic, immature, and interfering with social success, or as acceptable and conducive toward group harmony. Culture is not static, however, and changes in the roles or characteristics that define success within a culture might lead to changes in parents' attitudes and behaviors toward shy children. Thus, cross-cultural research on socialization would benefit from the

use of longitudinal designs and inclusion of parents' identification with the dominant values of their surrounding cultures.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the empirical research on parenting and children's development of shyness mirrors the tenets of transactional, bidirectional and bioecological theories of development. Integrating the patterns of findings across studies, a developmental model of the socialization of shyness can be constructed. At least within Western cultures, it begins early in life, as emotionally-reactive, distress-prone or temperamentally inhibited infants and toddlers elicit maladaptive socialization responses from their parents, reflected in such aspects of psychological control as intrusive over-control, egregious physical affection, or derision, criticism and rejection. Parents seem particularly prone to such responses if they themselves experience heightened anxiety or emotional distress. In parallel, temperamentally vulnerable or emotionally dysregulated infants and toddlers are most sensitive to the adverse effects of poor parenting, because their relatively poor self-regulatory capacities leave them more dependent upon external sources of support, specifically parenting.

The interplay of young children's high neediness and parents' inappropriate caregiving undermines the development of secure attachment relationships, diminishing the developing toddlers' preparedness to cope autonomously with social interactions with peers and non-familial adults. Encountering other children at daycare, preschool or the playground, these children become upset and withdraw from interactions. Their parents seek to prevent future distressing events by staying close to the children and micro-managing their social activities, or even by avoiding such activities to diminish the children's contacts with unfamiliar people and situations. However, these actions rob the children of opportunities to practice and develop their social skills, reinforce the pattern of avoiding or withdrawing from interactions, and thereby lead to stable patterns of shy behavior.

As their shy children move through the elementary school-age years, parents increasingly perceive their children's reticent behavior as an immutable and enduring characteristic. They also become increasingly dissatisfied and impatient with their children's shyness, as it violates their culturally-based expectations for children's normative development of autonomy and independence, and as their children's distress also acts as a chronic stress on parents. Overt physical affection becomes replaced by negativity and authoritarian control, which maintain children's feelings of incompetence and insecurity, and thus their shyness and social isolation. Inhibited and withdrawn children with overprotective parents thereby develop into shy and reticent youth with authoritarian parents, with isolation, loneliness and depression emerging as likely adverse outcomes of this unfortunate trajectory.

The empirical evidence for this model is not yet complete, of course, and we have inferred a series of temporal and causal links that have not been fully documented. Further, in keeping with the tenets of developmental psychopathology, there are likely to be many points of departure from this stable pathway toward shyness. Sensitive, supportive and positive parenting can help vulnerable children to develop social comfort and competence. Accepting peers and close friends, and nurturing teachers and other adults, might ameliorate some of the influences of maladaptive parental socialization. The luck of the genetic draw might lead to desirable maturational changes around puberty that increase acceptance by peers and children's self-esteem. We would contend, however, that parental socialization lies at the core of the developing child's sense of self and ability to engage competently with others, as well as their receptiveness to positive influences by other socialization agents. Recognizing the critically central roles of parental socialization and parent-child relationships for children's development of shyness and social withdrawal is fundamental for understanding the challenges faced by shy children. In turn, this knowledge will be vital to efforts to design and

implement effective interventions to help shy children overcome their reticence and attain comfort and confidence in the social world.

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