



Shyness Trait Among Adolescents: Does Gender Play Some Roles?

****Ebere B. Madu**
Department of Psychology
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka

Kingsley O. Nweke,
Department of Psychology
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka

Paschal Chukwuma Ugwu,
Department of Psychology
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka
pc.ugwu@unizik.edu.ng

Chidozie E. Mabia
Department of Psychology
University of Agriculture and
Environmental Sciences
ijeefinne@gmail.com

****corresponding Author:** ebyblessing15@gmail.com

Abstract

The study examined gender differences in shyness trait manifestation among two hundred and forty (240) adolescents in Awka, Anambra State Nigeria. To deepen the understanding of the expected differences, gender specific child rearing practices in Igbo culture was reviewed. The participants consist of male 119 (49.6%) and female 121 (50.4%). Their ages ranged from 13 - 16 years with the mean age of 14 years and the standard deviation of 1.1. Participants were selected from five secondary schools. 13 item the revised Cheek and Buss shyness scale was used for data collection. The study is a cross-sectional survey and independent t-test was used to analyze the data. The result showed that there was no gender difference in adolescents' shyness at $F(1,138) = 0.34, P > .05$. The discussion focused on the need to neutralize some of the cultural expectation that creates dichotomy in gender orientation and role.

Keywords: *Gender, Culture, Shyness, Children Rearing and Differences.*

Introduction

Shyness entails the awkward behaviour manifestation in social interactions. The gauche behaviour is often accompanied with fast breathing, profuse sweating, intensely agitated,

anxious, shaky hands and voice (Manzoor, 2016; Wang et al., 2020). The symptoms alter not only the overt behaviours but the internal (cognitive and hormonal secretions) functioning of the individual. Thus, affecting the entire human adjustment mechanisms and stability (Manzoor, 2016). Shyness is more prevalent at adolescence, which may be due to the identity crises that characterize the period. Adolescents with shyness symptoms report incapacitating experience and the tempo may depend on the place, people around and task at hand. Scholars found that shy people reported overwhelming and devastating experience in unfamiliar environment and in the presence of strangers (Wang et al., 2020) Gao and colleagues (2016) reported that shyness experience peaks when a shy person is assigned a responsibility that requires talking to a group or public. Worryingly, adolescents in their daily social engagements encounter tasks that will demand their interactions which may further expose them to shyness inducing agents.

Hormonal secretions during shyness may reduce cognitive functioning: attention, information processing, recall and engagement in fine motor skill (Nwafor, Anazonwu, Obi-Nwosu & Ugwu, 2016; Wang et al., 2020). Thus, an adolescent frequent exposure to shyness heightening scenario may threaten the adjustment, academic performance, social engagement and wellbeing. The danger of shyness among adolescents is compounded by the fact that adolescence is a period of heightened peer importance and increased socio-environmental exploration (Nwafor, 2014; WHO, 2020). Given the amplified significance of peer relationship, social inhibition associated with shyness becomes a bane to self-development. At adolescence, individuals are expected to develop socio-emotional skills, which may enable them to initiate, sustain or severe interpersonal relationship. Such developmental milestone is in tandem with human lifespan procedure (Ren, Gao, & Han, 2018; Sarwar, 2016). In a situation the symptoms become too severe and prevents the development of the socio-emotional skills, psychological breakdown seems imminent, and treatment urgently needed.

Nwafor, Obi-Nwosu, Anazonwu and Ugwu (2016) found positive relationship between executive function and shyness. Executive function is part of the brain or a set of mental skills that include working memory, flexible thinking and self-control. It regulates the ability to learn, work and manage daily experiences (Rothbart, & Derryberry, 1981; Wang

et al., 2020). The findings above were indicators that severe shyness experience may be capable of suppressing the executive function. Hence, may account for the disoriented behaviour observed among severe shy adolescents. However, shyness is a by-product of socialization (WHO, 2020), which is the process of learning to engage in a socially accepted behaviour. There are cultural norms and values that guide human conducts in each society. Such cultural norms and values do encourage internalization of both maladaptive (shyness) and adaptive behaviour, which the society deems appropriate (Duru, 2014). Cultures further define gender roles and expectations, which determine rewards and punishment. In Igbo culture, certain norms and values inculcate shyness in women. This is done through parental training and the impact is carried throughout the lifespan (Duru, 2014). From childhood stage, Igbo parents instill reservation in their children especially the girl child. Other practices that imbibe shyness are dictating sitting position (a girl should close her legs while sitting), trained not to be assertive, restricted from mingling with the opposite gender, and not allowed to talk in the public (Duru, 2014). Adult women are restricted from taking a cola from a plate in the presence of men and should not lead others in prayer with cola nut in the presence of a man. Men are not left out in the cultural approval of gender specific behaviours (e.g., Men don't cry. Be a man please. Take charge like a man). The gender approved behaviour is strengthened by social reinforcement. However, from Igbo cultural perspective, one may argue that shyness is not a trait but an acculturated restriction of girl children. The acculturation starts early in life with serious lifelong consequences. These behaviours further create gender differences in behaviour and may be responsible for the trendy female agitation for gender equality referred as feminism (Dunu, 2014).

Shyness has been found to be related to externalizing maladaptive behaviour such as aggression, poor academic performance, anxiety, bullying, callous unemotional behaviour (Nwafor, Anazonwu, Obi-Nwosu & Ugwu, 2016). Specifically, Nwafor, Anazonwu, Obi-Nwosu and Ugwu (2016) found significant positive relationship between shyness and aggression and inhibition respectively. Also, shyness may be related to internalizing behaviours such as suicidal ideation, depression, low self-concept, poor interpersonal adjustment, inhibitory component of effortful control and slow attainment of psycho-social

developmental milestone (Rorthbath & Derryberry, 1981). The multiple links of shyness to various maladaptive behaviours confirmed its tendency to potentiate other lifelong and stable threatening behaviours across the lifespan.

To deepen knowledge of development and sustenance of shyness across the lifespan, triadic reciprocal model of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2006, 2008) was adopted. The model maintained that three core components make up individual personality: traits, behaviour and the environment. The model further postulated that the three components interact to produce personality (Bandura, 2008). Not only do the factors make up personality but they all influence each other. From the standpoint of triadic reciprocal determinism, one may assert that individuals are the way they are by their interaction with the environment. Human behaviour influences the environment and it in turn influences traits and behaviours (Sarwar, 2016). Bergman, Bergman and Thatcher (2019) averred that trait (shyness) manifestation is mediated by contextual and cultural influences, which has potentials to facilitate or hinder the ability to act. This model succinctly explained the processes of shyness development, sustenance, and expression in Igbo culture, which approves it as feminine feature. Parental upbringing and socialization instill reservation and enhances expression of shyness trait. Through parental and cultural approval of the manifestation of shyness especially among females, the behaviour gains traction. However, the same pattern that instills shyness in females is adopted in suppression of shyness trait in males. Men are constantly reminded to be brave hence, the tendency not to manifest the behaviour.

However, Duru (2014) maintained that the Igbo cultural grip in formation, sustenance and manifestation of human behaviour has been depleted by globalization and female gender movement known as feminism. The vigorous campaigns of feminists may have changed many behaviour manifestations across cultures including among Igbo children. The feminism group clamor for gender equality in parental training, opportunities, cultural norms and values and social responsibilities. The gender movement was of the view that some culturally sanctioned children upbringing led to the development of maladaptive

behaviour, (shyness) low self-esteem, perpetual dependence, non-assertiveness, and non-actualization of self-potentials (Brabeck & Brown, 1997; Duru, 2014).

From the foregoing, the present study hypothesized that there will not be a gender difference in shyness among the sample of Igbo adolescents.

Method

Participants

A total of two hundred and forty (240) junior classes students were selected from five public secondary schools in Awka Anambra State Nigeria. Their ages ranged from 13 - 16 years with the mean age of 14.5 and the standard deviation 1.1. Their gender comprises of male 119 (49.6%) and female 121 (50.4%).

Instrument

The Revised Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale is 13 items self-administered questionnaire developed by Cheek (1983). It has four reverse items, number 3, 6, 9, and 12. The response pattern ranged from 1 = very uncharacteristic or untrue, strongly disagree, 2 = uncharacteristic, 3 = Neutral, 4 = characteristic, 5 = very characteristic or true, strongly agree. The developer of the scale found Cronbach alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .90$. However, researchers in the present study obtained Cronbach Alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .62$.

Gender of the participants were obtained by asking them to indicate it in the demographic section of the questionnaire.

Procedure and Ethics

Department of Psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State Nigeria granted approval for the study. The researchers met with the principals of the selected secondary schools, who gave their consent for their students to participate in the study. All the randomly, selected students were given an assent form for their parents or guardians to fill as condition for the participation. On the subsequent agreed dates, selected students whose parents filled the consent forms and they (students) agreed to participate were issued with a questionnaire. The questionnaire had two sections: part A contains

demographic information such as age, gender and part B consists of the shyness scale. The questionnaire was designed in English language,

Design and statistics

Cross-sectional survey design and independent t-test were utilized for the study.

Results

Gender differences in shyness

	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>of Df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Between Groups	138.007	1	138.007	4.611	.034
Within Groups	4010.985	239	29.933		
Total	4148.993	240			

The results showed that there is no significant gender difference in shyness $F(1,135) = .034, P > .05$.

Discussion

The study explored gender differences in shyness manifestation. The results showed that there was no gender difference in shyness among the sampled adolescents. The finding is in tandem with the work of Nwafor, Anazonwu, Obi-Nwosu and Ugwu (2016). It is plausible to posit that cultural impact is weakening may be due to the realization that shyness is a psychopathology, which has shown to be related to non-normative human behaviour. It may equally be asserted that feminist theory (Brabeck & Brown, 1997) is gaining traction in the current Igbo cultural children upbringing. Globalization through the mechanism of social media, education, intercultural marriage and interaction have reduced the impact of enculturation. Igbo people have been known as migrants who learn in their various social engagement and bring back such knowledge back home for children training. Feminism campaign, which advocates for gender equality in training of children and other opportunities may be impacting child rearing.

Implication of the Study

The study has both theoretical and practical implications.

The finding of the study upheld the impact of feminist theory, which canvasses for similar treatment for both genders. This study has contributed to the advancement of psychology discipline and yielded more results for empirical data base.

Practically, the result demonstrated that gender difference is not a significant factor in the cultural causative and sustaining factor in shyness development. Based on the independent t-test result, shyness which was assumed to be a female trait is no longer strong in Igbo society.

Conclusion

Although gender is an important element in understanding human behaviour, the assumption that certain gender is genetically designed to manifest some behavioural pattern has since been criticized by scholars. In the present study, the findings show that the ascription that gender difference should be expected in shyness especially among the Igbo was not confirmed. However, further studies could explore other moderating factors for instance culturally practices that could create a dichotomy in behavioural manifestation among the genders.

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