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AUTHOR   Carducci, Bernardo J.; Stein, Nikki D.
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ABSTRACT
                Previous studies on shyness have focused on a limited
number of individuals at a particular point in time. This study
assessed the extent to which shyness was experienced by college
students (N=1,120) in their daily lives and compared trends in such
experiences across groups over a 9-year period. Each year from 1979
to 1987, with the exception of 1986, students completed a survey on
shyness assessing their cognitive, affective, and situational
reactions to the experiences of shyness in their daily lives. The
results indicated that almost one-half of the students surveyed
considered themselves to be shy. This pattern of results also seemed
to remain stable over the 9-year period. Slightly over 55% of
students indicated that shyness was a personal problem for them.
Situations most often associated with eliciting feelings of shyness
included those involving strangers, authorities, and members of the
opposite sex. The results suggest that shyness is a rather pervasive
phenomenon that is considered problematic and undesirable by most
individuals who consider themselves shy. Most shy respondents,
however, believed that their shyness could be overcome and were
willing to work seriously to overcome it. A number of treatment
programs are available to help individuals overcome shyness, most of
which are designed to improve the individual's interpersonal skills.
(NB)

The Personal and Situational Pervasiveness of Shyness

in College Students: A Nine-Year Comparison

Bernardo J. Carducci   Nikki D. Stein

Indiana University Southeast

Address all correspondence to Bernardo J. Carducci, Department of Psychology, Indiana University Southeast, New Albany, IN 47150

The Personal and Situational Pervasiveness of

Shyness in College Students: A Nine-Year Comparison

Previous surveys on shyness (cf. Zimbardo, 1977) and

research on the dynamics and treatment of shyness (cf. Jones, .

Cheek, & Briggs, 1986) have focused on a limited number of

individuals at a particular point in time. While such specific

information has added to our understanding of shyness, it does

not make it possible to determine more global and temporal trends

in shyness. The purpose of the present study is to assess the

extent to which shyness is experienced by students in their

daily lives and compare trends in such expeiences across groups

over a nine-year period.

Methods

The subjects were 1120 male and female college students

ranging in age from 17 to 61 from both day and evening classes of

introductory psychology. Each year from 1979 to 1987, with the

exception of 1986, students in class sizes ranging from 35 to 85

completed a survey on shyness assessing their cognitive (e.g.,

Compared to others, how shy are you?), affective (e.g., Is your

shyness a personal problem for you?), and situational (e.g.,

Types of people who make you feel shy) reactions to the

experiences of shyness in their daily lives. The responses for

each year were assessed from at least two different psychology

classes.   Results

Personal Pervasiveness of Shyness

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that almost half of the college students surveyed consider themselves to be shy. While such a percentage may seem rather high, it is quite consistent with the 40 percent reported by Zimbardo (1977) in his early surveys on shyness. The pattern of results also seems to remain stable over the nine-year period. The somewhat chronic nature of shyness is suggested by the results in Table 2 where 44.2 percent of the individuals who presently considered themselves to be shy report that they have always been shy. Table 3 indicates that in comparison to their peers, 27.7 percent of the shy individuals consider themselves to be more shy than their peers while 26.7 percent considered themselves to less shy.

Insert Tables 1, 2, & 3 about here

The frequency of which shy individuals experience shyness is presented in Table 4. Inspection of these results indicate that shyness is most often experienced on a weekly basis, with slightly over 20 percent of the students indicating they experience shyness on an almost daily basis. The frequency of which shyness is a personal problem to the students is presented in Table 5. Slightly over 55 percent of the students indicated that shyness was a personal problem for them, with almost 10 percent saying it was often a problem with them. And, although there are some benefits associated with being shy (e.g.,

appearing discreet and seriously introspective), the results presented in Table 6 indicate that only 2.2 percent of the college students surveyed rated being shy as desirable, while 60 percent rated it as being undesirable. All of these patterns of results seem to be rather consistent across the nine-year period.

Insert Tables 4, 5, & 6 about here

Situational Pervasiveness of Shyness

Table 7 summarizes the extent to which the students felt shy in different situations. Consistent with previous research (Zimbardo, 1977), those situations most often associated with eliciting feelings of shyness include those involving strangers, authorities, and members of the opposite sex. The nature of this pattern of results was consistent across the nine-year period.

Insert Table 7 about here

The results in Table 8 indicate that over two thirds of the students felt that their shyness was something that could be overcome and, as seen in Table 9, over 77 percent indicated that they would be willing to work seriously at overcoming it. These patterns of results were observed to be consistent across the nine-year period.

Insert Table 8 & 9 about here

Discussion

The results of the present survey on shyness are quite

consistent with the pioneering work done by Zimbardo and his

associates (Zimbardo 1977; Zimbardo, Pilkonis, and Norwood,

1974). The results also indicate that the pervasiveness of

shyness has remained relatively stable over the nine-year period

investigated in the present study and over the 14 years since the

original surveys on shyness were conducted.

While the present results, along with previous results,

indicate that shyness is a rather common and problematic

phenomenon for many college students, a majority of them

indicated that they would be willing to work seriously to

overcome it. The first step in overcoming shyness is to identify

those situations that seem to elicit it. In the present study,

strangers, authorities, and interacting with members of the

opposite sex were identified as situations frequently eliciting

shyness in students.

One significant aspect of the fact that shyness is triggered

by authorities, either by their knowledge or their role, is that

college professors fall into this category. The implication is

that by making students feel shy, such students may fail to

obtain the assistance they may need with their studies by not·

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asking questions during the class or seeking the professor out after class for personal assistance. Such individuals may also be hindering their career aspirations by being to shy too ask authorities to write them letters of reference. To help minimize the possibility of teachers eliciting shyness in their students, Friedman (1980) offers the following guidelines:

1. Teachers should encourage and provide opportunities for oral presentation.

2. Teachers should indicate that they welcome and value all students' comments.

3. Teachers and students should admit to errors when they are made. Teachers need to encourage this among their students by creating a classroom atmosphere in which errors are not ridiculed.

4. Students should be encouraged to relate what they say to what others in the class have said.

5. Classroom discussion should be among students as well as between teacher and students.

To help shy individual cope with the shyness elicited by strangers and members of the opposite sex in interpersonal settings, a number of treatment programs have been suggested, including altering self-perceptions (Butler, 1981), assertiveness training (Alberti & Emmons, 1986), modeling social skills (Wassmer, 1978), and cognitive modification (Haynes-Clements & Avery, 1984). However, the interpersonal process training

approach incorporates many of these techniques into a support group program involving four basic steps (Alden & Cappe, 1986). First, clients are taught relaxation techniques. The second step involves clients arranging problematic social situations into a hierarchical manner according to the level of fear produced. In the third step of the program, various interaction skills, including active listening, empathic responding, communicating respect for others' opinions, and self-disclosure, are introduced and discussed. The therapist demonstrates how each skill might be useful in various situations. Clients then practice with the therapist the interaction skills, beginning with those situations posing the least difficulty. Finally, the clients then select social situations to encounter in vivo and report back to the group how they adapted the interaction skills to their situations and the results obtained. Feedback and social support are provided by group discussion.

In summary, shyness seems to be a rather pervasive phenomenon that is considered problematic and undesirable by most individuals who consider themselves to be shy. Fortunately, most individuals who consider themselves shy believe that their shyness can be overcome and are willing to work seriously to overcome it. For these individuals, a number of treatment programs are available., most of which are designed to improve the individual's interpersonal skills.

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Table 1

Percentage Considering Themselves to be a Shy Person

Year

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Yes	49.3	49.7	46.9	45.0	51.3	58.9	48.9	46.6	49.6
No	50.7	50.3	53.1	55.0	48.8	41.1	51.1	53.4	50.4
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

Table 2

Percentage of Shy Individuals Indicating They Have Always Been Shy

Year

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Yes	44.8	43.6	38.3	39.4	45.0	52.5	45.4	42.2	44.2
No	3.0	7.3	8.6	5.6	6.3	6.4	6.6	4.3	6.0
No response*	52.2	49.2	53.1	55.0	48.8	41.1	48.0	53.4	49.8
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

*Individuals who do not consider themselves shy did not respond to this question.

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Table 3

Percentage Indicating Their Shyness Compared to Their Peers

Year

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Much more shy	1.5	2.2	0.0	1.9	3.8	1.4	3.5	3.4	2.3
More shy	26.1	30.2	9.9	28.8	27.5	27.0	25.3	19.8	25.4
About as shy	29.9	31.8	42.0	30.0	38.8	39.7	37.1	31.9	34.6
Less shy	22.4	16.2	21.0	16.9	17.5	17.7	16.2	25.0	18.6
Much less shy	8.2	5.6	16.0	8.8	6.3	7.1	7.0	10.3	8.1
No response*	11.9	14.0	11.1	13.8	6.3	7.1	10.9	9.5	11.0
Sample size	134	179	81	160	30	141	229	116	1120

*Individuals who do not consider themselves shy did not respond to this question.

Table 4

Percentage Indicating How Often They Feel Shy

Year

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Everyday	8.2	5.6	3.7	5.0	7.5	3.5	5.7	6.9	5.7
Almost every day	14.2	17.9	11.1	14.4	16.3	16.3	13.5	12.1	14.6
Often, nearly every other day	8.2	11.2	11.1	12.5	11.3	13..	14.4	12.1	12.1
One or two times a week	18.7	21.8	25.9	22.5	27.5	27.0	18.8	18.1	21.9
Occasionally, less than once a week	26.9	16.2	17.3	15.6	22.5	23.4	21.4	26.7	21.0
Rarely, once a month or less	11.9	13.4	17.3	15.6	7.5	9.2	15.3	14.7	13.4
No response*	11.9	14.0	13.6	14.4	7.5	7.1	10.9	9.5	11.3
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

*Individuals who do not consider themselves shy did not respond to this question.

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Table 5

Percentage Indicating Shyness is a Personal Problem for Them

Year

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Yes, often	9.7	13.4	3.7	3.8	13.8	6.4	10.0	14.7	9.5
Yes, sometimes	18.7	22.9	19.8	21.3	25.0	14.9	21.4	14.7	19.9
Yes, occasionally	29.9	24.0	22.2	30.0	16.3	27.7	27.9	24.1	26.2
Rarely	24.6	15.6	30.9	22.5	27.5	27.7	21.0	27.6	23.5
Never	5.2	10.1	12.3	8.1	8.2	15.6	8.7	9.5	9.8
No response*	11.9	14.0	11.1	14.4	6.3	7.8	10.9	9.5	11.2
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

*Individuals who do not consider themselves shy did not respond to this
 question.

Table 6

Percentage Indicating the Desirability of Their Shyness

Year

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Very undesirable	1.5	8.9	11.1	10.6	18.8	14.2	18.3	19.8	12.9
Undesirable	53.0	50.8	49.4	50.0	45.0	48.2	40.2	42.2	47.1
Neither	32.1	24.6	24.7	23.8	26.3	27.7	27.5	28.4	26.9
Desirable	1.5	1.7	3.7	1.9	2.5	2.1	2.6	0.0	2.0
Very desirable	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3	0.0	.4	0.0	.2
No response*	11.9	14.0	11.1	13.8	6.3	7.8	10.9	9.5	11.0
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

*Individuals who do not consider themselves shy did not respond to this question.

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Table 7

Percentage Indicating Who Makes Them Feel Shy

Year

Situation	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Over-all
My parents	2.2	4.5	1.2	5.0	3.8	5.7	4.8	6.9	4.5
My siblings (brothers and/or sisters)	1.5	2.8	1.2	3.1	1.3	1.4	1.7	3.4	2.1
Other relatives	14.2	13.4	11.1	3.1	3.8	5.7	4.4	2.6	7.2
Friends	3.0	11.2	8.6	7.5	16.3	8.5	8.7	9.5	8.8
Strangers	62.7	59.8	58.0	66.3	68.8	75.9	67.7	65.5	65.8
Foreigners	12.7	12.3	13.6	15.0	21.3	19.1	12.2	11.2	14.2
Authorities (by virtue of their knowledge--intellectual superiors, experts)	47.8	48.0	42.0	48.8	47.5	46.8	42.4	49.1	46.4
Elderly people (much older than you)	7.5	10.1	8.6	10.0	8.8	8.5	5.7	9.5	8.4
Children (much younger than you)	1.5	2.2	1.2	1.3	3.8	2.1	2.6	4.3	2.3
Persons of the opposite sex, in a group	32.1	40.9	48.1	43.1	37.5	38.3	39.3	44.0	40.1
Persons of the opposite sex, one-to-one	26.9	33.5	34.6	41.3	42.5	42.6	37.6	40.5	37.2
A person of the same sex, one-to-one	5.2	8.4	3.7	5.6	12.5	9.2	6.1	9.5	7.3
Authorities (by virtue of their role--police, teacher, superior at work)	39.6	39.7	34.6	40.0	37.5	40.4	29.3	39.7	37.1
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

Table 8

Percentage Who Think Their Shyness Can Be Overcome

Year

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Yes	66.4	62.6	74.1	65.6	66.3	76.6	71.2	73.3	69.2
No	3.0	5.6	1.2	2.5	2.5	2.8	1.7	.9	2.7
Uncertain	17.2	15.1	13.6	17.5	25.0	11.3	14.0	14.7	15.5
No response*	13.4	16.8	11.1	14.4	6.3	9.2	13.1	11.2	12.6
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

*Individuals who do not consider themselves shy did not respond to this question.

Table 9

Percentage of Those Willing to Work Seriously at Overcoming Shyness

Year

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1987	Overall
Yes, definitely	50.0	46.4	53.1	50.0	47.5	46.1	46.3	46.6	47.9
Yes, perhaps	26.9	22.3	23.5	30.0	27.5	34.0	31.9	35.3	29.2
Not sure yet	6.7	6.1	6.2	3.1	11.3	9.9	8.3	6.9	7.1
No	3.0	8.4	3.7	2.5	7.5	1.4	.4	.0	3.1
No response*	13.4	16.8	13.6	14.4	6.3	8.5	13.1	11.2	12.7
Sample size	134	179	81	160	80	141	229	116	1120

*Individuals who do not consider themselves shy did not respond to this question.