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Social withdrawal in Russian youth: using the Extended Class Play to examine socio-emotional and academic adjustment

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Abstract: This study explored the socio-emotional characteristics and school adjustment of shy/socially withdrawn youth and examined the properties of the Extended Class Play (ECP), a common peer measure of shyness/withdrawal and other social behavior with Russian early adolescents ($n=106$; mean age 12.5). Associations between the ECP scores and teacher- and self-reports of adjustment (e.g. internalizing problems) provided evidence-supporting use of the ECP with Russian adolescents. Similar to North American studies, results also indicated that shy/socially withdrawn Russian youth tended to be more excluded, report greater internalizing problems and were also more asocial than a comparison group. No differences were found between shy/socially withdrawn and non-withdrawn adolescents in victimization/exclusion and academic performance. The discussion emphasizes the need for further examination of potential role of teacher-directed social interactions and classroom norms across the cultural contexts.

Keywords: shyness; social withdrawal; internalising problems; exclusion; Russian adolescents

Introduction

Social withdrawal refers to the consistent display of solitary behavior across situations and over time (Coplan & Rubin, 2010).¹ Prior research has generated evidence that social withdrawal has been frequently associated with internalising difficulties, such as anxiety, fear, depression and loneliness (Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995; Crozier & Alden, 2001). According to Rubin, Coplan, and Bowker (2009), models of social withdrawal often include shyness as one attribute that is typically strongly associated with the overarching construct. Research by Rubin and colleagues has taken a prominent role in shaping the current literature. Rubin and Burgess (2001), for example, suggest that shyness/social withdrawal is an important antecedent of social adjustment in adolescence, and that shy/socially withdrawn youth may miss opportunities for social and academic development due to isolation and the associated internalising difficulties. Rubin, Chen, McDougall, Bowker, and McKinnon (1995) have also indicated that children who were socially withdrawn at an age of 7 years had negative perceptions about their social competence and felt insecure in the peer group as adolescents at an age of 14. Another study by Ollendick, Greene, Weist, and Oswald (1990) provided evidence that socially withdrawn early adolescents were more likely to be disliked by peers and drop out of school compared with the well-adjusted adolescents. Researchers have also extensively explored proximal correlates (e.g. genetic factors, temperament, self-regulation and family influences) of shyness/social withdrawal (Hastings, Nuselovici, Rubin, & Cheach, 2010; Kagan, 1997; Rubin, Bowker, & Gazelle, 2010), but the field has, to date, made fewer attempts to explore the potential impact of aspects of the broader cultural context (e.g. outside of North America and western Europe) and this aspect of the research literature requires further development.

A broad search of international research databases for publications using the shyness, withdrawal construct terms and the related influence of potential cultural contexts and/or cross-cultural designs reveals relatively few related studies of children and youth and, of those, even fewer outside of Asian cultural contexts (see Chen, 2010, for a recent review). Findings from the relatively small body of work published (e.g. Chen, Cen, Li, & He, 2005; Chen & French, 2008; Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1995), however, lend even more weight to the contention that evaluations of shyness/social withdrawal are better understood in the context of specific cultural values and beliefs that help shape normative and maladaptive behaviours. Childrearing practices, social functioning and educational goals are all likely to vary across different cultural settings and may impact behaviors categorised as withdrawn perceptions of those behaviours and their associated outcomes (Chen et al., 1995).

According to a developmental model of social withdrawal that has gathered substantial empirical support (Rubin & Burgess, 2001; Rubin, Burgess, Kennedy, & Stewart, 2003), social withdrawal across transitions from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school may be particularly important because early adolescents face the contextual challenge of establishing relationships with new peers – likely a stressful task for shy/withdrawn students. This model has, however, not yet been consistently applied to data-sets drawn from participants outside North American (and to a lesser extent, Asian) contexts.

Earlier findings from Chen and colleagues application of this model, in one of the few direct examples of cross-cultural investigations, appeared to suggest that the role of greater shyness-withdrawal in Chinese or recent Chinese immigrant settings had historically predicted better school adjustment (psychological and academic indices). Over time, however, the pattern of results appeared to change, and later findings suggested that greater shyness predicted lower levels of adjustment and more problematic peer relationships. Chen and colleagues interpreted this shift as a possible indication of the social and cultural changes associated with Chinese political and economic reforms.

Chen and French (2008), in part as a response to their interpretation of their Chinese data and findings, stated the need for further research on social withdrawal and its correlates in diverse cultures – such a focus has, however, not yet emerged. Eastern European contexts may be one particularly interesting setting to evaluate social withdrawal and examine potential adjustment outcomes. Although Russian society has also undergone a period of rapid change, the patterns likely differ from Chinese and Asian contexts in important ways. The goal of this study was to explore the properties of a commonly used peer nomination measure of social withdrawal with Russian early adolescents and to examine potential links to socio-emotional characteristics and school adjustment of students identified as shy/socially withdrawn.

Cross-cultural research on shyness/social withdrawal

International findings on shyness/social withdrawal and academic outcomes have uncovered negative associations between shyness and school achievement in children from England and Wales (Crozier & Hostettler, 2003); between social withdrawal and achievement in North America (Green, Forehand, Beck, & Vosk, 1980; Rapport, Denney, Chung, & Hustance, 2001) and between anxious withdrawal and school achievement in Canadian students (Normandeau & Guay, 1998). The findings on social correlates of shyness/social withdrawal in European countries also supported expectations for a negative perception of shy/socially withdrawn behaviors in Italy (Casiglia, Coco, & Zappulla, 1998), Turkey (Ozdemir & Cheah, 2013) and Portugal (Freitas et al., 2013). No Russian or Eastern European participants/data-sets, however, were included in any of these studies nor have they apparently been conducted or published elsewhere.

Substantial evidence from North American studies also indicates that shyness/social withdrawal in adolescence predicts the internalizing problems further in life (Boivin et al., 1995; Woodward & Fergusson, 2001), especially when shy/withdrawn behaviour is accompanied by victimisation or exclusion (Boivin & Hymel, 1997; Gazelle & Rudolph, 2004). Socialisation practices and school adjustment in industrialised countries typically require adolescents to develop independence early in school and practice a wide range of social strategies in order to adapt within these competitive contexts. In the light of these social demands, shyness/social withdrawal is viewed as a risk factor

for maladjustment for children and adolescents (Rubin et al., 2009) in Eastern European contexts too. In this study, we examined the socio-emotional characteristics of Russian adolescents and explored whether the relationship between shyness/social withdrawal and internalizing problems followed a similar pattern to those of North America and similar contexts.

Much of the research on shyness/social withdrawal in other cultural contexts outside of Western Europe and North America has, to date, been performed in China (Chen et al., 1995, 2005). Chen and French (2008) proposed a contextual developmental perspective that emphasizes the effects of cultural values and beliefs on social interactions. They suggested that in collectivistic cultures, social initiatives may not be valued as much as in more individualistic contexts because they may not resonate with the group values to the same extent. Behavioral control, on the other hand, may receive greater emphasis as it supports the ability of the individual to conform to collectivist norms. However, these patterns may be changing. In his research with Chinese children, Chen suggested that relatively recent social and political reforms may have altered the role of individual initiatives and changed the perception of shyness/withdrawal from a positive factor associated with peer acceptance and academic achievement to a negative factor correlated with peer rejection and school problems (Chen et al., 2005). Despite the important contributions of previous research by Chen and colleagues, their findings cannot be directly applied to European contexts, and the literature will benefit from direct application of the model to data drawn from Eastern European adolescents and schools. In the light of recent similar changes in many Eastern European countries (typically categorized as collectivistic), there is a need to examine attributes and correlates of socially withdrawn behaviour in these contexts too. There currently appear to be no published investigations of shyness/withdrawal in East European youth.

Shyness-withdrawal in Russian culture: potential correlates

The current educational system

Russian law (On Education, 2007) currently requires 11 years of schooling. Classes typically consist of 20–35 students who enter elementary school together and proceed through required schooling as an intact group. After elementary school, the content areas are taught by different teachers, but each teaches the same classroom group throughout middle school and high school, and teachers tend to be much more familiar with students than their American counterparts. These characteristics may indicate that some aspects of shy/withdrawn behaviour may be less salient in schools as the number of unfamiliar peers and teachers may be substantially lower and thus place fewer demands on shy/withdrawn students' social skills.

Social and cultural changes

Russia has traditionally been classified as a collectivist country (Realo & Allik, 1999; Triandis, 1995) but, given patterns of political and social change in the last few decades, it is now more accurately placed in an intermediate stage on Hofstede's standard dimension of collectivism–individualism scale (Hart et al., 2000; Naumov & Puffer, 2000). Current social norms and economic patterns may require youth to display more individual initiative and greater competitiveness in social groups. We have thus hypothesized that in Russia, similar to Western countries, shy/withdrawn youth may now be at a similar risk for achievement difficulties and negative socio-emotional outcomes. In particular, we suggested that shy/withdrawn early adolescents may be readily identified by established measures and should be more likely to be asocial, victimized/excluded, should report more internalizing problems and display lower academic performance.

Potential gender differences

Findings regarding the adjustment of shy/withdrawn youth provide mixed results regarding gender differences. Although some studies reported that shy boys tended to experience more negative longitudinal outcomes (Caspi, Elder, & Bem, 1988) and displayed greater internalising problems and loneliness (Rubin, Chen, & Hymel, 1993), others have suggested that internalising outcomes may be worse for girls (Crick & Zahn-Waxler, 2003; Grills & Ollendick, 2002) within the age-group targeted

here. In the absence of a consistent or strong set of hypotheses, we examined potential gender differences in potential outcomes empirically.

The current study

We are aware of neither recently published studies on shyness/social withdrawal with Eastern European or Russian youth nor previously established measures of shyness and socially withdrawn behaviour (e.g. the Extended Class Play; Wojslawowicz-Bowker, Rubin, Burgess, Booth-LaForce, & Rose-Krasnor, 2006) being evaluated in these contexts. Related studies by Strelau, Angleitner, Bantelmann, and Ruch (1990) in Poland and Asendorpf (1990) in Germany approach shyness from perspectives examining levels of behavioural inhibition and emphasising the physiological foundations in temperament and shyness. This study, in contrast, has focused on accurately identifying shy/socially withdrawn early adolescents and examining potential associations with socio-emotional and school adjustment outcomes. Developmental models of shyness/social withdrawal suggest that withdrawal becomes more salient to peers with age and emphasises that the stress probably present during the transition from early childhood to middle childhood to adolescence may be additively associated with greater adjustment difficulties. Our participants were early adolescents who recently experienced the transition to middle school, and outcomes examined here included internalising problems (loneliness, anxiety and fear of negative evaluations), behavioural problems (victimisation/exclusion) and academic performance. We hypothesised that shy/socially withdrawn early adolescents would be at a greater risk for social and academic maladjustment relative to their non-withdrawn peers. Potential gender differences in withdrawn behaviour and outcomes were also examined. Although adolescents may be rejected because of shyness and aggression (Hymel, McDougall, & Renshaw, 2004), an aggressive group was also identified [i.e. individuals above one standard deviation (SD) on aggression] and excluded from the normative comparison group so that more homogeneous groups could be used for comparison.

Following Van de Vijver and Leung (1997), we distinguished three types of equivalence: structural, measurement unit and scalar. Structural equivalence was examined by performing inter-correlations among the factor scores of the measures and by performing factor analysis for each scale, and the latter two requirements were controlled for via translation and back-translation of the measures from English to Russian. The forward translation from English to Russian was conducted by the first author, a native Russian speaker with advanced graduate training in psychology research from both Russian and US universities. The forward translation targeted accurate conceptual and cultural equivalence rather than literal (word-for-word) equivalence. The back-translation from Russian to English was conducted by an independent, professional translator who was bilingual in Russian/English. Comparison of the back-translation with the original measures checked the accuracy of the forward translation and revealed no discrepancies.

Method

Procedures

Participants consisted of 106 early adolescents aged 12–14 from grades 5 and 6 [57 boys, 49 girls, mean (M) age = 12.49, SD = 0.71] and four teachers from one large secondary school that provided us with the permission for this study. The school served a middle class community of skilled workers and professionals and all students of the fifth and sixth grades participated. All measures were administered in Russian by the first author within 45-minute sessions. Students completed self-reports on anxiety, loneliness, victimization and ratings of peer behaviors. Teachers completed indices of adjustment for their students. School administration provided reports (i.e. grades) for academic performance in Russian language arts (reading and writing) and mathematics. Consent forms were obtained from four teachers who participated in research. In accordance with Russian requirements for conducting educational research, written parental permissions for students were not required for research approved by the school administration. Data collection procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board for the US university sponsoring this research.

Table 1. Bivariate correlations, *Ms* and *SDs*.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
|--|------|----------|---------|----------|---------|---------|----------|----------|----------|---------|----------|----------|---------|---------|
| Teachers' ratings (<i>n</i> = 99) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Aggressive with peers | | -0.539** | -0.216* | 0.347** | -0.164 | 0.066 | 0.790** | -0.070 | -0.229* | 0.267** | 0.088 | -0.012 | -0.016 | -0.047 |
| 2. Prosocial with peers | | | -0.041 | -0.455** | 0.113 | -0.025 | -0.477** | 0.142 | 0.106 | -0.173 | -0.017 | 0.041 | 0.262** | 0.083 |
| 3. Asocial with peers | | | | 0.460** | 0.449** | 0.366** | -0.313** | -0.264** | 0.439** | 0.163 | 0.188 | 0.230* | 0.224* | 0.204* |
| 4. Excluded by peers | | | | | 0.410** | 0.536** | 0.219* | -0.291** | 0.120 | 0.398** | 0.241* | 0.235* | 0.145 | 0.155 |
| 5. Anxious-fearful | | | | | | 0.451** | -0.156 | -0.355** | 0.190 | 0.108 | 0.127 | 0.161 | 0.180 | 0.140 |
| Peer nominations (<i>n</i> = 106) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Victimisation/exclusion | | | | | | | 0.021 | -0.221* | 0.294** | 0.349** | 0.202* | 0.186 | 0.178 | 0.187 |
| 7. Aggression | | | | | | | | 0.031 | -0.289** | 0.123 | 0.089 | -0.092 | -0.106 | -0.050 |
| 8. Popularity/sociability | | | | | | | | | -0.172 | -0.232* | -0.268** | -0.298** | -0.205* | -0.115 |
| 9. Shyness/withdrawal | | | | | | | | | | 0.030 | 0.190 | 0.279** | 0.305** | 0.072 |
| Self-reports (<i>n</i> = 99) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10. Victimisation | | | | | | | | | | | 0.529** | 0.442** | 0.397** | 0.526** |
| 11. Exclusion | | | | | | | | | | | | 0.592** | 0.521** | 0.459** |
| 12. Loneliness | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0.686** | 0.571** |
| 13. SAD-Gen | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0.493** |
| 14. FNE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 |
| <i>M</i> | 0.28 | 1.20 | 0.41 | 0.36 | 0.41 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 2.08 | 1.84 | 2.08 | 1.70 | 2.39 |
| <i>SD</i> | 0.44 | 0.61 | 0.42 | 0.47 | 0.48 | 0.78 | 0.87 | 0.82 | 0.91 | 0.85 | 0.76 | 0.52 | 0.73 | 0.81 |

Note: For ECP, standardised values are displayed.

SAD-Gen, generalised social avoidance and distress; FNE, fear of negative evaluations from peers.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Measures

Self-reports

All students completed a portion of the Self-Report of Victimization and Exclusion (SVEX, Buhs, McGinley, & Toland, 2010), a 16-item questionnaire tapping children's feelings of victimization and exclusion. For this study, we used two subscales: (1) Overt/relational victimization (seven items, $\alpha = 0.910$, e.g. 'say bad things about you') and (2) Social exclusion (five items, $\alpha = 0.811$, e.g. 'not pick you for a group activity'). Ms and SDs for all measures are reported in Table 1. For all self-report measures, participants rated how much they felt the item was true for them using a five-point Likert-type scale.

Participants completed two subscales of the Social Anxiety Scale for Children-Revised (SASC-R, La Greca & Stone, 1993): (1) Fear of negative evaluations from peers (FNE, five items, $\alpha = 0.785$, e.g. 'worry about what other kids say about me'); (2) Generalized social avoidance and distress (SAD-Gen, four items, $\alpha = 0.716$, e.g. 'feel shy even with the kids I know very well').

Students also completed a self-report of Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction (Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw, 1984), a 24-item scale assessing feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction at school. The loneliness scale used here included 16 items ($\alpha = 0.87$) tapping children's loneliness at school (e.g. 'I am lonely').

Peer nominations

The Extended Class Play (ECP; Wojslawowicz-Bowker et al., 2006) was administered to assess peers' perceptions of participants' social reputations. Four subscales were administered: (1) aggression (six items, $\alpha = 0.94$ e.g. 'who pick on other kids'); (2) victimisation/exclusion (five items, $\alpha = 0.88$, e.g. 'who gets picked on by other kids'); (3) shyness (three items, $\alpha = 0.93$, e.g. 'who hardly ever starts a conversation'); (4) popularity/sociability (three items, $\alpha = 0.78$, e.g. 'everyone likes to be with'). Scores were standardised by classroom to control for class size and potential group differences.

Teachers' ratings of adjustment

Teachers completed the Child Behaviour Scale (Ladd & Profilet, 1996), a 35-item questionnaire assessing children's aggressive, withdrawn and prosocial behaviours. Teachers indicated the extent to which each statement applied to the child using a three-point Likert-type scale. For this study, we used five subscales: (1) aggressive with peers (six items, $\alpha = 0.91$, e.g. 'fights with other children'); (2) excluded by peers (six items, $\alpha = 0.90$, e.g. 'peers refuse to let this child play with them'); (3) asocial with peers (six items, $\alpha = 0.89$, e.g. 'keeps peers at a distance'); (4) prosocial with peers (four items, $\alpha = 0.91$, e.g. 'helps other children') and (5) anxious-fearful (three items, $\alpha = 0.81$, e.g. 'fearful or afraid of new things').

Academic adjustment

School grades were used to indicate academic performance in reading, writing and mathematics. Students' performance for each subject was assessed by the teachers on the three-point scale used by the school: excellent, average or below average.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Factor analysis of ECP items

Principal component analysis (varimax rotation) initially suggested that a five-factor solution for the ECP. To ensure orthogonality and conceptual distinctions, four items from the victimisation/exclusion factor were eliminated due to cross-loading on multiple factors (i.e. cross-loadings greater than .030). The items eliminated were 'often left out', 'has trouble making friends', 'has many friends' and 'usually sad'. Based on the reliability coefficients and total item correlations, one additional item ('gets nervous participating in group discussion') did not demonstrate a significant contribution to the scale (i.e. a factor loading estimate, 0.30) and was eliminated.

After eliminating the items, analyses were recomputed (Table 2) and returned a four-factor solution accounting for 78.12% of the variance (1) aggression, six items, $\alpha = 0.936$; (2) victimization/exclusion, five items, $\alpha = 0.875$; (3) shyness/withdrawal, three items, $\alpha = 0.927$; popularity/sociability, three items, $\alpha = 0.780$. The prosocially item ('helps others') loaded on popularity/sociability scale (see Table 2 for all estimates). The resulting factor structure was largely consistent with original ECP subscales (Wojslawowicz-Bowker et al., 2006).

Table 2. Factor loadings for exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation of ECP.

| Items (abbreviated) | Factor | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Aggression | Victimisation/ exclusion | Shyness/ withdrawal | Popularity/ sociability |
| Teases other children too much | 0.94 | | | |
| Loses his/her temper easily | 0.93 | | | |
| Picks on other kids | 0.90 | | | |
| Spread rumours about other kids | 0.89 | | | |
| Gets into a lot of fights | 0.81 | | | |
| Too bossy | 0.79 | | | |
| Gets picked on by other kids | | 0.94 | | |
| Is hit or kicked by other kids | | 0.86 | | |
| Has mean things said to them | | 0.81 | | |
| Cannot get others to listen | | 0.80 | | |
| Whose feelings get hurt easily | | 0.62 | | |
| Hardly ever starts a conversation | | | 0.94 | |
| Talks quietly | | | 0.93 | |
| Who is very shy | | 0.31 | 0.84 | |
| Everyone likes to be with | | | | 0.86 |
| Helps other people | | | | 0.84 |
| Everyone listens to | | | | 0.82 |

Note. Only factor loadings of 0.30 or greater are shown.

Validity evidence

Concurrent and predictive validity of the ECP scales was examined by correlating ECP subscales with other study measures (Table 1). Several significant relationships were expected based on prior evidence. First, previous studies suggested that a positive relationship between shyness/social withdrawal and social avoidance, anxiety and loneliness (Asendorpf, 1990; Boivin et al., 1995). Second, other evidence suggested that a negative relationship between shyness/withdrawal and aggression (Schmidt, Fox, Rubin, Hu, & Hamer, 2002). Bivariate correlations revealed associations comparable to these and other North American results (Burgess, Rubin, Wojslawowicz, Rose-Krasnor, & Booth, 2003; Wojslawowicz-Bowker et al., 2006). Shyness/withdrawal was significantly positively correlated with teachers' ratings of asocial behavior (0.44), self-reports of social anxiety and distress (0.31), loneliness (0.28) and peers' ratings of victimization/exclusion (0.29), and negatively associated with the ratings of aggression reported by teachers (2 0.23) and by peers (2 0.29). Students who were reported as shy and withdrawn tended to be rated by teachers as more asocial, reported greater social avoidance and loneliness, and were rated as less aggressive.

Regression analyses

Shy/withdrawn scores were also used to explore potential links with adjustment indices in more detail. Regression analyses were performed predicting shyness/social withdrawal with teacher- and self-reports of internalizing and behavioral problems, while controlling for levels of gender and aggressive behavior (see Table 3). Results for the set of internalizing problem predictors indicated that shyness/social withdrawal was independently associated with higher levels of self-reported loneliness ($b = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$) and self-reported anxiety ($b = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$), but not with the fear of negative evaluations from peers (FNE: $b = 0.09$, ns). For the group of behavioral problem predictors, shyness/social withdrawal was associated with self-reports of social exclusion ($b = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$), but not victimization ($b = 0.09$, ns). In addition, shyness/social withdrawal was significantly associated with teachers' ratings of asocial behavior ($b = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$) and exclusion ($b = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$), but not anxiety/fear ($b = 0.14$, ns). In order to further explore the relationship between shyness/withdrawal and adjustment and to establish whether the most highly withdrawn youth displayed greater levels of internalizing and behavioral problems, follow-up group comparisons on all of the regression predictor variables examined above were employed.

Group comparisons

Socially withdrawn and comparison groups

Scores for shyness/withdrawal and aggression were used to create a group of highly socially withdrawn youth and a comparison/normative group. Although withdrawn adolescents may also display high levels of aggression (Hymel et al., 2004) and links between aggression and adjustment outcomes are also likely, youth scoring 1 SD above M on aggression ($n = 11$) were excluded from all group comparisons. The socially withdrawn group ($n = 13$) thus included participants scoring 1 SD above the M on shy/withdrawn subscale and remaining adolescents, with the more highly aggressive youth excluded, comprised the comparison group ($n = 82$).

Independent samples t-tests of eight a priori hypotheses were conducted using a more stringent, Bonferroni-adjusted a level of 0.00625 per test ($0.05/8$). Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) analyses were not appropriate due to a violation of the assumption of equality for the covariance matrices (i.e. Box's test indicated unequal variance-covariance matrices across groups) and a MANOVA would have distorted estimates (Field, 2005).

Internalizing problems

Although the scores differed in expected directions, there were no significant differences between the shy/withdrawn group and comparisons on either loneliness [$M = 2.39$, $SD = 0.85$; $M = 2.06$, $SD = 0.46$; $t(12) = 21.30$, $p < 0.00625$], anxiety [$M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.21$; $M = 1.61$, $SD = 0.60$; $t(12) = 22.318$, $p < 0.00625$] or fear of negative evaluations from peers [$M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.03$; $M = 2.39$, $SD = 0.79$; $t(88) = 20.67$, $p < 0.00625$]. There were also no significant differences between the shy/withdrawn group and the comparison group on self-reports of victimization [$M = 2.09$, $SD = 1.02$; $M = 2.06$, $SD = 0.85$; $t(88) = 20.11$, $p < 0.00625$] or social exclusion [$M = 2.17$, $SD = 1.02$; $M = 1.78$, $SD = 0.71$; $t(88) = 21.63$, $p < 0.00625$]. Follow-up group comparisons using teachers' ratings partially supported previous regressions and revealed significant differences on asocial behavior ($M = 0.88$, $SD = 0.52$) relative to the comparison group [$M = 0.38$, $SD = 0.38$, $t(87) = 24.04$, $p < 0.00625$]. The shy/withdrawn and comparison groups were not significant although scores varied in the expected directions on teachers' ratings of excluded by peers [$M = 0.61$, $SD = 0.48$; $M = 0.30$, $SD = 0.47$; $t(87) = 22.17$, $p < 0.00625$] or anxious/fearful [$M = 0.61$, $SD = 0.53$; $M = 0.41$, $SD = 0.47$; $t(87) = 21.33$, $p < 0.00625$].

Academic achievement

An ordinal logistic regression analysis was conducted on the categorical achievement outcomes (below average, average and above average) in math, language arts and literature using shyness/withdrawal as a predictor. Shyness/withdrawal was not a significant predictor of academic achievement in math [$x^2(2) = 1.35$, $p > 0.05$], language arts [$x^2(2) = 1.33$, $p > 0.05$] or literature [$x^2(2) = 0.56$, $p > 0.05$].

Gender differences

An independent samples t-test was also conducted to examine potential gender differences. Due to the small number of withdrawn adolescents ($n = 13$, seven girls), comparisons between withdrawn boys and girls were not possible. Results drawn from all participants revealed no significant differences between males ($M = 0.007$, $SD = 0.95$) and females ($M = 2.008$, $SD = 0.88$) on peers' ratings of shy/withdrawn early adolescents [$t(103) = 0.09$, $p > 0.05$]. An independent sample's t-test was also conducted to examine gender differences in internalizing problems (loneliness, anxiety and fear of negative evaluations) using a Bonferroni-adjusted a level of 0.016 ($0.05/3$). Ms and SDs are presented in Table 4.

Females reported significantly more ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 0.60$) loneliness than males [$M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.40$; $t(98) = 22.83$, $p < 0.016$] and fear of negative evaluations from peers [$M = 2.65$, $SD = 0.92$; $M = 2.18$, $SD = 0.64$; $t(76) = 22.88$, $p < 0.016$]. Differences on anxiety scores were not significant [$t(65) = 22.20$, $p > 0.016$].

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore potential socio-emotional and school adjustment correlates of social withdrawal and evaluate the utility of the ECP in a Russian Middle School context. Eastern European countries and cultures have undergone a series of relatively rapid changes that probably affect youth social adjustment and developmental outcomes. The lack of research attention to these important aspects of youth development is detrimental to our understanding of psychological and academic adjustment patterns in these settings. This study takes an initial step towards improving the scope of research findings available and provides results that impact both substantive and methodological concerns.

Consistent with our hypothesis and in support of the ECP measure's validity, socially withdrawn adolescents were more likely to be evaluated by teachers as asocial compared with their non-withdrawn peers. Consistent with our second prediction, no differences were found in peers' evaluations of level of shy/withdrawn behavior for girls versus boys. Our hypothesis that girls would report more internalizing problems in general received support from analyses that indicated that girls reported greater loneliness and feared negative evaluations than boys.

Social-withdrawn behavior in Russian early adolescents

The subscales produced in the Russian study were largely consistent with the conceptual and empirical structures of the original ECP measure using data drawn from the US participants (Burgess et al., 2003; Wojcikowicz-Bowker et al., 2006). Data from the Russian participants provided empirical support for the contention that shy/withdrawn behaviors (and perhaps most of the other behaviors tapped by the ECP) may be reliably assessed by the ECP in Russian early adolescent contexts. Several aspects of the scales' validity were also supported. Teachers' evaluations of school adjustment indicated that teachers evaluated shy/withdrawn early adolescents as more asocial compared with their non-shy/withdrawn peers.

The picture of the results regarding problems of peer relationships and internalizing difficulties was more complex, however. Regression analyses indicated a consistent pattern of significant linkages to higher levels of internalizing symptoms (loneliness and anxiety) and to more peer exclusion and asocial behavior. These indicated that there was an association between withdrawn behaviors and more-negative adjustment. Even though the follow-up group comparisons indicated that a highly withdrawn subgroup of students reported M scores on the same internalizing and peer relation variables that were somewhat higher than the comparison group, only the group differences on asocial behavior (as rated by teachers) achieved significance. The stringent significance standard imposed by the analyses available to us using the group sizes present in this data-set was likely a factor in the lack of significant comparisons, but the magnitude of the differences may also reflect peer and school contexts that are relatively less socially stressful and demanding even for very shy and withdrawn students. Reported levels of negative adjustment were relatively low overall and may indicate that adjustment indices linked to the school context reflect a more positive school context. If certain social behaviors are less predictive of later adjustment problems in similar contexts, then this may indicate the value of supportive social settings for more positive adjustment for shy and withdrawn youth. This suggests that it may help to identify those youth more versus less at risk for maladjustment and help to focus the limited intervention resources and efforts accordingly.

Contrary to our hypotheses that socially withdrawn early adolescents would tend to experience more academic difficulties, our results demonstrated that shyness/withdrawal was not a significant predictor of academic performance for these youth. Furthermore, the findings also revealed that neither peers nor teachers nor early adolescents tended to see or report that shy/withdrawn students are more victimized or excluded. These findings may reflect the fact that Russian students were perhaps not as likely to have had many opportunities to exclude peers (relative to American students) because their school environment is more structured and teacher-directed (Wilson, Andrew, & Below, 2006) and requires greater time spent on individual learning tasks (Smagorinsky, 2011), rather than on the development of social skills and relationships, which is an explicit compo-

nent of many US middle school classrooms (Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004). This greater social focus for many classroom activities may place the US students who are very shy or withdrawn at a greater risk for maladjustment. We also contend that the school system in Russia still typically reflects some aspects of more traditional collectivistic values such as requiring students to comply more fully with the group norms and more consistent and frequent compliance with teachers' instructions. Consequently students in Russia may not have as many opportunities to express their social preferences, such as inviting or excluding someone from a structured peer activity, and more socially reticent early adolescents are perhaps less likely to experience the same level of exclusion apparent in peer groups at many US schools. Thus, if shy/withdrawn children are not victimized or excluded, they may be less likely to develop sequential negative self-perceptions and internalizing problems.

Our findings support the importance of cultural perspective in studying shyness/social withdrawal and the associated socio-emotional outcomes and indicate that the experience of shy and socially withdrawn behavior likely varies substantially for youth in different contexts. Clearly, future studies seeking to examine support for causal models will also need to explicitly examine the frequencies of peer-directed social interactions and the levels of relevant teacher-directed activities/norms across the parallel social and cultural contexts.

Potential gender differences

Findings from our study provided evidence to support an original hypothesis that there would not be any gender differences in peers' evaluations of shy/withdrawn boys and girls. These findings are largely consistent with the findings from North American studies using similar constructs/variables. Although we were not able to directly examine gender differences between withdrawn boys and withdrawn girls, we expected that internalizing symptoms would be higher for girls, and expected girls to feel lonelier, more anxious and to be more fearful of negative evaluations. Our results indicated that girls exhibited similar patterns to those found in the US groups and reported more internalizing problems than boys. It is interesting to note that, even within a classroom and school contexts that may emphasize peer group social processes less than typical North American settings, girls may still be at a greater risk for internalizing symptoms – this could potentially indicate that, if present, girls may be more likely to show related internalizing difficulties.

Strengths and limitations

More evidence needs to be gathered on the interpersonal aspects of shyness/social withdrawal in boys and girls, perhaps in less structured contexts (e.g. after-school peer interactions). Children's school activities are relatively highly structured in Russian schools, and teachers typically do not expect students to initiate a high degree of peer interaction in classrooms; the social cost of being isolated may be minimized for both shy/withdrawn and non-shy/withdrawn boys and girls in such classroom. This possibility, coupled with further evidence that supportive contexts ameliorate the typical effects of shy/withdrawn social behavior (see Rubin & Coplan, 2010, for an overview), suggests that closer examination of the broader context of specific social behaviors is critical to understanding the social processes and adjustment trajectories associated with behavioral tendencies.

Cultural values and traditional socialization practices may also affect both the expression of shyness/withdrawal and its perception as a potential causal factor in maladjustment. A larger sample and a more detailed longitudinal design would be required in order to investigate the correlates and adjustment outcomes of shyness/social withdrawal in the context of Russian schools and specific aspects of socialization and peer/school culture. Longitudinal designs would also allow a stronger test of potentially causal relationships between shyness/withdrawal and internalizing outcomes and a focus on the long-term effects of shyness/withdrawal. A comparative data from the US sample would allow for tests of measurement invariance. Specific measures of classroom structure and the roles of teachers would also cast more light on the school adjustment difficulties that shy/withdrawn students may face in Russia as potentially linked to the aspects of adult structure and roles.

These findings highlight the importance of studying correlates of shyness/social withdrawal across cultures and examining the properties of the measures used to indicate potential differences. This study presented consistent validity evidence and used multiple sources for data (i.e. self-reports, teachers and peers), but limitations within the design and data-set prevented us from using more advanced, detailed analyses. Nevertheless, we believe that these findings contribute to research on shyness/social withdrawal by providing insights into potential socio-emotional characteristics and school adjustment of socially withdrawn early adolescents in Russia and perhaps in similar contexts.

Note

1. 'Federal law of 21 July 2007 No. 194-FZ' (in Russian). Rossiyskaya gazeta (official publication). <http://www.rg.ru/2007/07/25/obrazovanie-izmenenia-dok.html>. Retrieved 2011-11-25.

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