International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 2012, 4(3), 573-591.

Socioemotional Competence, Self-Perceptions, and Receptive Vocabulary in Shy Canadian Children*

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Received: June 2012 / Revised: June 2012 / Accepted: July 2012

Abstract

Given existing gendered stereotypic assumptions regarding shyness and children's school competencies, this study explored relations among socioemotional competencies, self-perceptions, and receptive vocabulary in shy children. Ninety-one Canadian children (52 girls, 39 boys; 5-8 years) were classified as shy (n = 26) based on teachers' behavioural ratings (n = 8), and completed self-perception and vocabulary measures. Compared to their non-shy peers, shy children reported lower levels of self-worth, and were rated by their teachers as more aggressive. Shy girls scored the lowest on the vocabulary task, and received the highest teacher emotional competence ratings. Shy boys scored the highest on the vocabulary task, and received the lowest emotionally competence ratings. Gender-role stereotypes and shyness and their educational implications are discussed.

Keywords: Shyness, Socioemotional Understanding, Middle Childhood, Language

Introduction

Across educational and psychological research domains, there has been a rise in the interest in the emotional and social aspects of learning (Bruner, 1996; Rubin, Burgess & Coplan, 2002). Increasingly, recent research with young school children shows that shyness or social withdrawal may play a significant role in children's socioemotional and cognitive development (see Rubin et al., 2009, for a recent and extensive review). Despite the theoretical and practical implications of investigating the inner and social world of the shy child, empirical support for the gendered links between children's social withdrawal and socioemotional competence remains sparse and existing findings are inconsistent and variable (Chang, 2003; Rubin & Asendorpf, 1993; Rubin, Coplan & Bowker, 2009; Wichmann, Coplan & Daniels, 2004).

* This research was supported in part by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant (#410-2003-0950) awarded to the author.
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ISSN:1307-9298

www.iejee.com

Thus, the main purpose of this research was to explore gendered relations among socioemotional competence, self-perceptions, and language abilities in shy Canadian school aged children. In particular, building on psychocultural theories of self-system and social behavior (e.g., Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Maccoby, 1998), this research explores teachers' perceptions regarding the mental states, motivations, emotions, and socio-communicative competence of shy/quiet children in their classrooms. Moreover, given past research conducted in North America suggesting that shy behaviors may be less tolerated and more problematic for boys than for girls (Rubin & Coplan, 2004), gender differences were also explored within a Canadian context.

Role of Gender, Self-Perceptions, and Language in Shy Children's Socioemotional Competencies

A substantial part of children's emotion understanding is mediated through language processes in particular cultural settings such as parent-child conversations in the home, or peer-peer and teacher-child conversations in schools (Kitayama, Markus & Matsumoto, 1995). A psychocultural approach to emotion assumes that language and emotion development are interdependent and have their origins in social interactions with more skilled partners (Gergen, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). That is, cultural frames or culturally shared systems of meaning including gender help to shape emotional experience and one's developing sense of self through the social interactions and communication with others (Lutz, 1988; Maccoby, 1988).

Regarding the emotional competence and language in middle childhood, many researchers (e.g., Harre, 1986; Saarni, 1999) claim that emotion words play a large role in the child's conceptualization of emotion. Thus, according to Kopp (1989), emotion language "provides children with an especially powerful tool for understanding emotions" (p. 349). Several recent studies highlight the importance of language in children's emotional understanding. For example, researchers suggest that the links are complex, especially those concerning emotion understanding across gender and countries (Harris, 1989). More recently, Gergen (2001) has extended the notion that language and emotion are inextricably linked, by proposing that people should create the emotional forms or scripts that are essential to encourage people to take responsibility for their actions.

Given the strong conceptual links among language, self, and emotion, it is surprising that relatively few researchers have examined the role language competence plays in the development of socially withdrawn children's socioemotional competence. However, some researchers, have assessed emotion understanding in the absence of any general language measure (e.g., Laible & Thompson, 1998). Consistent with past studies which often include standardized measures of language competence, (e.g., Carroll & Steward, 1984; Dunn & Hughes, 1998), the present study investigated receptive, vocabulary ability. Few researchers have investigated the role language plays in shy children's emotional competence and self-perceptions from a psychocultural perspective (for exceptions see Capps et al., 1992; Russell & Paris, 1994; Harris, 1989). Given Maccoby's (1999) conceptualization of gender as a culture, a psychocultural approach to the study of socioemotional competence could help to examine the gendered links among shyness, language, and self-perceptions. Past research on socioemotional competence among older children and adults suggests that girls and women exhibit a higher level of socioemotional competence than do boys and men (Bybee, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1994).

Regarding the role of gender in children's socioemotional competence, some studies reveal contradictory findings. For example, compared to young boys, young girls have been found to exhibit a greater expression of pride after success on a task (Stipek, Recchia & McClintic, 1992), and to express greater emotional regulation and displays of shame and guilt

(Kochanska. 1994). In contrast, some studies have failed to find gender differences among emotions of pride, shame, and guilt in school-aged children (Griffin, 1995; Kornilaki & Chlouverakis, 2004). The reasons for these contractions may be due to either conceptual issues or definitional issues such as different definitions of complex, moral emotions such as pride and shame. Differences could also be due to differences to varied methods as well, as well as the data analysis procedures. Accordingly, given the complex gendered patterns of associations among socioemotional competence, self-perceptions, and language, (Denham, 1998), more research is needed on individual differences on these variables among shy children.

Self-Concept, Socioemotional Competence, and Shyness

Although shyness is often defined as the reluctance to engage in interpersonal interactions, it also implies a metacognitive or evaluative component. For example, the relation between shyness and social anxiety or embarrassment, suggests an evaluation of the self against some kind of ideal self (Lewis, 1995). This often negative evaluation component may be linked to metacognitive factors such as the ability to reflect on one's own thinking and self-image, in addition to various social-cultural factors such as gender and ethnicity. Given this metacognitive definition of shyness, the concept of shyness in middle childhood needs to be examined from a psychocultural perspective (Bruner, 2006). That is, researchers need to explore individual differences among the variables, and the influence of sociocultural factors such as gender and language.

Some researchers approach the concept of self and emotion in middle childhood from a psychocultural perspective which defines the self as a multidimensional, constantly changing process or system, co-created by conversation and context (Bruner & Kalmar, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1994). Children's views of themselves as human beings, and also of a particular gender, is transmitted and reinforced by various social agents including family, peers, and the mass media. Parental influences have received the most attention with a number of North American studies showing that maternal comments and modeling influence preadolescent girls' self-perceptions and attitudes concerning body image and self-views (e.g., Smolak, Levine & Schemer, 1999).

However, the majority of research on self-conception deals with children's verbal and written accounts in the forms of interviews, self-report questionnaires, and narratives who are considered typical or not viewed as specifically shy or socially withdrawn (see Harter, 1999 for a review). Few studies examine the connections between shy children's self-perceptions, social and emotional competence and language ability and self-story within the school context during the ages of 6-10 or middle childhood. Developmentally, middle childhood often involves the commencement of schooling experiences that represent children's interactions with teachers, peers, and others (Harter, 1999). The social experiences during this transitional time provides an opportunity for children to co-create various sense of selves with significant others in various aspects of their lives and to develop in that they may develop different selves with their peers, parents, teachers, etc. (Bruner, 1996). Given this complex social context of the school environment, and the possible influence of peers and teachers on children's self-perceptions, socioemotional competence and language ability may differ for children considered to be shy or socially withdrawn.

Despite the claims that suggest girls possess a less coherent and positive self-theory than boys (e.g., Maccoby, 1998; Tavris, 1992), and the empirical evidence that preschool-aged girls show more frequent mental state talk than boys (Hughes & Dunn, 1999), differential gender links between self cognitions and socioemotional development, especially with shy and non-shy children during middle childhood have not yet been studied in depth. For example, little

is known about the connections between shy children's emotional understanding or the ability to discern one's own and others' emotional states and to use the vocabulary of emotion effectively (Saarni, 1999) and shy children's perceptions of self, social and emotional experiences and language ability, especially during the middle childhood years. Thus, this study examined to examine the complex web of correlates among shy and non-shy children's socioemotional competence, self-perceptions, and language.

Related to self-perceptions, another aspect of metacognitive ability involves emotional competence. Emotional competence refers to the ability to express, regulate, and understand emotions (Denham, 1998). When functioning optimally, these three sets of skills are intricately interdependent and work together in an integrated way. Emotional expressiveness is the ability to express and/or experience emotions such as positive affect. Emotion regulation refers to the "extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions… to accomplish one's goals" (Thompson, 1994, p. 27-28). Finally, emotion understanding or knowledge refers to the ability to identify the expression on a peer's face or to comprehend the emotions elicited by common social situations (Denham, 1998; Denham et al., 2003). As an integral part of emotional competence, for the purpose of this article, I have chosen to use Saarni's definition of emotion understanding as the ability to discern one's own and others' emotional states and to use the vocabulary of emotion effectively.

Gendered Relations among Self-Perceptions, Socioemotional Competence, and Language in Shy Children

Teachers play a crucial role in both the gender role socialization and co-construction of children' social-cognitive and linguistic abilities (Arbeau & Cooplan. 2007; Purkey, 2000). However, surprisingly few researchers have studied the links among teachers' perceptions of shy children's socioemotional competence, children's self-perceptions and language ability. In general, the empirical evidence on the role of gender in emotional competence remains inconsistent and fairly scarce. In brief, past research has found that girls outperform boys in emotion understanding tasks and receive higher emotional competence teacher ratings (Cutting & Dunn, 1999; Parent et al., 1999), as do middle-school children (Bybee, 1998) and adults (Brody, 1999). Although researchers have claimed that girls seem to internalize earlier and more completely the message that it matters how people feel, some studies have demonstrated either no gender differences exist in emotion competence (e.g., Banerjee & Yuill, 1999; Denham, Cook & Zoller, 1992) or that school-aged boys outperform girls (Laible & Thompson, 1998; Whissell & Nicholson, 1991).

Regarding gender differences among shy/non-shy children, there is accumulating evidence to suggest that due to societal expectations, shyness may hold more negative psychological implications for boys than for girls (e.g., Rubin et al., 2002). That is, given societal stereotypic gender-role expectations, some adults may perceive shyness as a more stereotypic "feminine" trait and thus some adults may be more likely to accept and reward shyness in girls as compared to boys. In contrast, for boys, some adults may perceive shyness as a negative personality characteristic, and shyness may be more likely to be discouraged among boys as compared to girls. However, the majority of researchers interested in exploring gender differences have either a) investigated parent-child conversations regarding emotions, but not teachers' beliefs of students' emotional competence (Parent et al., 1999); or b) investigated teachers' beliefs and expectations of their children's emotional development, but not the connections to language ability and self-perceptions (Hughes, Deater-Deckard & Cutting, 1999), or c) investigated self-perceptions, socioemotional

competence and language abilities in typical children (i.e., labelled as not shy) (Verschueren, Buyck, Moarcoen, 2001).

The Present Study

To date, there remains little research on the gender-related differences among shy children's socioemotional and language competencies, and self-perceptions within a Canadian context (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008). Given this gap in the literature, the present study focused on the role that gender and shyness play in Canadian children' socioemotional competencies, self-perceptions, and receptive vocabulary ability. To explore the emotional landscape of children's social worlds, and illustrate the gendered relations among emotional competence, self-perceptions, and language. Given the lack of studies that compare similar classrooms across US and Canada – especially as the population of North America continues to expand and diversify ethnically and morally. Thus, within the Canadian school context only (Denham et al., 2003), this research aims to promote educational programs that foster the foundation of the learner where the child and teacher collaborate in a learning program to foster socioemotional competencies in Canadian school-aged girls and boys.

This study investigated the various conceptual mechanisms that may underlie this association between social cognitions and social withdrawal. For example, global biases and deficits in sociognitive processing may contribute generally towards social maladjustment. Researchers suggest that socially withdrawn children may differ in their ability to act upon their prosocial cognitions due to poor emotional regulation and social inhibition (Rubin et al., 2002). That is, shy children may process social situations similarly to non-shy peers, but lack the ability to sufficiently regulate their emotions in the face of arousing social situations. Thus, as Wichmann, Coplan, and Daniels (2004) suggest, shy Canadian children may evidence a performance rather than a competence deficit. Building on previous literature that shows shy children may be more likely to be more depressed, anxious and hold more negative self-perceptions than their non-shy agemates (Rubin, Burgess & Coplan, 2002), the present study explored the connections among self-perceptions, socioemotional competencies, and receptive vocabulary ability in Canadian school-aged children. Perhaps such negative self-perceptions or lack of self-worth and confidence may underlie deficits in effective social performance.

This study explored the role gender plays in the connections among socioemotional competence, self-perceptions, and receptive vocabulary ability among shy or socially withdrawn children. This study explored shy and non-shy children's responses (i.e., general pattern of responses and gender-related differences) regarding: 1) self-perceptions; 2) teachers' perceptions of students' social and emotional competence, and 3) language competence as defined by receptive vocabulary ability. Based on past gender research (Saarni; 1999), gender-related differences in the findings were expected to reflect stereotypic gender role expectations. That is, given that social reticience or passivity, emotion understanding and vocabulary ability are considered to be stereotypically feminine traits (Maccoby, 1998), girls were expected to receive significantly higher teacher ratings than boys on socioemotional competence and score higher than boys on the vocabulary task. Further, based on past research which suggests that shy boys are a greater risk for socioemotional problems than shy girls (Coplan & Armer. 2005), this study explored the question of whether or not this gender difference would be accentuated among children rated as shy by their teachers? For example, it was hypothesized that shy girls compared to shy boys would be rated by teachers as more socially competent, report a more positive sense of self, and score higher on the vocabulary task. Similarly, it was hypothesized that correlational patterns

found among children' socioemotional competence. self-perceptions, and vocabulary ability would differ according to gender and shyness.

Method

Participants

As part of a larger study of children' s social understanding and social behaviour during the middle childhood years, 91 children (52 females, *M* = 6y, 4m; 39 males, *M* = 6 y; 3m**)** and their teachers (*N*=8, females) were recruited from two schools within a mainly English-speaking, Euro-Canadian, middle SES population, in Ontario, Canada.

Measures

Self-Concept. To assess children's perceptions of their competencies, subscales from Harter's (1985) Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC) were used.

Based on past literature (Harter, 1999), the present study focused on three aspects that some researchers consider particularly relevant to children's sense of self including: perceived behavioural conduct (6 items, e.g., "how well-behaved do you think you are," Cronbach's alpha = .81), physical appearance (6 items, e.g., "how good-looking do you think you are," Cronbach's alpha = .79), and global self-worth (6 items, e,g., "how happy are you being who you are?" Cronbach's alpha = .89)

Teacher ratings of children's social relational competencies. Standardized, psychometrically robust rating scales were used to assess teachers' ratings of children's social behaviour, physical and psychological or relational or social aggression (Crick & Nelson, 2002; Harter, 1985; Ladd & Profilet, 1996). Borrowing from Cassidy and Asher's (1992) teacher rating scale (Child Behavior Scale), teachers were asked to rate children's behaviour on a 59-item, 3-point scale on dimensions of aggressiveness (7 items, e.g.,"fights with other children,"Cronbach's alpha = .79), disruptiveness/hyperactivity (4 items, e.g., "restless, runs about or jumps up and down, doesn't keep still), Cronbach's alpha = .94), shyness/withdrawal (e.g., 17 items composite score including items to assess peer exclusion (7 items), anxiety and fearfulness (4 items), and asocial with peers (6 items) Cronbach's alpha for composite score = .86) and sociability (e.g., "Cooperative with peers," Cronbach's alpha = .86).

Teachers' ratings of children's social behaviour was assessed with the Children's Social Behavior Scale – Teacher Form (Crick, 1996; Harter, 1985). This 15 item rating form assesses children on a 5-point scale regarding relational aggression (7 items e.g., "This child tries to exclude certain peers from peer group activities,"Cronbach's alpha =.92); physical aggression (4 items, "This child hits, shoves, or pushes peers," Cronbach's alpha = .78); and Prosocial Behavior (4 items, "This child is kind to peers," Cronbach's alpha = .89). In addition, teachers rated children's academic performance on specific disciplines such as language arts, sciences, mathematics, arts (1-item each with the child rated on a scale from 1 to 5. Scores were summed to create an aggregate, 4-item academic competence scale, Cronbach's alpha = .93).

*Teacher ratings of emotional competence***.** (Cassidy et al., 1992; Dunn & Hughes, 1998)**.** Due to the dearth of teacher rating scales of emotional maturity of school-aged children, a rating scale based on Denham's (1998) characterization of emotional competence was designed for this study (Children's Emotional Competence Scale for Teachers – CECS-T). In particular, teachers completed a 12-item rating scale of children's behaviour within the classroom (e.,g., "this child understands others' emotional states such as knowing that the teacher's smile as she comes in to the classroom means that she is feeling happy"; Cronbach's alpha = .88).

*Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-III, Dunn & Dunn, 1997)***.** This standardized pencil and paper task assesses children's general verbal ability. This test requires children to point to the pictures that correctly illustrate vocabulary items read by the researcher. High correlations have been found to exist between scores on the PPVT with scores on the verbal components of standardized intelligence tests. The PPVT is frequently used within developmental and educational research.

Design and Procedure

Upon receiving ethical clearance from university and school officials, this study consisted of two stages; the first stage consisted of a group, in-class session where children were group administered tasks regarding self-perceptions. Demographic information pertaining to family structure was obtained through parent questionnaire. The second stage involved an individual session in which children were administered a standardized language measure. Following the second stage of the study, teachers completed the questionnaires individually, during their own time, regarding children's social behaviours and socioemotional competencies.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

An extreme-groups method was used to categorize children as either shy or non-shy based Cassidy and Asher's (1992) Child Behaviour Scale scores. Shy children had social-withdrawal scores in the top thirty percentile and disruptiveness/aggression scores in the bottom thirty percentile (n = 26; 16 girls, 10 boys), with the remainder of the children representing the comparison group (n = 65, 36 girls, 28 boys).

To address the ongoing debate in the literature as to whether or not shyness should be conceptualized as either a category to which one does or does not belong (Kagan & Snidman, 2004), or as a dimension to which an individual varies on a continuum (see Crozier, 2001, for a review), bivariate correlations were tested with shyness/social withdrawal and the main outcome variables with shyness as a continuous variable (not a dimension or categorical variable). Among boys only (n=39), teachers' ratings of emotional competence and shyness/social withdrawal ratings were negatively related, whereas among girls (n=52), there was no relation (-.411, .055 respectively, $p < .05$). Among boys only, shyness/social withdrawal ratings were associated with relational aggression, physical aggression and social behaviour (r = -.323, .55, -.35 respectively).

Family Background, Teacher Ratings, and Vocabulary Ability

Sociometric status and family structure variables also revealed distinct patterns of associations. Overall, both the mother and father's education level was not related to children's vocabulary ability. However, separate correlational analyses conducted on the shy/non-shy groups showed a marginal positive correlation between mother's education level and vocabulary for shy boys only ($r(9) = .55$, $p < 01$). Among girls only, the number of older siblings was positively associated with receptive vocabulary ability ($r(50) = .28$, $p < .05$). That is, as the number of older siblings in girls' families increased, their scores on the receptive vocabulary task also increased reflecting a higher receptive vocabulary ability. Among boys only, the number of older siblings was negatively associated with teacher ratings of school academic competence ($r(37) = -.43$, $p < .01$). That is, teachers' ratings of academic competence increased as the reported number of boys' older siblings decreased.

Table 1. *Means, Standard Deviations as a Function of Shyness and Gender*

Variables	Girls		Boys		Main effects		
	Shy (n=16) *M (SD)*	Non-shy (n=36) *M (SD)*	Shy (n=10) *M (SD)*	Non-shy (n=28) *M (SD)*	Gender *F*(3, 91)	Shyness *F*(3, 91)	Interaction *F*(3, 91)
1. Behavioral Conduct	18.31 (3.84)	19.56 (2.68)	19.10 (2.86)	19.50 (4.36)	.19	.97	.26
2. Appearance	17.06 (4.37)	18.90 (3.50)	18.40 (3.94)	17.04 (4.60)	.07	.06	2.73
3. Global Self-Worth	17.18 (4.03)	18.28 (3.63)	19.5 (2.68)	18.14 (3.79)	2.07	.11	2.55
4. Prosocial	16.88 (2.83) $_{a}$	16.63 (2.84) $_{a}$	12.30 (3.13) $_{b}$	15.07 (3.56) $_{a}$	17.26***	2.94 ^{M}	4.14*
5. Relational Aggression	27.06 (4.19) $_{a}$	26.40 (4.92) $_{a}$	19.10 (4.43) $_{ab}$	25.11 (5.62) $_{ac}$	15.07***	5.04 *	7.76**
6. Physical Aggression	5.38 (2.62) $_{a}$	4.86 (2.11) $_{a}$	7.06 (2.75) $_{b}$	4.96 (1.75) $_{a}$	5.01*	9.18**	2.90 ^{M}
7. Emotional Competence	37.94 (5.40) $_{a}$	37.67 (6.57) $_{a}$	26.80 (5.65) $_{b}$	35.57 (7.14) $_{a}$	2.14	.88	8.60**
8. Academic Competence	12.62 (3.30)	11.91 (9.2)	9.40 (3.71)	10.75 (3.63)	4.52	.10	1.70
9. PPVT 98.25 (17.55)	103.14 (12.59)	98.25 (17.54)	103.46 (14.90)	1.11	.04	3.12^{M}	

Note. [1] = Means with different subscripts differ at the $p < .05$ level. *** $p < .001$.M = p <.20.

Table 2. *Correlations Among Self-Perceptions, PPVT, and Teacher Ratings of Socioemotional Competence*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Self-Behavioral Conduct	---	.50***	.49	.19	.02	-.16	.04	.11	.13
2. Self-Physical Appearance		---	.38***	.01	.06	-.06	.10	.13	.00
3. Global Self-Worth			---	.04	-.06	-.23*	-.02	.09	.04
4. Teacher - Prosocial				---	.28***	-.24*	.55***	.16	.01
5. Teacher - Relational Aggression					---	-.36**	.97***	.37***	.18 M
6. Teacher - Physical Aggression						---	-.40***	-.03	-.03
7. Teacher - Emotional Competence							---	.37***	.19 M
8. Teacher - Academic Competence								---	.01
9. PPVT									---

Note. $N = 91$. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, $M = p < .10$

Gender-Related Differences Across Shy/Non-Shy Groups

Table 1 shows gender differences among various measures and teacher ratings, were assessed by 2 x 2 ANOVAS (Gender x Group) performed on the PPVT and CEST. Marginal interaction effects (Gender x Shy Group) were found for the PPVT (F (1, 90) = 3.165, $p < .10$) with shy boys scoring higher than shy girls (M=110.6 and 98.3, $p < .10$ respectively). Significant interaction effects (Gender X Shy Group) were found for the CECS-T (F (1, 90) = 8.60, $p < .01$), with shy girls (M=37.94) scoring higher than shy boys (M=26.80).

Examination of the means of the study variables revealed significant and marginal differences between the four groups (shy boys, non-shy boys, shy girls, non-shy girls). The main results are summarized in the following section.

Gender differences among PPVT and Emotion Competence Scale Teacher (CECS-T) ratings revealed that shy boys received the lowest teacher ratings regarding emotional competence, whereas non-shy boys, came third, and girls received the highest scores (no distinction between shy/non-shy). Regarding vocabulary scores, boys received the highest language scores (no distinction between shy/non-shy), followed next by non-shy girls with the shy girls receiving the lowest vocabulary scores.

Across the four groups**,** shy girls received the highest emotional competence teacher ratings (M=37.9) and scored the lowest on the vocabulary task (M=98.3). In contrast, shy boys scored the highest on the vocabulary task (M=110.6), and received the lowest emotional competence ratings (M=26.8), (the reverse pattern compared to shy girls). Shy girls reported the lowest feelings of self-worth (M=18.6), whereas across all four groups, non-shy girls reported the highest feelings of self-worth (M=20.17). No differences occurred between perceived self-worth among shy (M=19.7) and non-shy boys (M=19.04).

Teacher Ratings of Prosocial and Aggressive Behaviour (CSBS-T)

To test for group differences in teacher ratings of prosocial and aggressive behaviors, a two-way MANOVA was conducted with Gender (Girl X Boy) and Group (Shy X Non-Shy) as the independent variables and the scores for the teacher rating scales served as the dependent variables (Relational or social aggression, Physical aggression, and prosocial aggression score). Means and standard deviations are displayed in Table 1. Results indicated a significant multivariate effect (Wilk's Lambda) for Group (F(3, 87) = 3.74, $p < .05$), Gender (F(3, 87) = 7.38, $p < .001$), and Gender X Group Interactions (F(3, 87) = 3.22, $p < .05$. Examination of the univariate results for gender revealed that compared to boys, girls were rated by their teachers as more aggressive, and that overall, compared to non-shy children, shy children were rated by their teachers as more aggressive (see Table 1).

Further examination of the means showed that shy girls were rated as the most relationally or socially aggressive, whereas shy boys were rated as the most physically aggressive and the least relationally aggressive (see Table 1). Interestingly, shy girls also received the highest prosocial teacher ratings compared to shy boys who received the lowest prosocial ratings.

Vocabulary, Emotional competence, Self-Worth and Gender

Table 2 shows the bivariate pearson intercorrelations for the main variables for the whole sample (N=91). A marginal positive correlation was found between PPVT scores, emotional competence and relational aggression ratings which illustrates how general vocabulary ability is marginally related to how teachers' view children as emotionally competence and relationally aggressive. Separate correlational analyses conducted on boys and girls, and also on the four groups (shy girls, shy boys, non-shy girls, non-shy boys) revealed a significant positive correlation between vocabulary ability and emotion understanding for girls only

(shy and non-shy; r(50) = .34, $p < .01$; boys $r(37) = .07$, ns), which suggests that higher ratings of emotional competence are related to higher levels of general vocabulary ability.

Among the total group of boys (shy and non-shy), teacher ratings of emotional competence (CEST) were marginally negatively related to boys' global self-worth ($r(37) = -.28$, $p < .10$). In contrast, among the total group of girls (shy and non-shy), teacher ratings of emotional competence were marginally positively related to feelings of global self-worth ($r(50) = .24$, $p < .10$). *Perceptions of Self-worth, Vocabulary ability, and Teachers' Ratings of Academic competence: Gender Differences and Patterns*

Table 1 also shows the ANOVA results illustrating that shy girls received the highest emotional competence ratings with shy girls (M=37.94) receiving significantly higher teacher ratings of emotional competence compared to shy boys (M=9.40). (see Table 1). Although there were no significant gender differences, further examination of the mean self-perception scores showed interesting patterns among the self-perceptions scores across the four groups. In particular, shy girls reported the lowest global self-worth (M=17.19) and shy boys the highest (M=19.30). Similarly, although no significant differences were found across groups and gender, interesting patterns emerged across the four groups regarding teachers' ratings of academic competence and PPVT scores. Specifically, shy girls received the highest teacher academic competence ratings (M=12.62) and scored the lowest on the PPVT (M=93.25), whereas the opposite pattern emerged for shy boys. That is, shy boys received the lowest academic competence ratings (M=9.40) and scored the highest on the PPVT vocabulary task (M=103.46).

Additional correlations conducted for the shy groups (both girls and boys) showed that a significant correlation was found between shy boys' global self-worth and their scores on the PPVT ($r(8) = .764$, $p < .05$). That is, shy boys' perceptions of their general self-worth, or how happy they are with themselves, increased as their language skills increased. Further gendered patterns of associations among shy and non-shy groups revealed that non-shy groups revealed that non-shy boys' perceptions of self-worth were not related to general language ability ($r(37) = -.035$, *ns*). Among shy and non-shy girls, PPVT scores were not related to global self-worth ($r(15) = -.07$, $r(34) = .05$, *ns*, respectively).

Table 2 shows the intercorrelations among the main variables for the total sample. Table 2 shows a significant negative correlation between children's perceptions of global self-worth and teacher ratings of physical aggression ($r(89) = -.28$, $p < .001$). That is, the higher the teachers rated the children on exhibiting acts of physical aggression, the lower the children rated themselves regarding global self-worth. Although Table 2 shows that no correlation was found between teacher ratings of relational aggression and global self-worth for the total sample (N=91), further correlational analyses conducted on each group showed that significantly different gender correlational patterns emerged for girls and boys regarding these variables (Fisher's Z test, $z = 2.85$, $p < .05$). More specifically, a significant negative correlation was found between teachers' perceptions of relational aggression and perceived global self-worth for the total group of boys ($r(37) = -.34$, $p < .05$) as compared to a nonsignificant relation for the total group of girls ($r(50) = .23$, *ns*). That is, for boys only, higher teacher ratings of relational or social aggression were related to lower scores of perceived global self-worth.

Regarding associations between teachers' ratings of academic competence and children's perceived self-worth, among the total group of girls, a significant positive relation was found between teacher ratings of academic competence and perceived self-worth ($r(50) = .34$, $p < .05$; for boys, $r(38) = -.19$ *ns*). Fisher's Z test revealed that these correlations differed significantly ($z = 2.41$, $p < .05$). That is, girls but not boys who viewed themselves positively

were rated by their teachers as more academically competent. Further correlational analyses conducted within-gender groups revealed significant positive relations for shy girls' only (r(14) .624, $p < .01$). No relations were found between boys' (shy and non-shy) and non-shy girls' perceived self-worth and teachers' ratings of their academic ability.

For girls only, a significant positive relation was found between teacher ratings of academic competence and perceived self-worth (r(50) = .34, $p < .05$; for boys, r (38) = -.19 *ns*). Fisher's Z test revealed that these correlations differed significantly ($z = 2.41$, $p < .05$). That is, girls with positive self-views were rated by their teachers as more academically competent. Further correlational analyses conducted within-gender groups revealed significant positive relations for shy girls' only (r(14) .624, $p < .01$). No relations were found between boys' (shy and non-shy) and non-shy girls' perceived self-worth and teachers' ratings of their academic ability.

Table 2 shows a marginally significant positive relation (r(89) = .19, $p <$. 10) between teacher ratings of children's emotional competence and PPVT scores, suggesting that children who received higher teacher ratings of emotional competence were more likely to score higher on the receptive vocabulary task. Separate correlational analyses conducted for girls and boys on these variables revealed a significant positive relation for girls only (r(50) = .39, $p <$ .01; boys (r(38) =.08, *ns*).

Discussion

This study explored the role gender plays in the associations among teachers' perceptions of socially withdrawn or shy Canadian children's socioemotional competence, children's self-perceptions, and receptive language ability. Findings suggest that the child's gender may influence teachers' perceptions of socioemotional competence. In particular, significantly different patterns of associations were found among children's self-perceptions and teacher ratings of relational aggression, emotional competence, and academic competence for shy/withdrawn girls and boys. Significant gender differences were also found among patterns of associations between relational aggression and emotional competence, self-perceptions, and receptive vocabulary. The theoretical and educational implications of these findings are discussed below.

Teachers' Perceptions of Children's Socioemotional Competencies and Self-Perceptions

The gender-related differences in the relations among teachers' perceptions of children's socioemotional competencies and self-perceptions suggest that shy girls may be more influenced and/or sensitive to teachers' perceptions and expectations than shy boys. Findings suggest that shy girls' self-perceptions may be influenced by teacher ratings of academic competence and this is consistent with Dunn's (2005) claim that a sophisticated ability to understand mental states and emotions in others may have some psychological costs as well as benefits in that some children may be more sensitive to teachers' criticisms as compared to other children who do not have such a well developed ability. In the present study, given that the shy girls were rated by their teachers as the most emotionally competent compared to shy and non-shy girls and boys, perhaps shy girls' self-perceptions are more likely to be influenced by their teachers' comments (both positive and negative). Overall, these findings are also consistent with past research that suggests teachers' expectations and beliefs of students may influence students' self-perceptions and behaviors within the classroom (e.g, Curtis & Altmann, 1977; Purkey, 2000). However, as the present results illustrate, children's perceptions and teacher ratings were not always in agreement, and this lack of concordance needs to be addressed in future research as this difference in perceptions may have implications for students' learning.

The present results also support the past research which suggests that compared to shy girls, shy boys may be the greatest at-risk for the development of socioemotional difficulties (e.g., Coplan & Armer, 2005). Also, the present findings suggest that language may play a larger role in shy boys' developing sense of self-worth. That is, given that shy boys scored the highest on general language ability, but were rated as the least emotionally competent by their teachers and received the highest aggression ratings but the lowest prosocial ratings, and that positive relations between receptive vocabulary ability and emotional competence were found for shy boys only supports Coplan & Armer's (2005) claims that increased vocabulary ability might be particularly helpful for shyer children (especially boys) in terms of facilitating social interaction. Interestingly, the reverse pattern was found shy girls in that they scored the lowest on receptive vocabulary scores, and received the highest prosocial and relational aggression ratings.

Teacher Perceptions and Students' Perceived Self-Worth

How do we explain the finding that the relation between teachers' perceptions of children's emotional competence and children's perceptions of self-worth was positive for girls' self-worth, but this relation was negative for boys? As discussed earlier in this paper, from a psychocultural perspective, these findings could be explained in terms of North American stereotypic societal gender-role expectations. That is, perhaps the findings reflect North American, particularly Canadian stereotypic societal gender-role expectations that place a greater value on emotional competence among women as compared to men. Given that girls have learned to expect that understanding emotional worlds is an expectation of their gender, competence in this "emotion reading skill" would be more likely to increase someone's sense of self-worth. However, if this skill is considered gender-inappropriate, emotional competence may have a negative influence on a boy's sense of self-worth.

Shyness, Language, and Gender-Related Differences in Emotional Competence

The present findings suggest that the complex connections exist among receptive vocabulary ability, perceived self-worth, and teacher ratings of emotional competence may differ according to gender and shyness. Such findings support previous research (e.g, Cutting & Dunn, 1999; de Villiers, 1999) and theorists' claims that language and social interaction play significant roles in children' emotion understanding (e.g., Bruner, 1996). However, gender analyses revealed that the relation between vocabulary ability and perceived self-worth remained significant for shy boys only. Thus, compared to girls, general vocabulary ability may play a larger role in boys' self-development.

The results from the present study partially support research that suggests that shy boys might have greater psychological costs due to cultural stigmas attached to stereotypic gender-role expectations and behaviour (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008), and furthers this claim by showing that there may also be some psychological costs for shy girls. Thus, as mentioned earlier, the present findings add to the growing body of contradictory empirical evidence regarding gender differences in the experiences of shyness, self-perceptions, and socioemotional competence in middle childhood.

The language differences across shy and non-shy girls and boys, particularly the finding that shy girls scored the lowest on the language measure whereas shy boys scored the highest supports past research which shows that some socially withdrawn children may experience restrictions in their verbal communication (Schneider, 1999). In contrast to past research (e.g., Rubin, Chen & Hymel, 1993), shy boys scored the highest on the self-perceptions, and the highest on the language measure, but the lowest emotional competence ratings. Further, teachers rated shy boys as the most aggressive group, and according to the self-

socialization theory (Maccoby, 1998), these teacher perceptions may also influence the boys' self-perceptions and possible aggressive behaviours.

Past research may help to explain the question of why would vocabulary ability be linked to perceived self-worth for shy boys only, and why did shy girls score the lowest on the receptive vocabulary task, whereas shy boys scored the highest? Although Cutting and Dunn (1999) found a similar result (receptive vocabulary ability was related to false belief understanding for boys only), they claimed that the finding required replication before it could be interpreted. The present findings suggest that perhaps receptive vocabulary ability plays a larger role in boys' self development than in girls. Thus, although boys may not be able to express their emotion knowledge verbally, perhaps they are capable of understanding the emotion concepts. In contrast, perhaps expressive language ability plays a greater role in girls' emotional development and sense of self. This finding also supports Coplan and Armer's (2005) claim that increased vocabulary ability might be particularly helpful for shyer children (especially boys) in terms of facilitating healthy social interactions.

The finding that girls, as compared to shy boys, receive higher ratings in emotional and social competence and academic ratings but also receive the highest relational aggression rating support the ongoing debate as to whether or not gender plays a role in shy children's social and emotional competencies. For example, past research that has shown school-aged girls score higher than boys on emotion understanding, particularly the complex, moral emotions (Bybee, 1998; Cutting & Dunn, 1999), but contradicts research that found American preschool-aged boys scored higher than girls (Laible & Thompson, 1998). This gender-related difference also supports related studies within the United Kingdom that have shown that girls scored higher than boys in emotion understanding (e.g., Cutting & Dunn, 1999). Thus, the present study adds to the growing number of studies that demonstrate the contradictory research on the gender-related differences in the area of mental state attribution or psychological mindedness and the psychosocial implications of such an ability (Hughes & Dunn, 1999).

Such findings also support the notion that perhaps sophisticated, or advanced emotional competence may have both intrapersonal and interpersonal costs and benefits (Cutting & Dunn, 1999; Sutton et al, 1999). For example, regarding interpersonal implications, children with a highly advanced emotional understanding ability may also use this ability to harm others such as excluding certain peers from a group by developing friendship with someone else (Sutton, et al., 1999). As Dunn (1995) reminds us, a child's ability to understand someone's emotional state does not tell us how that child may choose to behave socially. Another explanation for the contradictory teacher ratings about shy girls' behaviours is perhaps that due to the subtle nature of relational aggression (e.g., smiling at someone while writing her/him a hate letter?), teachers reported contradictory behaviours exhibited by girls in the classroom (Crick & Nelson, 2002).

Parent-child and/or teacher-child emotion talk can also be considered as a possible explanation. As Fivush (1989) found in her study, mothers focused more on causal explanations of emotions with young boys and used more emotion labels than explanations with girls. Perhaps such gendered emotion parent-child talk influenced the responses of the children in the present study. That is, perhaps the mothers in the present study focused more on emotions in conversations with their daughters as compared to their sons. During the grade school years, in addition to parents, teachers also play a crucial role in shaping their students' self-concepts and competencies (Denham, 1998; Purkey, 2000). For example, educators and parents could serve as socioemotional and linguistic "coaches" by providing a supportive scaffold (in the Vygotskian sense) that could be used to facilitate children's

socioemotional and linguistic competence, which in turn may lead to a greater sense of self-worth.

Implications and Future Directions

The illustration of gender patterns among socioemotional competence, self-perceptions, and receptive vocabulary ability highlights the need for future research to include the role of gender and language when exploring the connections among shyness, self-perceptions, and teacher ratings of students' social and emotional competencies during the middle childhood years. The positive association found between shy boys' vocabulary ability and their perceived self-worth suggests that receptive vocabulary ability may play a supporting role in boys' developing sense of self-worth during middle childhood. That is, although language may provide a vehicle through which the theories of self, others' minds and feelings are created (e.g., Bruner & Kalmar, 1997), our findings suggest that receptive vocabulary ability may be of greater use in the creation of self-scripts or schemas for shy boys than shy girls. Language played a stronger role in teachers' ratings of girls' emotional competencies than boys – both non-shy and shy. Consequently, researchers and educators need to draw from psycho-linguistic and cross-cultural literature (e.g., Salovey & Sluyter, 1997; Vinden, 1999), and begin to integrate language tasks (both receptive and expressive) into socioemotional and self-concept research with children across various cultures, as well as educational programs aimed to develop emotional literacy as a means of coping with social anxiety in the classroom.

Given the limitations of the present study (e.g., correlational design, lack of general intelligence measure, ethnically homogeneous sample), interpretations of the present findings are to be made with caution. Given the complex process of the co-construction of emotions and self-concept, paper-and-pencil tasks such as the SPPC and teacher reports are unlikely to capture such a dynamic and complex process. Future studies could provide more explicit training for teachers to report and rate shy and socially withdrawn behaviour in their students, and the addition of parental ratings of shy or socially withdrawn behaviour would also provide a more accurate description of a child's behaviours both in the school and home context. With research on teachers' perceptions of shy children' s emotional competence still in its infancy, this study may provide a starting point for future research on shy children's emotional competence within the school setting to include observational measures in naturalistic settings such as discourse analysis of peer conversations on the playground and parent-child/ child-sibling conversation.

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