

Individuation Moderates the Relationship between Social Anxiety and Adaptation in Late Adolescence

Norah C. Hass, Paul C. Stey, & Daniel K. Lapsley
University of Notre Dame, Adolescent Psychology Lab

Background

Increases in college counseling visits motivate investigation into why so many students are poorly handling the college adjustment process. Shyness and loneliness are two constructs commonly tied with relational problems and are explored here in their relation to college adjustment. Moreover, a third construct, separation-individuation, is investigated for potential mediating effects on the two aforementioned relationships.

Shyness is defined as the tension, concern, discomfort, and inhibition felt as a reaction to social interactions (Buss, 1980; Cheek & Buss, 1981)

- Previous research has established shyness as an impediment to forming and maintaining relationships, linking it to low self-esteem, high anxiety, and a fear of social interactions (e.g., Cheek & Buss, 1981; Crozier, 1995; Melchior & Cheek, 1990)

Loneliness is defined as a response to the absence of an adequate positive relationship to persons, places, or things (Weiss, 1973).

- The adjustment problems associated with loneliness can present themselves as lack of confidence, low self-esteem, negative self-concept, and low levels of learned resourcefulness, or, more severely, as depression, alcoholism, and suicidality (Cheng & Furnham, 2002; Culp et al., 1995; McWhirter, 1997; Medora & Woodward, 1986).

Separation-Individuation is defined as the normative developmental process of establishing independent but healthy relations with family and peers (Lapsley et al., 1989).

- Unsuccessful separation-individuation, or dysfunctional individuation, has been linked to feelings of dependence, resentment, guilt, and anger towards parents that carries over into other, new relationships (Hoffman & Weiss, 1987; Lapsley et al., 1989; Rice et al., 1990).

Purpose

The purpose of the present study is two-fold. First, it will attempt to replicate previous associations between both shyness and loneliness and college adjustment. Second, it will test a novel, empirical claim about the exacerbating effects that normative developmental challenges, in this case, separation-individuation, have on college adjustment for shy or lonely individuals.

Hypotheses

- We expect to confirm previous research relating shyness to poor college adjustment.
- We expect loneliness to negatively correlate with college adjustment.
- Finally, we predict that dysfunctional individuation will have a moderating effect on the relationships between both shyness and loneliness with college adjustment.

Materials & Methods

Participants: 265 University of Notre Dame undergraduates

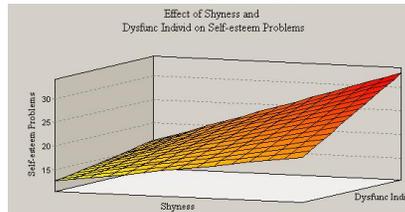
Task: Complete an anonymous online survey composed of the following measures:

- Revised Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale (1985)
- UCLA Loneliness Scale (1996)
- Dysfunctional Separation-Individuation Scale (2001)
- Ryff's Scale of Psychological Well-Being (1995)
 - Positive Relations with Others
- Anton and Reed's College Adjustment Scales (1991)
 - Interpersonal Problems
 - Self-Esteem Problems

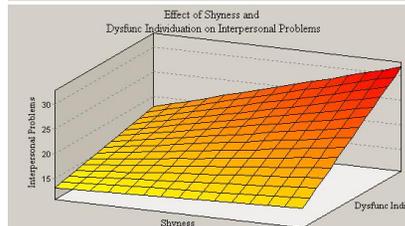
Results

Both shyness and loneliness related negatively to college adjustment. Shyness was positively associated with self-esteem problems, $r = .65$, $p < .001$, and interpersonal problems, $r = .50$, $p < .001$. In addition, shyness and dysfunctional individuation showed a positive relationship, $r = .45$, $p < .001$. Similarly, loneliness was positively associated with self-esteem problems, $r = .63$, $p < .001$, and interpersonal problems, $r = .67$, $p < .001$. Loneliness was negatively associated with positive relations with others, $r = -.79$, $p < .001$. Moreover, loneliness was positively associated with dysfunctional individuation, $r = .56$, $p < .001$.

Effect of Shyness and Dysfunctional Individuation on Self-Esteem Problems:



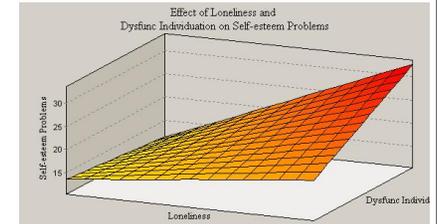
Effect of Shyness and Dysfunctional Individuation on Interpersonal Problems:



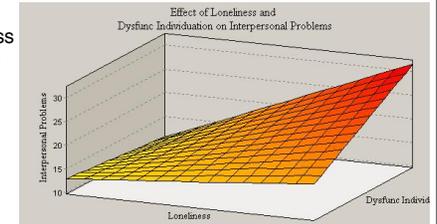
The interaction between shyness and dysfunctional individuation positively predicted self-esteem problems, $\beta = .14$, $p < .01$, and interpersonal problems, $\beta = .17$, $p = .001$. As dysfunctional individuation increased, shyness became an increasingly strong predictor of negative adjustment as captured by self-esteem and interpersonal problems.

Results (continued)

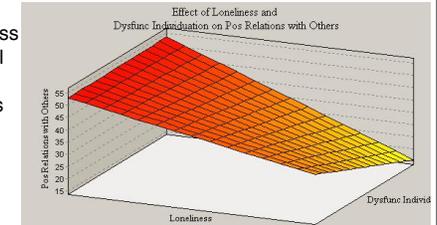
Effect of Loneliness and Dysfunctional Individuation on Self-Esteem Problems:



Effect of Loneliness and Dysfunctional Individuation on Interpersonal Problems:



Effect of Loneliness and Dysfunctional Individuation on Positive Relations with Others:



The interaction between loneliness and dysfunctional individuation also positively predicted self-esteem problems, $\beta = .17$, $p < .001$, and interpersonal problems, $\beta = .20$, $p < .001$. In addition, the interaction of dysfunctional individuation and loneliness negatively predicted relational well-being, $\beta = -.11$, $p < .01$. As dysfunctional individuation increases, loneliness becomes an increasingly strong predictor of relational well-being.

Discussion

- Confirmed research relating shyness and loneliness to poor college adjustment.
- The interaction between shyness and dysfunctional individuation supported the hypothesis that, as individuals demonstrate more shyness, higher scores of dysfunctional individuation will predict greater levels of problematic adjustment.
- The interaction between loneliness and dysfunctional individuation supported the hypothesis on the moderating effect dysfunctional individuation has between loneliness and college adjustment.

Funding for this research was provided by the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program of the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts at the University of Notre Dame.