

A Psychological Study on Gender Differences in Adolescent's Shyness

Shashikant Verma^{1*}

ABSTRACT

Shyness is defined as discomfort and inhibition in social settings (Cheeks and Buss, 1981). Adolescence is a critical period in the development of emotional and social skills. Adolescents frequently experience significant levels of social anxiety and self-consciousness, two main components of shyness (Rubin et al. 2009). The primary goal of this study is to identify gender variations in shyness among youths aged 13 to 18. The primary goal of this study is to determine the size of these disparities and their impact on teenage shyness. Data were collected from 200 youths aged 13 to 18, representing a varied range of socioeconomic origins. Shyness levels were measured using standardized psychometric measures, and trends and gender differences were identified using independent t-tests. The findings revealed substantial gender differences, with females having a higher level of social shyness (48.5 vs. 41.2), but males had a larger level of situational shyness (42.3 vs. 35.7). Several factors, including self-perception, peer interactions, and societal expectations, were discovered to influence these disparities. This study underscores the importance of raising knowledge about the cultural and societal variables that contribute to adolescent shyness, as well as the necessity for gender-specific activities to assist adolescents in overcoming shyness and developing social confidence. Future research should investigate how digital media play its role in shaping these behaviors.

Keywords: *Adolescents, shyness, gender differences, social anxiety, self-consciousness, societal expectations, cultural factors, social confidence, emotions*

In human growth and development, adolescence is such an important stage marked by significant cognitive, physical, and emotional transformations. At this stage of growth, adolescents are navigating the complexities of identity formation, emotional regulation, and social connectivity. Shyness is a highly important and prevailing character among different states that are experienced by adolescents. It is generally characterized by feelings of discomfort and avoidance of social situations leading to withdrawal from social interactions and complications in social engagements (Cheeks & Buss, 1981). These feelings of discomfort are mostly intensified by social anxiety and self-consciousness, which are enhanced during the adolescent years (Rubin et al., 2009).

¹Degree College, Mahagama 814154, Godda (Jharkhand)

*Corresponding Author

Received: January 13, 2025; Revision Received: February 15, 2025; Accepted: February 18, 2025

A Psychological Study on Gender Differences in Adolescent's Shyness

An adolescent's shyness is not simply a personality character but also shaped by various social, cultural, and psychological factors. Which comprise expectations by society, peer interactions, and individual self-perceptions (Else-Quest et al., 2006).

Going further, experience of shyness may vary between genders, with males and females potentially exhibiting different types of patterns and intensity of shyness. For example, societal norms mostly induce passivity and emotional expressiveness in females, which may encourage their self-consciousness, while males may feel strained to abide by traditional masculine ideals, impacting their situational expressions of shyness (Dindia & Allen, 1992; McCabe & Diehl, 2011).

The documented findings of the research have noted gender differences in the way of shyness manifestation across the age of adolescence. Male have to be found to experience situational shyness, whereas females have been recognized to have increased levels of social shyness, which may vary according to the context (Mathews & MacLeod, 2002). However, there is lacuna of research that defines the factors associated with these gender differences in shyness.

The main aim of this research is to observe how gender differences in adolescent shyness are shaped by various factors like socio-cultural and psychological factors, including peer interactions, societal expectations, and self-perception. Understanding of these variations is crucial for formulating and improving targeted interventions that can aid adolescents manage their shyness and boost their social confidence.

Objectives:

- To evaluate the level of differences based on gender in adolescent shyness.
- To identify the factors contributing to these differences in shyness among the genders.

Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis 1:** Adolescent age females will exhibit more levels of social shyness compared to male adolescents.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Adolescents age men will express more situational shyness than females.

METHODS

Study design:

To study this both quantitative and qualitative approaches are used. To assess the degree of shyness quantitative data were gathered using standardized psychometric tools, whereas data related to qualitative parameters were collected through interviews and focus groups to explore the socio-cultural factors influencing shyness in adolescents.

Participants:

This study involved a total of 200 participants of age group between 13-18 years, consisting of 100 females and 100 males. To diversify the sample, participants from different socio economic backgrounds were considered to ensure broad representation of adolescent experiences.

A Psychological Study on Gender Differences in Adolescent's Shyness

Measurement tools:

Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale (1981) is used to measure shyness, which is a validated instrument which can assess self-consciousness, social anxiety and discomfort in social contexts efficiently. Along with Cheek and Buss, Shyness Scale focused group discussions and semi structured interviews were also organized to effectively evaluate the factors like societal expectations, self-perception and peer interactions.

Procedure:

Participants completed the Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale, preceded by interviews and focus group discussions. The quantitative data were analyzed by subjecting an independent t-test to identify significant gender differences in shyness, while qualitative data were studied thematically to diagnose basic patterns and factors contributing to shyness.

RESULTS

The results revealed that there is a significant difference in the levels of shyness between adolescent male and females. The independent t-test was employed to analyze the results of the Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale (1981), and the outcomes were statistically significant ($t(198) = 3.68, p < 0.05$), indicating that female adolescents reported higher levels of overall social shyness compared with men.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Shyness Scores for Male and Female Adolescents

Gender	Mean Shyness Score	Standard Deviation
Female	48.5	9.21
Male	41.2	8.46

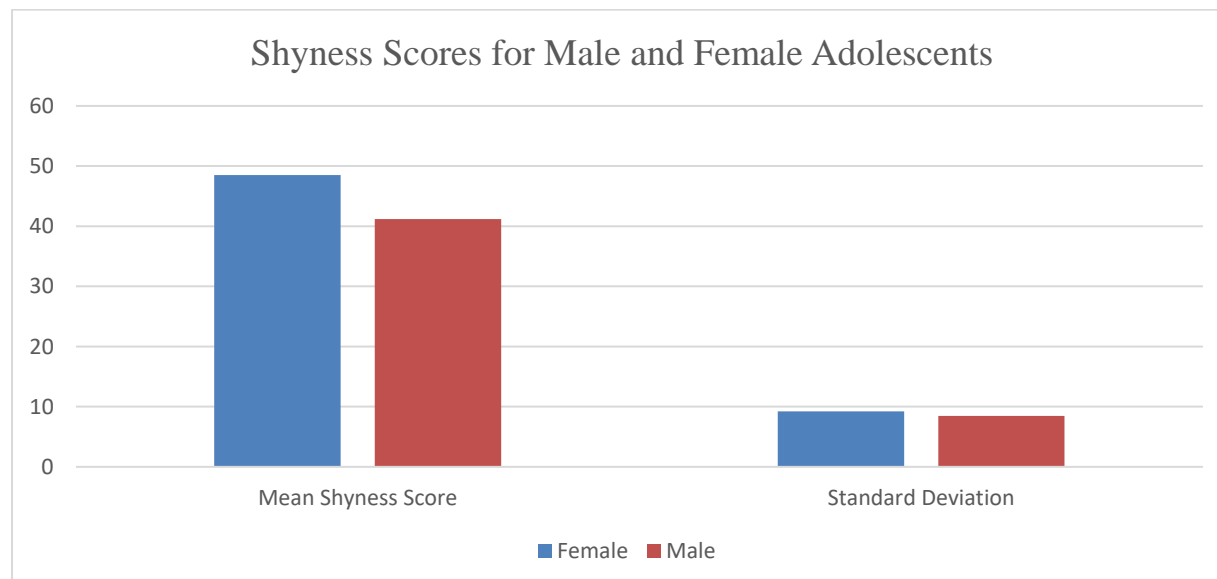


Fig.1. Shyness Scores for Male and Female Adolescents

As demonstrated in Table 1 and depicted in Fig 1, females scored significantly higher on the Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale, indicating that they experience more shyness in social circumstances than men. This supports the idea that teenage females will have higher levels of social timidity than adolescent males. The mean shyness score for females (48.5) was substantially greater than for males (41.2), confirming that gender differences in shyness levels are consistent with previous research (Cheek and Buss, 1981; Rubin et al., 2009).

A Psychological Study on Gender Differences in Adolescent's Shyness

Situational Shyness

About the situational shyness, the results demonstrated that men felt more uncomfortable in some situations especially during social contexts that were related to performance. This is supporting hypothesis 2 that predicted men to be more situationally shy than women. According to qualitative evidence from focus groups discussions and interviews, men frequently feel discomfort when their masculinity is called into question or when they are expected to perform good, such as public speaking or sporting activities. Social demands to appear powerful, confident, and capable may significantly contribute to situational shyness in men (Dindia & Allen, 1992; McCabe & Diehl, 2011).

Table 2: Situational Shyness by Gender

Gender	Situational Shyness Score (Mean)	Standard Deviation
Female	35.7	7.91
Male	42.3	9.04

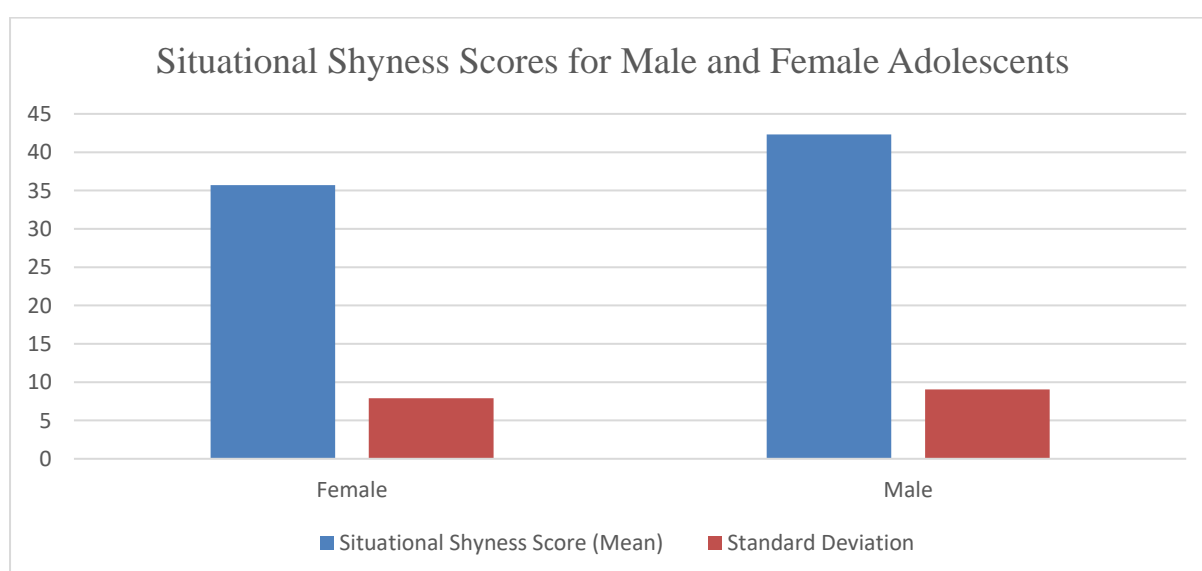


Fig.2. Situational Shyness Scores for Male and Female Adolescents

Table 2 and Fig.2 confirms these findings, with males scoring higher at situational shyness (42.3) with SD 9.04 than females 35.7 and 7.91 respectively. Males with the highest score (42.3) bear extreme situational shyness, especially when placed in settings that require them to confine to traditional masculine norms or when they are afraid of being criticized for failing to meet those expectations. (Leary, M. R. 1983).

Socio-Cultural Factors Contributing to Gender Differences in Shyness

The qualitative research, based on interviews and focus group discussions, provided useful observations into the variables underlying gender differences in adolescent shyness. A prominent outcome that emerged from these discussions was the effect of cultural expectations and gender norms on shyness behaviors.

Societal Expectations of Females:

During the study females were more likely to report feeling stressed to conform to cultural notions of femininity, which often contain qualities like emotional expressiveness, behaviors of nurturing and passivity. These expectations by society can enhance feelings of self-consciousness and social anxiety, leading towards heightened social shyness (Eagly &

A Psychological Study on Gender Differences in Adolescent's Shyness

Wood, 1991; Crozier, 2001). Many female participants stated how they felt well comfortable in smaller, more intimate surroundings, but became highly anxious in bigger social gatherings or in situations where they remain as the main center of attention.

Societal Expectations of Males:

Males started feeling pressure to abide so-called traditional masculine ideals, like being confident, assertive and independent. These pressures were especially evident in situations that required them to assert themselves in a social setting, like while engaging in group activities or engaging in public speaking. Several male participants reported that their fear of being perceived as weak or incapable in such situations significantly contributed to their situational shyness (Leary, 1983; McCabe & Diehl, 2011).

Peer Interactions and Shyness:

Next notable thing responsible to shyness in both genders was peer interaction. Adolescence is a crucial time for peer group formation, and peer interactions can have a significant influence on an adolescent's self-esteem and social confidence (Rubin et al., 2009; Dindia & Allen, 1992). Female participants often reported feeling more supported by their close friends, but they still reported feeling shy when they were in larger groups where they were not much familiar with others. On the other hand, male participants reported a wish to appear "cool" or "tough" in front of their peers, which sometimes results in the restraint of emotions and feelings of discomfort in social settings.

Self-Perception and Shyness:

Self-perception was also acknowledged as a key contributor to adolescent shyness. Many adolescents, especially females, expressed that their opinions of self-consciousness were often linked to their appearance, body image, and the need to catch up societal expectations of beauty. For example, one female participant stated that: "I don't like how I look in particular clothes, and when I'm with my friends, I feel like all are judging me on grounds of my appearance." This self-consciousness is very closely linked with the broader concept of social anxiety, which is often connected to shyness in adolescents (Rubin et al., 2009; Kashdan & Roberts, 2004).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study emphasize the significant role that gender plays in the experience of shyness during adolescence. The data validate that while both males and females experience shyness, the ways in which shyness manifests and the elements affecting it differ between both genders.

Gender and Shyness

In this study, females are identified with higher levels of social shyness, which is in line with previous studies that have found females to be highly socially anxious and self-conscious related to males (Cheek & Buss, 1981; Else-Quest et al., 2006). The pressure to conform to societal expectations related to femininity, this highlights passivity and emotional expressiveness, which likely contributes to the increased levels of social shyness reported by females. This is supported by the qualitative data, where many females reported feeling nervous and self-conscious in social situations, especially when they were likely to be more emotionally expressive or passive. (Eagly & Wood, 1991).

On the other hand, males in the study expressed maximum levels of situational shyness, more precisely in performance-related situations. These results are in alignment with

A Psychological Study on Gender Differences in Adolescent's Shyness

existing study that indicates that males may experience shyness when they are likely to abide by traditional masculine norms, like behaving confident, assertive, and emotionally restrained (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Leary, 1983). The pressure to adopt these norms can lead to heightened anxiety and shyness in contexts where males felt their masculinity might be questioned.

Implications For Intervention

The development of therapies aimed at assisting adolescents in overcoming their shyness and obtaining more social confidence is substantially impacted by an assessment of gender differences in teenage shyness. Interventions for women may focus on treating social anxiety connected to cultural norms surrounding emotional expressiveness and femininity (Spence & Rapee, 2016). Interventions could assist males achieve traditional masculinity expectations and give coping mechanisms for situational shyness in performance circumstances (Wang & Lee, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The study, therefore, involves the complex interaction between gender, cultural norms, and self-perception in shaping adolescent shyness. The findings suggest that gender differences in shyness are shaped by a multitude of factors, which include cultural norms, peer interaction, and individual self-perception. Females having a mean shy score of 48.5 are likely to suffer from greater degrees of social shyness owing to societal compulsions toward ideal feminine identity; males, having a highly significantly higher situational shyness score of 42.3, show a higher degree of situational shyness under conditions of social challenges against mainstream masculine expectations. Awareness of these gendered differences is necessary to develop more advanced interventions that can overcome the specific barriers that adolescents face in overcoming shyness and achieving social confidence. Interventions that deal with these deeper issues can help youngsters develop social skills and self-esteem while remaining conscious of the unique challenges that each gender encounters.

Future Research Directions

While this research is valuable to understand gender variations in adolescent shyness, it is important that more research is conducted to better understand the effect of digital media in developing tendencies of shyness. Growing popularity of social media may provide adolescents with unique forms of online social anxiety and self-consciousness that are very different from offline interactions. It can be helpful to explore the association between digital media use and shyness, especially in the context of understanding how contemporary technological trends influence adolescent social behaviors (Keles et al., 2020; Valkenburg & Piotrowski, 2017).

REFERENCES

- Cheek, J. M., & Buss, A. H. (1981). Shyness and sociability. *Journal of personality and Social Psychology*, 41(2), 330-339.
- Crozier, W. R. (2001). Shyness, self-perception, and reticence. *Shyness and Embarrassment: Perspectives from Social Psychology*, 60–84. Routledge.
- Dindia, K., & Allen, M. (1992). Sex differences in self-disclosure: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112(1), 106–124.
- Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (1991). Explaining sex differences in social behavior: A meta-analytic perspective. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 17(3), 306–315.
- Else-Quest, N. M., Hyde, J. S., Goldsmith, H. H., & Van Hulle, C. A. (2006). Gender differences in temperament: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 132(1), 33–72.

A Psychological Study on Gender Differences in Adolescent's Shyness

- Kashdan, T. B., & Roberts, J. E. (2004). Social anxiety's impact on affect, curiosity, and social self-efficacy during a high self-focus social threat situation. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 28(1), 119–141.
- Keles, B., McCrae, N., and Grealish, A. (2020). The effects of social media on social anxiety in adolescents: A systematic review. *Journal of Adolescence*, 83, 55-68.
- Kingery, J. N., Erdley, C. A., and Marshall, K. C. (2020). Peer dynamics and gendered differences in adolescent social shyness. *Developmental Psychology*, 56(4), 599-611. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/dp.2020.56.4.599>
- Leary, M. R. (1983). Social anxiousness: The construct and its measurement. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 47(1), 66–75.
- Mathews, A., & MacLeod, C. (2002). Cognitive vulnerability to emotional disorders. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 1(1), 167–195.
- McCabe, K. O., & Diehl, M. (2011). Gender differences in social relationships: Implications for well-being. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 52(2), 283–293.
- Rubin, K. H., Coplan, R. J., and Bowker, J. C. (2009). Social withdrawal in childhood. *Annual review of psychology*, 60, 141–171.
- Spence, S. H., and Rapee, R. M. (2016). Social anxiety disorder in youth: Gender-specific influences and interventions. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 19(4), 421-439.
- Valkenburg, P. M., and Piotrowski, J. T. (2017). *Plugged in: How media attract and affect youth*. Yale University Press.
- Wang, Y., and Lee, J. H. (2022). Traditional masculinity and its impact on situational shyness in adolescence. *Journal of Adolescent Development*, 48(2), 133-147.

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciate all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Verma, S. (2025). A Psychological Study on Gender Differences in Adolescent's Shyness. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(1), 1121-1127. DIP:18.01.104.20251301, DOI:10.25215/1301.104