Shyness, Self-Construal, Extraversion–Introversion, Neuroticism, and Psychoticism: A Cross-Cultural Comparison Among College Students

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Abstract
Shyness is considered as a universal phenomenon and its prevalence rates vary across cultures. This study aimed at comparing the level of shyness, self-construal, and personality traits of extraversion, introversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism among the college students from India, the host country, Africa; Iran; and Maldives, and Tibetan refugees in India (TRI), studying in different colleges at Mysore, India. Two hundred students (100 men and 100 women), age ranging from 17 to 30 years, were recruited based on stratified random sampling and were administered the Henderson/Zimbardo Shyness Questionnaire, Fernandez Scale of Independent–Interdependent Self-Construal, and Eysenck Personality Questionnaire–Revised. The results showed that shyness was significantly correlated with high introversion and high neuroticism scores. The results also showed that level of shyness varies significantly across different cultural groups and students from Maldives showed highest level of shyness whereas Iranian students had the lowest level of shyness. Although there was no significant gender difference, TRI males and Maldivian females had higher scores on shyness. Faith Orientation did not differentiate the prevalence of shyness among students of the different cultural groups. Shyness may be influenced by the culture from which one hails, and its level may vary depending on the nurturance.

Keywords
shyness, self-construal, extraversion–introversion, neuroticism, cross-cultural

Introduction
Shyness is considered as a behavior leading to increase in problems within an individual. It is a blend of fear that is universally manifested across cultures (Weiner & Craighead, 2010). Shyness leads to inhibition among people and hinders the process of achieving healthy interpersonal relationships and professional goals (Henderson, Zimbardo, & Carducci, 2001). A shy individual tends to focus on self and is preoccupied with thoughts of his own (Crozier, 2002). Shyness is a psychological state that causes feelings of discomfort, leading to avoidance of social contact. Cheek, Melchior, and Carpentieri (1986) defined it as “... the tendency to feel tense, worried or awkward during social interactions, especially with unfamiliar people” (p. 115).

Shyness and sociability are two distinct personality traits (Cheek & Buss, 1981). The degree of these varies from mild social awkwardness to totally inhibiting social phobia (Henderson & Zimbardo, 1998). In another study, Henderson et al. (2001) reported that manifestation of shyness occurs at various levels varying from cognitive level (e.g., excessive negative evaluation of self), affective level (e.g., feelings of anxiety), physiological level (e.g., arousal of sympathetic nervous system) to behavioral level (e.g., failure to respond appropriately), and may also be caused by various other situational cues. Some of the physical symptoms associated with shyness include blushing, sweating, a pounding heart or upset stomach, negative feelings about oneself, worries about how others view them, and a tendency to withdraw from social interactions.

Shy behavior could be triggered by a wide variety of arousal cues (Henderson & Zimbardo, 1998). An individual may feel shy while interacting with strangers or an authoritative figure, while initiating conversation in a group setting, or in performing a social action in unstructured group

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settings (D’Souza, Gowda, & Gowda, 2006). It could also be caused when the individual has to develop a relationship especially with individuals of opposite gender, in a one-to-one situation (Natesha & D’Souza, 2008). Metaphorically, shyness could be considered as shrinking back from life that weakens the bonds of human connections (Henderson & Zimbardo, 2010) affecting one’s mind, body, and self as a whole (Sinha, 2011).

Shy people are reported to be self-conscious and resist pleasures because they believe that they tune out from the social matrix (Schlenker & Weigold, 1990). To relate with others, they find the computer-mediated communication to be easier means than the face-to-face contact (Chan, 2011). The privately self-conscious shy people emphasize more on personal identity, whereas those who are publicly self-conscious emphasize on conformity, social identity, and social trepidations (Wojslawowicz, 2005). Shy individuals prefer to create an identity of being autonomous and will monitor and control their self-presentations to construct a shy image for audiences. However, the privately shy people control their shy behavior and attitudes in public to protect their autonomy. Individuals with shyness are aware of their own absence of social skills (Creed & Funder, 1998). As a result, they avoid involving in social relationships and subsequent loneliness is high among them (Jackson, Soderlind, & Weiss, 2000). Mounts, Valentiner, Anderson, and Boswell (2006) also found that high levels of shyness and low levels of sociability are related to high levels of loneliness.

Shyness and Gender

Gender differences in shyness among male and female were reported by several studies (Crozier, 1995; La Greca & Lopez, 1998; Mandal, 2008; Stockli, 2002). In Indian context, shyness is considered to be the quality of women, and if any one lacks modesty and possesses more of a masculine character, then she is considered to be a bold, brash, and non-feminine being (Sinha, 2011). However, in a recent study by Afshan, D’Souza, and Manickam (2014), no significant difference was found between adolescent boys and girls who stayed in hostels and those who lived with their parents. Studying the level of shyness of population from different countries, Henderson and Zimbardo (1998) found no gender difference and opined that men may have learnt typical tactics to conceal shyness as they regard it as a feminine trait.

Shyness, Anxiety, and Phobia

There are several other variables that are studied in relation to shyness. Clinically, shy individuals are reported to be more prone to depression and anxiety (Crozier, 1995), and they experience more amount of fear in their lives as well (D’Souza et al., 2006). Several studies found positive correlation between shyness and social phobia (Chavira, Stein, & Malcarne, 2002; Heiser, Turner, & Beidel, 2003; Kamath & Kenekar, 1993). Kamath and Kenekar (1993) also reported that shy people with social phobia are more introverts and neurotics than the shy people without social phobia. Significant correlations were also found between shyness and personality traits (Ebeling-Witte, Frank, & Lester, 2007).

Shyness and Personality Traits

Eysenck, Eysenck, and Barrett (1985) opined that an extrovert always tries to seek excitement in a social activity to heighten the arousal level, whereas an introvert prefers to keep such arousals at minimum level and hence they avoid the social situations. Due to this behavior, they are recognized as shy people and the terms introversion and shyness are often used interchangeably in everyday language (Briggs, 1988). But as a construct, shyness is conceptually distinct from the well-known dimensions of Extraversion (E), Introversion (I), and Neuroticism (N) (Crozier, 1995). Shy individuals experience uncomfortable feelings of self, especially in social situations. Introverts may appear to be shy, because their desire to interact with others is low; however, they are not worried about what others think of them and are confident about their quietness (Asendorpf & Meier, 1993; Coplan et al., 2013). However, Gray (1987), based on his personality theory, explained that impulsive behavior as shown by an individual could be due to the arousal of Behavioral Activation System (BAS), whereas behaviors of anxiety and inhibition are manifested due to activation of Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS). Hence, individuals whose BAS is motivated are more impulsive and outgoing, whereas an individual who is motivated by BIS could experience shyness and anxiety.

The Concept of Self

The concept of self is a dynamic center of awareness, emotions, judgment, and actions that are organized into a distinctive whole and are set contrastively, against social and natural background (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The self of an individual varies greatly depending on one’s own culture (Rhee, Uleman, Lee, & Roman, 1995). From the Western perspective, self is composed of individual attributes such as ambitions, good humor, and extravert qualities (Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). Markus and Kitayama (1991) differentiated two kinds of self: independent and interdependent. The independent self is viewed as a bounded entity. It is more or less integrated, unique, and motivational. However, the interdependent self is a sense of self that is more flexible and is connected to the social context that emphasizes on distinctive quality (Cross & Madson, 1997). Singelis (1994) opined that these two images of self can coexist among individuals and they can be measured. People can best distinguish their own self by discovering unique talents (Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001). Fernandez, Paez, and Gonzalez (2005) reported that less interdependent quality and more
Culture and Shyness

Many researchers have reported that shyness varies across different cultures (Aizawa & Whatley, 2006; Chen, & French, 2008; Sakuragi, 2004; Stocklki, 2002; Vanaja, Latha, & Bhaskara, 2004). Shyness is considered to be a negative trait in the Western countries (Weisz et al., 1993). Studies conducted in China showed that shyness is positively correlated with peer acceptance in the age group of 8 to 10 years (Chen, Rubin, & Sun, 1992). However, when they compared with Canadian children of the same ages (Chen et al., 1992), peer acceptance was negatively correlated with shyness. In South Asian countries, shyness is considered to be a boon because the societies expect to control oneself in front of others and to respect social rank of others (Weisz et al., 1993). Carducci and Zimbardo (1995) studied shyness across cultures, including participants from India, Canada, Germany, Israel, Japan, Mexico, and Taiwan. They found that the extent of population experiencing shyness varied from 31% to 55%. In India, as per the study, shyness was found to be prevalent at 47%. The lowest was experienced in Israel and the highest was reported in Japan.

Several cross-cultural studies have shown the direct effects of culture on shyness (Carducci & Zimbardo, 1995; Kerr, Lambert, & Bem, 1996; Maltby, Day, & Macaskill, 2007; Stocklki, 2002). The cultural context also influences the connection between shyness, scholastic achievement, and social popularity, as well as parental education among students (Stocklki, 2002). Carducci and Zimbardo (1995) explaining the cultural differences in shyness made a distinction between collectivistic cultures and individual cultures. Collectivist culture promotes esteem of the group over that of the individual. As a result, it fosters self-consciousness and shyness. In one of the recent research conducted in India, Sinha (2011) observed that the self-conscious and inhibited behaviors observed in shy individuals are induced due to the cultural factors.

The present study attempted to compare the level of shyness among individuals of various cultural groups: Indians, the host; Africans; Iranians; Maldivians; and Tibetan refugees in India (TRI). It also attempted to measure whether age, gender, faith orientation, and other socio-demographic variables have any relationship with shyness, self-construal, extraversion, introversion, and neuroticism. How far shyness is related to variables of extraversion, introversion, and neuroticism, as well as its relation to the level of independence or interdependence, is also explored.

In the present study, shyness is operationally defined as a psychological state that leads to feelings of discomfort, resulting in avoidance of social encounters, especially with strangers and is culturally determined.

Method

Sample

A total of 200 participants from five different cultural groups studying at degree level in four different colleges of Mysore city in India were selected using purposive sampling. Among them, 80 participants were Indians, 30 were Iranians, 30 Africans, 30 Maldivians, and 30 of them were TRI. Whereas the TRI group was born and brought up in India, the participants from other nations have come to India for their educational purpose and have been in India only from the past 1 to 2 years. The sample was matched for gender, and they belonged to the age group of 17 to 30 years. The mean age for males and females being 22 years (SD = 3.47) and 21 years (SD = 3.64), respectively. The participants belonged to different faith orientations as follows: 31 Hindus, 76 Muslims, 55 Christians, 30 Buddhists, and the remaining 8 did not mention their faith orientation. Regarding the educational course, 103 participants were studying arts subjects, whereas 97 were pursuing science subjects.

Measures

The English versions of following scales were group administered to the participants:

Henderson/Zimbardo Shyness Questionnaire. The 35-items questionnaire (Henderson & Zimbardo, 2001) measures the level of shyness quotient (shy Q) experienced by individuals. The items are to be rated on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 to 5. A score of 1 indicated low level of shyness and a score of 5 indicated high level of shyness. Cronbach’s alpha obtained for six different samples were reported to be between .92 and .93 (Henderson & Zimbardo, 2001).
Independent and Interdependent Scale of Self-Construal. This 13-item questionnaire (Fernandez et al., 2005) is the modified version of the original Singelis (1994) scale of independence and interdependence. This tool measures the interdependent and independent quality of an individual. The items of both the interdependent scale (group loyalty and relational interdependence) and the independent scale (uniqueness and low context) are grouped into two factors. Items were rated using a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 4 (totally agree). The reliability of the scale was reported to be .61 for group loyalty, .39 for relational interdependence, .51 for uniqueness, and .37 for low context.

Eysenck Personality Questionnaire–Revised (EPQ-R). This is a 100-item scale (Eysenck et al., 1985) that was developed and revised over a period of 50 years (Francis, Lewis, & Ziebertz, 2006). It measures extraversion, introversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. This is a reliable research tool that is validated in the Indian population (Abraham & Varghese, 1990), and both vernacular as well as English versions are used for research (Manickam, 1996).

Results

The socio-demographic data of the sample are shown in Table 1. One-way ANOVA was conducted between dependent variables (shyness, extraversion, introversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, and independent–interdependent self-construal) and independent variables (culture, age, gender, education, and faith orientation). The variables that were significant in one-way ANOVA were further subjected to two-way analysis to determine the interaction effect between them. There was no significant difference observed in relation to faith orientation.

As observed in Table 2, the level of shyness varied significantly between cultural groups, $F(4, 190) = 4.179, p = .003$. Maldivian participants ($M = 3.17, SD = 0.86$) reported significantly high levels of shyness compared with the participants from other nations. Significant difference was found between shyness and educational course, $F(1, 190) = 10.08, p = .002$. Arts students ($M = 2.81, SD = 0.53$) reported significantly lower level of shyness than science students ($M = 3.05, SD = 0.65$). Although no significant gender difference was found in relation to shyness, the interaction effect of gender and cultural groups on shyness was found to be significant $F(4, 190) = 3.058, p = .018$. TRI males ($M = 3.29, SD = 0.73$) and Maldivian females ($M = 3.21, SD = 0.91$) showed higher level of shyness, and African males ($M = 3.23, SD = 0.69$) and Iranian females ($M = 3.21, SD = 0.91$) showed lower levels of shyness. The interaction effect between cultural groups and education on shyness were also significant $F(4, 190) = 3.894, p = .005$. Participants who are in arts courses from Africa ($M = 3.00, SD = 0.59$) had high score of shyness, whereas their counterparts from Iran ($M = 2.42, SD = 0.40$) had low scores. Participants who are in science courses from Maldives ($M = 2.75, SD = 0.58$) showed higher level of shyness, and those from Africa had low level ($M = 2.75, SD = 0.58$) of shyness.

Independent–interdependent self-construal did not differ with different cultural groups (Table 3). However, age showed significant differences with independent self-construal, $F(1, 190) = 3.965, p = .048$. Higher age group showed

### Table 1. Results of One-Way ANOVA.

|                        | Shyness | Independent | Interdependent | P    | E    | N    | L    |
|------------------------|---------|-------------|----------------|------|------|------|------|
| Cultural groups        | 4.00**  | 2.88*       | 2.78*          | 1.54 | 5.92***| 1.22 | 1.42 |
| Gender                 | 1.27    | 0.022       | 0.214          | 29.5***| 0.141  | 0.022 | 5.86* |
| Age                    | 0.128   | 8.04***     | 0.026          | 0.083 | 0.007 | 0.701 | 3.46 |
| Education              | 8.35*** | 0.079       | 0.032          | 1.36 | 172.8***| 5.01* | 2.39 |
| Faith orientation      | 1.01    | 2.30        | 2.63           | 1.84 | 1.75  | 1.53  | 0.98 |

Note. P = Psychoticism; E = Extraversion; N = Neuroticism; L = Lie Scale.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

### Table 2. Means, SDs, and Two-Way ANOVA of Shyness Scores Among Students From Different Cultural Groups, Educational Streams, and Gender.

|                | Indian | Iranian | African | Maldivian | TRI | Total |
|----------------|--------|---------|---------|-----------|-----|-------|
| M  | SD    | M  | SD    | M  | SD    | M  | SD    | M  | SD    |
| Male | 2.83  | 0.49 | 2.63 | 0.51 | 2.58 | 0.45 | 3.14 | 0.83 | 3.29 | 0.73 | 2.88 | 0.62 |
| Female | 3.01 | 0.41 | 2.59 | 0.40 | 3.14 | 0.58 | 3.21 | 0.91 | 2.85 | 0.52 | 2.97 | 0.58 |
| Arts | 2.92  | 0.45 | 2.41 | 0.39 | 2.99 | 0.59 | 2.61 | 0.94 | 2.69 | 0.39 | 2.81 | 0.53 |
| Science | 2.91 | 0.49 | 2.87 | 0.40 | 2.75 | 0.58 | 3.34 | 0.77 | 3.23 | 0.69 | 0.65 | 3.05 |
| Total | 2.92  | 0.46 | 2.61 | 0.45 | 2.86 | 0.59 | 3.17 | 0.86 | 3.07 | 0.66 | 2.92 | 0.60 |

Note. TRI = Tibetan refugees in India.
higher degree of Independent self-construal ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.48$) when compared with lower age groups ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 0.46$). However, interdependent self-construal was not affected by age. The interaction effect between independent and interdependent self-construal, cultural groups, and age was also not significant.

Analyzing the personality traits of cultural groups and education (Table 4), only education and extraversion showed significant differences, $F(1, 190) = 126.6, p = .000$. Although participants from arts courses were found to be more extraverts ($M = 15.46$, $SD = 2.36$) compared with those from science courses ($M = 11.10$, $SD = 2.31$), the interaction effect between cultural groups and educational course was not significant.

Furthermore, correlation coefficients were computed to analyze the relationship between the study variables. Shyness was negatively correlated with extraversion ($r = −.227, p < .01$; Table 5), and it was positively correlated with neuroticism ($r = .447, p < .01$) as well as with interdependent self-construal ($r = .248, p < .01$). There was no correlation between shyness and psychoticism. The Independent–Interdependent sub-scales of self-construal correlated positively ($r = .190, p < .01$) with each other. A positive correlation was observed between the interdependent self-construal with relational interdependent ($r = .503, p < .01$), group loyalty ($r = .824, p < .01$), low context ($r = .224, p < .01$), and uniqueness ($r = .188, p < .01$). A positive correlation was also found between independent self-construal with relational interdependence ($r = .205, p < .01$), low context ($r = .593, p < .01$), and uniqueness ($r = .619, p < .01$).

**Discussion**

The study was intended to find the differences in shyness levels of the students from different cultural groups and found that Maldivian students were shyer compared with the students of other cultural groups under study. Hofstede (1983) viewed that every nation provides a symbolic value to its inhabitant and every individual derives their identity from this symbolic value. This identity among them creates a sense of belongingness toward their nation, and it also affects their thoughts. The diversity in their thoughts may be affected by early life experiences in family, differences in family background, and parenting (Aunola & Nurmi, 2005), as well as the later educational experiences in schools and organizations, which are not same across the national borders (Hofstede, 1983). Apart from these factors, differences within the culture may also play a role, directly or indirectly, in inducing shyness.

As shyness interferes in every aspect of an individual’s life, its existence has direct effects even in selecting the courses of education (Woolnough, 1994), as well as on the academic and scholastic performances (D’Souza, Urs, & Jayaraju, 2008). The present study revealed that the participants belonging to science courses were shyer and less extraverts compared with those studying arts courses. The art
students by virtue of the nature of the curriculum are made to actively participate in programs that require more interaction with people around and that could be one of the reasons for them to be less shy.

Factors such as faith orientation and culture affect the development and persistence of certain behaviors and ideas of self (Chen, French, & Schneider, 2006). Kitayama, Karasawa, Curhan, Ryff, and Markus (2010) reported that the age factor affects both the independent and interdependent self-construal. However, we found that the age factor slightly affected the thoughts of independent self-construal but not the interdependent self-construal. The same observation was made by previous research (Matsumoto, 1999). He observed that interdependence is the quality found among people living in collectivist culture and their thoughts were not affected by the age factor. They prefer to be interdependent and create a sense of oneness within them. However, people of independent cultures create a sense of independence within themselves with their growing age and experiences of life.

Independent–interdependent self-construal was not found to vary among the different cultures. The probable explanation is that when students are exposed to a culture other than their own, they try to change their thinking and behavior according to the requirements of new environment, which leads to similarities in the ideas and thoughts of the host culture (Cross & Madson, 1997). Probably, the new environment demands team building qualities of the students that would have helped them excel in extracurricular activities and academically. Furthermore, the prior knowledge about the culture of the host country guides them to accept the differences in the values, beliefs, and principles of that culture leading to being independent.

It was found that shyness was negatively correlated with extraversion and positively correlated with neuroticism. Several studies also found that the low levels of inherent shyness are significantly related to high levels of extraversion (Briggs, 1988; Kamath & Kenekar, 1993; Lawrence & Bennett, 1992). One of the studies conducted among physical education students in India also found shyness to be positively related to neuroticism. The outgoing potentials of extraverts are not present in shy individuals who find it very difficult, even to start a conversation and to maintain it. It is also possible that those with high extraversion and having more independent self-construal may have desired to leave their home country and dared to study in a nation that is culturally different from their own.

**Limitations**

The findings of the study cannot be generalized because adequate representation was not given to the different cultural groups. The TRI sample included in the study grew up in India, and hence, they would have imbibed the cultural values and may possess similar qualities as that of the Indian participants. Probably, using a measurement tool to assess the cultural values would have helped differentiate between the cultural groups.

Another limitation was that the cultural group that represented Africa had participants from different nations of the African continent, which in fact may be a divergent group in itself. Considering the participants from different nations from a continent as a single group may also have vitiated this particular group. Future studies may be conducted comparing the present study variables of students who are studying in India with their counterparts who are in their home countries.

**Conclusion**

The present study found that shyness varies within different cultural groups and could be influenced by the culture from which an individual hails. However, the faith orientation to which one belongs does not influence the level of shyness.

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**Table 5. Correlation Coefficients Between Shyness E, I, N Traits of Personality and Interdependent–Independent Self-Construal.**

|   | 1   | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 | 11 |
|---|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | Shyness | —  | .100 | −.227*** | .447*** | −.192* | .248*** | .096 | .240*** | −.005 | .028 | .107 |
| 2 | Psychoticism | —  | .002 | .102 | −.080 | −.096 | −.072 | −.086 | −.063 | −.045 | .021 |
| 3 | Extraversion | —  | −.121 | .035 | −.050 | −.090 | −.036 | .099 | −.035 | .024 |
| 4 | Neuroticism | —  | −.159 | .057 | .037 | .040 | .034 | .072 | .111 |
| 5 | Lie scale | —  | −.084 | −.110 | −.113 | −.065 | −.006 | −.100 |
| 6 | Interdependent | —  | .503*** | .824*** | .190*** | .224*** | .188*** |
| 7 | Relational interdependence | —  | .102 | .205*** | .183*** | .231*** |
| 8 | Group loyalty | —  | .093 | .218*** | .113 |
| 9 | Independent | —  | .593*** | .619*** |
| 10 | Low context | —  | .297*** |
| 11 | Uniqueness | —  | —  |

Note. E = Extraversion; I = Introversion; N = Neuroticism.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
There are no gender differences found, and the gender differences that were reported earlier do not exist now. The persistence of shyness affects one’s personality trait and ideas of self, making him or her appear to be neurotic and withdrawn, even though the shy individual wishes to be more socially active. Probably, when an individual migrates from his or her native to other countries for the purpose of education, he or she learns to be independent and less shy.

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**Note**

1. The participants of this group were from Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

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