

Continuity of Behavioral Inhibition in Early Childhood:
The Impact of Parental Attitudes toward Socially Inhibited Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Although behavioral inhibition has been found to be relatively stable, such stability has not always been shown. Moreover, although an association between parental shyness and child behavioral inhibition has been reported, this relationship is imperfect and indirect. The present study proposed that one factor that may impact these relationships is the attitudes parents hold toward having a shy, inhibited child. Although shyness is typically regarded as a negative and maladaptive trait, it is not necessarily viewed as problematic by all parents. The present study investigated a series of ten specific hypotheses that centered around the notion that variations in parental attitudes toward shyness may lead some parents to encourage and other parents to discourage behaviors typically associated with shyness in their young children. Using a longitudinal design, the present study examined the relations among the constructs of parental attitudes toward shyness, child behavioral inhibition, childrearing strategies, and parental shyness over a span of two years in a sample of 3 to 6 year-old children and their parents. Results revealed several interesting and valuable findings. Maternal attitudes toward shyness emerged as a moderator of the relationship between behavioral inhibition at Time 1 and Time 2. Maternal attitudes toward shyness also emerged as a significant moderator of the relationship between maternal shyness and child behavioral inhibition. However, childrearing strategies did not mediate the relationship between maternal attitudes toward shyness and behavioral inhibition in children as predicted.