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Self-consciousness, friendship quality, and adolescent internalizing problems

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Abstract

The correlates between public and private self-consciousness and internalizing difficulties were examined during early adolescence. Friendship quality was assessed as a possible moderator of the relation between self-consciousness and maladjustment. One hundred and thirty-seven young adolescents ($N = 87$ girls; M age = 13.98 years) reported on their self-consciousness, internalizing problems, and the quality of their best friendship. Results indicated stronger associations between private self-consciousness and internalizing correlates than between public self-consciousness and internalizing problems, suggesting that private self-consciousness may be a stronger risk factor during adolescence. Contrary to expectations, evidence revealed that positive friendship quality may exacerbate some difficulties associated with self-consciousness. Results pertaining to friendship quality add to the growing literature on the ways in which friendships can contribute to adjustment difficulties.

Highly self-conscious individuals are at risk for a variety of internalizing problems (e.g. Chioqueta & Stiles, 2005; Muraven, 2005). Self-conscious adults tend to report greater anxiety, more loneliness and depression, and lower self-worth than adults who are not self-conscious (e.g. Hope & Heimberg, 1988). Distinguishing between public and private self-consciousness reveals that different subtypes of self-consciousness are related to different types of internalizing problems. Public self-consciousness, which involves excessive concern about the self as a social object, is related to reports of social anxiety and self-presentation concerns (e.g. Fenigstein, 1979; Miller & Cox, 1982). In contrast, private self-consciousness, which involves exaggerated concern over one's inner thoughts and emotions, is associated with generalized depression and anxiety and social withdrawal (e.g. Anderson, Bohon, & Berrigan, 1996).

For many individuals, early adolescence is the time during which self-conscious feelings and emotions peak in frequency and intensity (Elkind & Bowen, 1979). But whereas researchers have clearly linked self-consciousness to internalizing problems in adults, little is known about the possible internalizing correlates of self-consciousness during early adolescence (10-to-14 years of age). Equally little is known about how close relationships may influence the adjustment difficulties associated with self-consciousness during early adolescence, in spite of growing evidence that peer relationships are particularly significant during this period and that friendships may be particularly helpful for children and adolescents who are at risk for internalizing and externalizing problems [e.g. see Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker (2006) for a recent review]. The current study was designed to address these marked

research gaps by: (1) examining self-consciousness during early adolescence; (2) exploring the relations between specific types of self-consciousness (public, private) and different types of internalizing problems; and (3) considering whether close friendships influence the relations between self-consciousness and adjustment difficulties of the internalizing ilk.

Self-consciousness theory and adult personality literature

In the study of adult personality, self-consciousness is conceptualized as consistent attention directed at the self (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). Concern for one's behaviour, acute awareness of the self as a social object, knowledge of internal and external attributes of the self, and introspection all characterize self-consciousness in adults (Fenigstein *et al.*, 1975). *Self-consciousness theory* emphasizes two distinct categories of self-consciousness: private and public (Buss, 1980, 1986, 2001). Proponents of the theory posit that some individuals are more prone to focus attention on private aspects of the self, whereas others focus on public aspects. The private self is thought to encompass cognitions, emotional states, desires, and intentions; the public self involves the self as a social object (Fenigstein, 1987).

To assess these two types of self-consciousness, an oft-utilized measure with undergraduate populations is the *Self-Consciousness Scales* (SCS; Fenigstein *et al.*, 1975). Using this measure, numerous exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses have confirmed the two-factor model of self-consciousness (e.g. Carver & Glass, 1976; Turner, Scheier, Carver, & Ickes, 1978), across sex and culture (e.g. Teixeira & Gomes, 1995). It is important to note that empirical studies of private and public self-consciousness typically reveal low-to-moderate associations between the two scales among college students (e.g. $r = .23$; $p < .01$; Fenigstein *et al.*, 1975), providing evidence that the two types of self-consciousness represent related but distinct types of self-directed attention.

Further supporting the premise that private and public self-directed attention represent distinct types of self-consciousness, considerable evidence suggests that the correlates of focusing on private aspects of the self are different from those focusing on the public aspects of the self (e.g. Fenigstein, 1987). For instance, research indicates that the tendency to focus on the public aspects of the self leads to greater *interpersonal sensitivity*, which influences such cognitions as rejection-sensitivity (Fenigstein, 1979), social anxiety (Fenigstein *et al.*, 1975), and paranoid thinking (Fenigstein & Venable, 1992). Private self-consciousness, in contrast, is related to generalized anxiety, depression, and ruminative tendencies (e.g. Anderson *et al.*, 1996; Ingram & Smith, 1984) as well as withdrawn behaviour (Scheier, Carver, & Gibbons, 1981).

Self-consciousness during early adolescence

Despite research linking high levels of general self-consciousness during adolescence to such internalizing problems as depression (e.g. Garber, Weiss, & Shanley, 1993; Lewinsohn *et al.*, 1994), very little empirical attention has been directed to the distinction between private and public self-consciousness during adolescence. This dearth of research is surprising because the two-factor model of self-consciousness during adolescence has been empirically supported (Abrams, 1988; Rankin, Lane, Gibbons, & Gerrard, 2004). Self-conscious emotions and feelings are also cited in the DSM-IV-TR (2000) as symptoms of a variety of personality and affective disorders in adolescents and adults, such as avoidant and borderline personality disorder and social anxiety disorder. One might expect, however, that publicly self-directed attention may be more relevant for understanding certain disorders (e.g. social anxiety disorder) whereas privately self-directed attention may be more relevant for others (e.g. avoidant personality disorder). As such, additional studies of self-consciousness and its subtypes during adolescence may begin to shed light on the specificity

of public and private self-consciousness as cognitive risk factors for concurrent and future internalizing difficulties and psychopathology.

With regard to concurrent adjustment difficulties during adolescence, it is likely that the internalizing ‘costs’ of attention directed at the self concerning public issues differ from the ‘costs’ of self-directed attention pertaining to private concerns. Research on *public* self-consciousness during adolescence has been primarily limited to studies of imaginary audience (IA) concerns (Elkind, 1967). The IA-construct is often characterized as a state of self-consciousness because the over attention to the self by the self and others (at least in the mind of the adolescent) is thought to cause the adolescent to be in a heightened state of self-awareness. Findings reveal positive relations between concerns about an *IA* and reports of *public* self-consciousness among 7th–12th graders (but not private self-consciousness; Ryan & Kuczkowski, 1994), and *IA* concerns have been associated with self-reports of shyness, nervousness, and poor social skills in a sample of 10–15 year-olds (Cohn *et al.*, 1988). The present study was the first to explore the associations between *public* self-consciousness *per se* and internalizing difficulties; it was predicted that similar to publicly self-conscious adults, publicly self-conscious adolescents would be interpersonally sensitive (e.g. rejection-sensitive) and experience concerns about and problems with their peers. Thus far, researchers have not examined the internalizing correlates of *private* self-consciousness during adolescence, with the exception of one study wherein private self-consciousness was positively associated with self-reports of loneliness (*M*age = 16 years; Franzoi & Davis, 1985). Yet, we reasoned that private self-consciousness during early adolescence may be strongly related to generalized anxiety and depression and withdrawn behaviour.

Self-consciousness and friendship

There is growing evidence that having a high-quality friendship during late childhood and adolescence is positively related to indices of self-esteem and self-worth (e.g. Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998), and negatively associated with psychological distress (e.g. loneliness; Parker & Asher, 1993). There is also increasing evidence that high-quality, positive friendships, with its offerings of companionship and emotional and social support, may be particularly helpful for those children and adolescents considered at risk for internalizing and/or externalizing problems (e.g. Fordham & Stevenson-Hinde, 1999; Wight, Botticello, & Aneshensel, 2006). Results from one study, for example, indicated that high-quality friendships buffered young adolescents from the internalizing effects of low maternal support (Rubin *et al.*, 2004).

Due to their possible risk for internalizing problems, highly self-conscious adolescents may benefit from high-quality, close friendships. Researchers have suggested that emotional ties with close friends and the feelings of security and support that they provide, may influence how adolescents think about themselves and how they process social information (Burgess, Wojslawowicz, Rubin, Rose-Krasnor, & Booth-LaForce, 2006; Crick & Dodge, 1994; Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000; Parker, Rubin, Erath, Wojslawowicz, & Buskirk, 2006). Indeed, in a recent study, positive friendship quality moderated the relation between individual differences in aggressive behaviour and social-information processing and coping strategies during early adolescence (Bowker, Rubin, Rose-Krasnor, & Booth-LaForce, 2007). There is some evidence indicating that highly *publicly* self-conscious individuals, at least during adulthood, are preoccupied with feelings of rejection (e.g. Fenigstein, 1979). Therefore, being accepted by one person, reflected by a close, positive quality friendship, may significantly improve highly *publicly* self-conscious adolescents’ psychological well-being. With reference to *private* self-consciousness, close friendships may buffer highly self-conscious adolescents by providing important outlets for introspection and self-reflection (Franzoi & Davis, 1985).

The present investigation

In summary, our primary objective was to determine whether two types of self-directed attention, private and public self-consciousness, are differently related to specific types of internalizing difficulties during early adolescence. We focused on early adolescence because young adolescents (8th graders) report greater IA concerns (a proxy measure of self-consciousness) than younger children (4th and 6th graders) and older adolescents (12th graders; Elkind & Bowen, 1979). Based on the extant adult personality literature (e.g. Scheier *et al.*, 1981), our specific hypotheses were as follows: (1) public self-consciousness would be more strongly associated with social problems/concerns than would private self-consciousness and (2) private self-consciousness would be more strongly related to anxiety and depression and withdrawn behaviour than would public self-consciousness. To determine whether rejection-sensitivity is related to public self-consciousness in adolescents (as it is in adults), we distinguished between two forms of rejection-sensitivity commonly made in studies of rejection-sensitivity among children and adolescents: (1) anxious expectations for rejection and (2) angry expectations for rejection (e.g. Downey, Lebolt, Rincon, & Freitas, 1998). Downey and colleagues (Downey, Feldman, & Ayduk, 2000) revealed positive associations between *anxious* expectations for rejection and psychological distress within the context of close romantic relationships. In light of these findings and the theoretical and empirical links between public self-consciousness and concerns about relationships and social others (e.g. Miller & Cox, 1982), we predicted particularly strong associations between *anxious* expectations for rejection and *public* self-consciousness.

We also examined whether a positive friendship would diminish the internalizing difficulties associated with public and private self-consciousness. We predicted that a high-quality friendship would lessen the social concerns and rejection-sensitivity associated with the public form of self-consciousness, while diminishing predicted associations between private self-consciousness and anxiety/depression and withdrawn behaviour.

Lastly, important sex differences may exist in the relations between self-consciousness, friendship quality, and internalizing problems. There is some evidence suggesting that girls are more self-conscious than boys during adolescence. Davis and Franzoi (1991) found that 10th, 11th, and 12th grade girls reported significantly higher levels of *public* self-consciousness and social anxiety than did boys. Additionally, Rankin and colleagues (Rankin *et al.*, 2004) reported that girls aged 13–17 years reported greater public and private self-consciousness than did same-aged boys. It may be the case that girls report more self-conscious thoughts and emotions, which are more strongly associated with internalizing problems. Yet, girls also tend to rate their friendships more positively than do boys (Parker & Asher, 1993), and due to greater importance placed on their friendships during late childhood and early adolescence, it has been suggested that high-quality friendships may be more influential on the adjustment of girls than boys [for a recent review, see Rose and Rudolph (2006)]. Thus, it may be that girls' friendships better buffer or protect them from the internalizing problems associated with both types of self-consciousness.

Method

Participants

Participants were 137 (50 boys, 87 girls) 8th grade students from a middle school in Upstate New York. Mean age of the sample was 13.98 ($SD = 0.37$) years (Boys: $M = 13.92$ years, $SD = 0.30$; Girls: $M = 14.01$, $SD = 0.38$). Approximately, 70% of the children were Caucasian, 5% African American, 4% Hispanic/Latino, 3% Asian, 2% Native American, and 8% Biracial or Multiracial. All 8th grade students were invited to participate in the study; a raffle for 'Best Buy' gift certificates was held to encourage participation. Only those

adolescents for whom parental consent was obtained were allowed to participate. Overall consent rate was 99% (only one child returned a consent form indicating that his parents did not want him to participate in the project); overall participation rate for the grade was 50%. Due to absenteeism on one of the questionnaire administration days or unusable data (e.g. completing the questionnaire incorrectly), friendship quality and internalizing problems data were available for 127 youth, self-consciousness data were available for 122 youth, and rejection-sensitivity data were available for 120 youth. No significant differences on study variables were revealed between youth who participated on one day or both days of the administration, and listwise deletion was utilized in analyses to account for missing data.

Measures

Self-Consciousness Scales (SCS, Fenigstein *et al.*, 1975). The *SCS* assesses public and private self-consciousness and social anxiety. The measure yields three subscales of Public Self-Consciousness (e.g. *I am concerned about my style of doing things*; 7-items), Private Self-Consciousness (e.g. *I am aware of the way my mind works when I work through a problem*; 10-items), and Social Anxiety (e.g. *It takes me time to overcome my shyness in new situations*; 6-items). Participants indicate how similar they are to the items on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 = not at all similar to 4 = very similar, and mean scores are calculated. Test-retest correlations for the subscales are high (e.g. public SCS, .84; private SCS, .79; social anxiety, .73; Fenigstein *et al.*, 1975). Only the private ($\alpha = .70$) and public ($\alpha = .81$) SCS were of interest in the present study. Although the *SCS* was designed for use with an adult population, a few investigators have used the measure in studies of adolescents (e.g. Davis & Franzoi, 1986). Correlations were computed between the public and private SCS subscales in the present study, for the entire sample, and separately for males and females. For the entire sample, the correlation was .55, $p < .001$. The correlation between these subscales for males was .50, $p < .001$, and .57, $p < .001$ for females. This degree of association between the private and public SCS was stronger than values typically reported by adult personality researchers (e.g. $r = .23$; Fenigstein *et al.*, 1975), but similar to results from studies involving adolescents (e.g. $r = .58$, $p < .05$; Frankenberger, 2000; M age = 15.91).

The *Youth Self-Report* (YSR; Achenbach, 2001) for adolescents ages 11–18 was used to assess a variety of internalizing problems. Adolescents completed questions pertaining to the broad-band internalizing subscales: *Withdrawn Behaviours*, *Anxiety/depression*, *Somatic Problems*, *Social Problems*, and *Thought Problems*, indicating how true each item was for him/herself on a 3-point scale ranging from 0 ‘not true’ to 2 ‘very often true’. Items pertaining to suicide and suicidal ideation were excluded, and mean scores were calculated. Previously, researchers have demonstrated adequate construct validity, test-retest and internal reliability, and cross-ethnic and sex measurement equivalence (e.g. Achenbach, Howell, McConaughy, & Stranger, 1995). Of particular interest in the present study were the withdrawn behaviours (7-items, $\alpha = .63$; e.g. *I would rather be alone than with others*), anxiety/depression (12-items, $\alpha = .82$; e.g. *I am unhappy, sad, or depressed*), and social problems subscales (11-items, $\alpha = .69$; *I am not well-liked by other kids*), which have been associated with self-consciousness in samples of adults.

Children’s Rejection-Sensitivity Questionnaire (CRSQ; Downey *et al.*, 1998). The *CRSQ* assesses children’s rejection-sensitivity, and yields two subscales: (1) Angry expectations of rejection (e.g. *You wonder if the teacher will choose you to meet the famous guest; How mad would you feel about whether the teacher will pick you to meet the famous guest?* 1 = *Not mad* to 6 = *Very, very mad*) and (2) Anxious expectations of rejection (e.g. *How nervous would you feel about whether the teacher will pick you to meet the famous guest?* 1 = *Not nervous* to 6 = *Very, very nervous*). Angry and anxious expectations of rejection scores were calculated by multiplying the expected likelihood of rejection by the degree of

anger or anxiety for each situation and dividing by 12 (the total number of situations assessing angry and anxious expectations). Adequate test–retest reliabilities have been demonstrated for the angry and anxious expectations scales (e.g. Downey *et al.*, 1998).

Friendship Qualities Scale (FQS; Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994). The 23-item FQS was used to assess the qualities of children's friendships. All children were instructed to complete the measure about their 'very best friend', and each item involved a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = 'not at all true' about the relationship to 5 = 'really true' about the relationship. The FQS yields five subscales pertaining to companionship, conflict, help, security, and closeness, with higher scores indicating greater perceived friendship quality on all of the subscales. The Cronbach α s for the subscales were: *Companionship*: .72 (4-items; e.g. *My friend thinks of fun things for us to do together*); *Conflict*: .68 (4-items; e.g. *My friend and I can argue a lot*); *Closeness*: .76 (5-items; e.g. *I feel happy when I am with my friend*); *Help*: .81 (5-items; e.g. *My friend helps me when I am having trouble with something*); and *Security*: .58 (5-items; e.g. *If I have a problem at school or at home, I can talk to my friend about it*). Given the low alpha for the *Security* scale, the scale was excluded. Correlations between the positive friendship quality scales were relatively high (.48–.71). Therefore, similar to previous studies [see Furman (1996)], mean ratings across these items were calculated, yielding an index of positive friendship quality (overall $\alpha = .88$). Because *positive* friendship quality was of particular interest in the present study, and the absence of conflict is considered to be qualitatively different from positive friendship quality (Furman, 1996; Rubin *et al.*, 2006), the conflict scale was excluded from further analyses.

Procedure

Students were visited in their classrooms in the Spring of their 8th grade year (April/May). All students were told that their answers were private and confidential, and were instructed not to discuss their answers. Students completed packets of questionnaires at their desks on two consecutive school days (Part 1 and Part 2); each session lasted one class period, approximately 45 minutes. The order of the questionnaires for all adolescents was: Part 1: FQS and YSR; Part 2: SCS and CRSQ.

Results

Preliminary analyses

A comparison of means revealed that all adolescents reported significantly more public ($M = 16.39$; $SD = 5.91$) than private SCS ($M = 11.69$; $SD = 5.15$), $t(121) = 30.64$, $p < .001$. Further, a series of preliminary t tests exploring for potential sex differences in self-consciousness, internalizing problems and rejection-sensitivity subtypes revealed significant differences for anxious expectations for rejection, $t(119) = -4.91$, $p < .001$. Girls reported more anxious expectations for rejection than did boys ($M = 9.51$; $SD = 4.28$; $M = 8.24$; $SD = 2.83$, for girls and boys, respectively). Significant differences between boys and girls were also revealed for positive friendship quality, $t(126) = -5.05$, $p < .001$, with girls ($M = 4.26$; $SD = 0.45$) rating their friendships more positively than boys ($M = 3.73$; $SD = 0.66$). No significant sex differences emerged on other YSR, CRSQ, and SCS variables.

Overview of data analytic plan

To determine the associations between adolescents' SCS and their reports of internalizing problems and different types of rejection-sensitivity, correlational analyses (including partial correlations) were computed between adolescents' reports on the SCS, the YSR, and the CRSQ. Fischer's r to Z transformations were performed to test for significant differences among the correlations between public SCS and the YSR and CRSQ subscales, and private

SCS and the *YSR* and *CRSQ* subscales. Only significant differences are noted below. Hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the possible moderating role of positive friendship quality on the relation between SCS and internalizing problems and rejection-sensitivity. Given the above mentioned sex differences, all correlational analyses were conducted for the total sample, and then separately for boys and girls, and regression analyses included child sex as a predictor variable and also in interactions.

Associations between self-consciousness and internalizing problems

Analyses conducted with the entire sample revealed that both public and private SCS were significantly and positively related to all *YSR* subscales (see Table 1). For the entire sample, both public SCS and private SCS were also positively related to reports of angry and anxious expectations for rejection. For *boys*, public SCS was significantly and positively related to reports of angry and anxious expectations for rejection. Boys' private SCS however, was not significantly associated with either type of rejection-sensitivity, and both private and public SCS were not significantly related to any *YSR* internalizing subscales. For *girls*, public SCS was significantly and positively related to reports of anxiety/depression and social problems, and anxious and angry expectations for rejection. Private SCS, for girls, was significantly and positively related to all *YSR* subscales (withdrawn behaviours, anxiety/depression, and social problems), and both types of rejection-sensitivity.

Transformations (r to Z) were also performed to examine for possible sex differences in the strength of the associations between the two types of SCS and the *YSR* and *CRSQ* scales. For example, the strength of the associations between boys' reports of withdrawn behaviours and public SCS ($r = .26$) was compared to the association between girls' reports of withdrawn behaviours and public SCS ($r = .17$). Results indicated that the correlation between private SCS and anxiety/depression for *girls* tended to be greater than the correlation between private SCS and anxiety/depression for boys ($Z = -.16, p < .10$). Also, a significant sex difference in the correlations between private SCS and *anxious* expectations for rejection was revealed ($Z = -2.39, p < .001$). The correlation for girls ($r = .52, p < .001$) was significantly greater than the correlation for boys ($r = .10, ns$).

Partial correlations

Given the strong association between public and private SCS in the personality literature (e.g. Fenigstein *et al.*, 1975) and also in the present study, a series of partial correlations was performed between each type of SCS and internalizing problems and rejection-sensitivity, controlling for the other type of SCS. Rather than aggregating the two factors, partial correlations have been recommended to examine the unique correlates of public and private self-consciousness (e.g. Anderson *et al.*, 1996). Partial correlations were also performed separately by sex of participant, and results are displayed in Table 2.

Noteworthy are instances in which one type of self-consciousness was uniquely associated with adjustment. For the entire sample, when private SCS was controlled, public SCS was uniquely associated with the *YSR* subscale of anxiety and depression, and the *CRSQ* subscale of anxious expectations for rejection. In contrast, when public SCS was controlled, private SCS was uniquely associated with the *YSR* subscales of withdrawn behaviour, social problems, and anxiety/depression, along with the *CRSQ* subscale of anxious expectations for rejection.

When data were examined separately by sex, public self-consciousness (when private SCS was controlled) was uniquely related to angry and anxious expectations for rejection for *boys* but anxiety/depression for *girls*. Private SCS, when public SCS was controlled, was uniquely associated with all internalizing outcomes (*YSR*: withdrawn behaviour, anxiety/

depression, social problems; *CRSQ*: angry expectations, anxious expectations) for girls, but not for boys. Data analyses indicated that the correlations between private SCS and anxious and angry expectations for rejection were greater for girls than boys (Anxious expectations: $Z = -2.50, p < .01$; Angry expectations: $Z = -1.70, p < .08$).

Examining friendship quality as a moderator

A series of hierarchical linear regression analyses was conducted with the positive friendship quality rating as a possible moderator. According to recommendations by Aiken and West (1991), all variables were centred by subtracting the mean, and then standardized. Interaction terms were formed with these centred, standardized variables. The sex variable was dummy coded (0 = boys, 1 = girls). Dependent variables were the *YSR* and *CRSQ* subscales. Public and private SCS were independent predictor variables. However, given the associations between public and private SCS, public SCS was entered at Step 1 as a control variable for those analyses with private SCS as a predictor, and private SCS was entered at Step 1 as a control variable for those analyses with public SCS as a predictor. Sex was entered at Step 2, SCS (public or private) at Step 3, and positive friendship quality at Step 4. Interaction terms involving sex, public or private SCS, and positive friendship quality were entered at Steps 5–8. A total of 10 hierarchical linear regression analyses (five focused on public and five focused on private SCS) were conducted. Three significant interactions involving public or private SCS and friendship quality emerged. These interactions were interpreted according to the Aiken and West (1991) procedures. Values for the positive friendship scores were chosen to correspond to the mean, one standard deviation above the mean (high), and one standard deviation below the mean (low), and interactions were plotted in *Excel*.

Changes attributable to the *public SCS* $\times$ positive friendship quality $\times$ sex interaction were significant for *anxious expectations for rejection*, $F(8, 116) = 5.42, p < .04, \beta = 0.20$; to further probe this interaction, the regression equations were restructured to express the regression of anxious expectations for rejection on public SCS for boys and girls, at varying levels of positive friendship quality, after controlling for private SCS (Figures 1 and 2).

The strongest relation between anxious expectations and public SCS was obtained for girls and boys who reported high levels of positive friendship quality. Among *girls*, the simple slopes for the high positive friendship quality group ($\beta = 0.54, p < .001$) was significantly different from zero, whereas the simple slope for the moderate ($\beta = 0.10, ns$) and low positive ($\beta = -0.34, ns$) groups were not significantly different from zero. Similar findings were evinced for boys; the simple slope for the high positive friendship quality group ($\beta = 0.40, p < .001$) was significantly different from zero, whereas the simple slopes for the moderate friendship group ($\beta = 0.12, p < .001$) and the low friendship group were not significantly different from zero ($\beta = -0.18, ns$). Thus, for young adolescents who reported high levels of positive friendship quality, there was a significant association between their reports of anxious expectations for rejection and public SCS, whereas there was no relation between these variables for young adolescents who reported moderate and low levels of positive friendship quality.

Changes attributable to the *public SCS* $\times$ positive friendship quality interaction were significant for *angry expectations for rejection*, $F(7, 116) = 3.48, p < .03, \beta = 0.23$; to further probe this interaction, the regression equations were restructured to express the regression of angry expectations for rejection on public SCS at levels of positive friendship quality, after controlling for private SCS (Figure 3).

The strongest relation between angry expectations and public SCS was obtained for the young adolescents who reported high levels of positive friendship quality. The simple slope

for the high positive friendship quality group ($\beta = 0.41, p < .001$) was significantly different from zero, whereas the simple slope for the moderate ($\beta = 0.19, ns$) and low ($\beta = -0.04, ns$) positive groups were not significantly different from zero. Thus, for young adolescents who reported high levels of positive friendship quality, there was a significant association between their reports of angry expectations for rejection and public SCS, whereas there was no relation between these variables for young adolescents who reported moderate and low levels of positive friendship quality.

Lastly, changes attributable to the *private* SCS $\times$ positive friendship quality interaction were significant for *social withdrawal*, $F(7, 117) = 2.91, p < .03, \beta = 0.35$; to further probe this interaction, the regression equations were restructured to express the regression of social withdrawal on private SCS at levels of positive friendship quality, after controlling for public SCS (Figure 4).

The strongest relation between social withdrawal and private SCS was obtained for the young adolescents who reported the high and moderate levels of positive friendship quality. Simple slopes for both the high positive friendship quality group ($\beta = 0.57, p < .001$) and moderate friendship group ($\beta = 0.23, p < .04$) were significantly different from zero, whereas the simple slope for the low positive group was not significantly different from zero ($\beta = -0.11, ns$). Thus, for young adolescents who reported high and medium levels of positive friendship quality, there was a significant association between their social withdrawal and private SCS, whereas there was no relation between these variables for young adolescents who reported low levels of positive friendship quality.

Discussion

Despite considerable interest in understanding the internalizing correlates of the public and private subtypes of self-consciousness in adult and undergraduate populations (e.g. Fenigstein *et al.*, 1975), very little empirical attention has been paid to self-consciousness as a personality trait and the possible distinctions between its correlates in early adolescence. To address this research gap, we examined the associations between public and private self-consciousness and a number of specific internalizing problems (e.g. rejection-sensitivity, anxiety/depression) that have been linked to the self-consciousness subtypes in the adult personality literature (Anderson *et al.*, 1996; Ingram & Smith, 1984). Given the importance of peer relationships and friendships during early adolescence (Rubin *et al.*, 2006) and findings suggesting that high-quality friendships may be particularly helpful for children and adolescents at risk for internalizing difficulties (e.g. Wight *et al.*, 2006), we also examined whether a high-quality friendship might diminish the internalizing problems associated with self-consciousness. The general pattern of findings draws attention to the potential 'risk' of high levels of self-consciousness during early adolescence, particularly for girls and when the self-directed attention is private in nature. Contrary to expectations, evidence revealed that positive friendships may exacerbate the difficulties associated with self-consciousness.

Although significant associations were revealed between both types of self-consciousness and the adjustment outcomes, there was notable evidence suggesting that *private* self-consciousness may be more problematic to adjustment than the public type during early adolescence. Differences in the internalizing correlates of public and private self-consciousness became pronounced in the computation of partial correlations. In fact, many of the significant associations between public self-consciousness and internalizing difficulties disappeared after private self-consciousness was controlled. These differences in the internalizing correlates of private and public self-consciousness were also particularly striking when the partial correlation analyses were performed separately for boys and girls. For girls, private self-consciousness was uniquely associated with all indices of internalizing

problems, including both types of rejection-sensitivity. Importantly, there were no significant associations revealed between private self-consciousness and adjustment indices for boys.

This study was the first to examine the internalizing correlates of private and public self-consciousness during early adolescence, and due to the small sample size in the present study, clearly additional research is needed. Nonetheless, the sex differences are intriguing and suggest that the internalizing ‘costs’ of privately self-directed attention may be greater for girls than for boys. It may be the case that private self-consciousness represents a unique cognitive vulnerability or important individual risk factor for psychopathology among girls, much in the same way as rumination or co-rumination (Rose, 2002). Interestingly, for girls, private self-consciousness was most strongly related to anxious expectations for rejection in the partial correlations, findings which were unexpected and inconsistent with those from studies involving adults. These findings may suggest that girls do better in terms of thoughts and feelings about their peers when they spend more time thinking about the self in relation to others than time thinking about the inner working of the self. Given the central role of peer relations during early adolescence and the increasing importance of close dyadic peer relationships for girls (Rubin *et al.*, 2006), disconnects between the extent to which social interactions occur and the amount of time spent thinking about the self in these interactions may prove psychologically distressing for early adolescent girls.

With regard to *public* self-consciousness, results indicated that adolescents reported more public than private self-consciousness. In light of the aforementioned importance of peer relationships during adolescence (Rubin *et al.*, 2006), it seems likely that public self-consciousness is somewhat more normative than private self-consciousness during early adolescence. More specifically, it may be rather normative to spend increased time thinking about the self as a social object as young adolescents’ social worlds change. The increased intimacy of young adolescents’ friendships and the development of romantic relationships may enhance concerns and worries about the self in relation to others, especially those pertaining to appearance and social behaviours. This interpretation is consistent with results from one study in which the public self-consciousness factor accounted for the majority of the variance in reports of self-consciousness among 13 year-olds, but not in a sample of younger children (Abrams, 1988). Yet, given the associations between public self-consciousness and anxiety/depression in the present study and the strong links between public self-consciousness and interpersonal sensitivity among adults (e.g. Fenigstein & Vanable, 1992), it seems likely that the psychological ‘costs’ of public self-consciousness become more problematic as public self-conscious concerns become less common with age. Moreover, the finding that public self-consciousness was significantly associated with angry and anxious rejection sensitivity for boys but not girls (after controlling for private self-consciousness) also suggests that public self-consciousness may play a significant role in excessive social concerns and worries during early adolescence, perhaps especially among boys because of their orientations towards the larger peer group and their tendencies to care more about popularity than girls (Rose & Rudolph, 2006).

Contrary to expectations, findings also indicated that some internalizing problems, particularly angry and anxious expectations for rejection and social withdrawal, were augmented by positive friendship quality. In particular, significant associations between *public* self-consciousness and anxious and angry expectations for rejection, and also between *private* self-consciousness and social withdrawal, were revealed for adolescents who reported high levels of positive friendship quality, but not for early adolescents who reported moderate and low levels of positive friendship quality. Only a handful of researchers have examined the friendships of self-conscious *adults*; these results have shown that friendships do not *lessen* the anxieties and concerns associated with self-consciousness

(e.g. Froming, Corley, & Rinker, 1990). At the same time, the friendships of self-conscious adults do not appear to enhance internalizing problems. The friendships of self-conscious *adolescents* may have a stronger (and more negative) influence on adjustment during early adolescence because of the central role that friendships and peer relationship play during this developmental period (Hartup & Stevens, 1996).

Although these findings are inconsistent with previously mentioned self-consciousness studies focused on adults and the previously described friendship quality studies, the findings fit nicely with results from investigations focused on the negative aspects of friendship during childhood and adolescence. For instance, it appears that positive friendships might actually foster or support some psychosocial difficulties and problematic behavioural styles (e.g. Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999; Murray-Close, Ostrov, & Crick, 2007). But, why might positive friendships exacerbate internalizing problems for highly *self-conscious* adolescents? It is possible that close friendships can be a source of internalizing problems if they offer the opportunity for privately self-conscious adolescents to co-ruminate about problems (Rose, 2002). A high-quality relationship characterized by co-rumination may increase the privately self-conscious adolescent's sense of 'exposure', thereby elevating concerns and worries associated with the once private aspects of the self and causing the adolescent to withdraw. Although a measure of rumination was not included in the present study, it would behoove future researchers to carefully examine the associations between rumination and private self-consciousness during adolescence. Some researchers argue that the problematic nature of private self-consciousness might be explained by its strong associations with ruminative tendencies during adulthood (e.g. Anderson *et al.*, 1996; Trapnell & Campbell, 1999), and the same may be true for young adolescents, especially within the context of their friendships (Rose, 2002).

Specific to the findings pertaining to *public* self-consciousness and angry and anxious expectations for rejection, an intimate friendship may foster a strong sense of 'togetherness', but also create a perceived '*us versus them*' scenario. In this scenario, two adolescents together may become overly concerned with the positive approval from peers and, together, expect the worst. This interpretation is consistent with studies revealing a strong *self-as-target* bias in publicly self-conscious individuals (Fenigstein, 1984). It seems likely that this bias may become heightened within the context of a close friendship. Although researchers have not explored the ways in which friendship qualities influence social cognition, this construal is consistent with a recent study demonstrating that children interpret hypothetical negative social situations involving good friends differently than those involving unfamiliar peers (Burgess *et al.*, 2006).

This present study is not without its limitations. Although the study's focus on the distinction between the internalizing correlates of private and public self-consciousness was novel, it is important for future studies to be longitudinal in nature, and to include peer-, parent-, and teacher-reports of self-consciousness, friendship quality, and internalizing problems. In accord with procedures outlined to clarify distinctions between personality and psychopathology (e.g. Clifton, Turkheimer, & Oltmanns, 2005), a multiple informant, longitudinal design would eliminate the present study's shared-method variance, would allow issues pertaining to causality and the direction of effects to be addressed, and may provide important knowledge about longitudinal trajectories of self-consciousness and internalizing difficulties from adolescence into adulthood. Such a design could also further elucidate the distinction between individual differences in personality (self-consciousness) and psychopathology (internalizing problems) during early adolescence (e.g. Oltmanns, Turkheimer, & Strauss, 1998). Relatedly, caution should be used when interpreting findings due to the larger number of comparisons without any corrections. Thus, additional research

with larger samples of young adolescents is clearly needed to eliminate potential problems associated with Type 1 error.

Furthermore, as noted previously, future investigators should consider individual differences in ruminative tendencies among young adolescents. We were unable to assess the reciprocity or mutuality of self-conscious adolescents' friendships. Yet, peer relationships researchers argue that reciprocal or mutual friendships may more influential on children's and adolescents' adjustment than non-reciprocated friendships (e.g. Rubin *et al.*, 2006). Thus, future studies that include assessments of rumination and friendship mutuality could prove illuminating regarding the specific ways in which *relationship* factors influence self-consciousness during early adolescence. On a related note, it may be important to examine the extent to which highly self-conscious adolescents form friendships with highly self-conscious peers and whether this similarity has an impact of their psychological well-being.

Despite these limitations, the present study increases our understanding of the internalizing correlates of public and private types of self-consciousness during early adolescence, and also reveals important complexity in the relations between individual child characteristics (e.g. self-consciousness), relational features (friendship quality), and psychological adjustment indices. The importance of this study is underscored by possible clinical implications of the findings: findings strongly suggest that the *private* type of self-consciousness during this period may place adolescents the most at risk for internalizing problems, but that both privately and publicly self-conscious adolescents may not be helped if paired with a good friend.

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Figure 1.

Anxious expectations as a function of public self-consciousness at three levels of positive friendship quality for girls; subscripts L, M, H refer to low, medium, and high levels of positive friendship quality.

Figure 2.

Anxious expectations as a function of public self-consciousness at three levels of positive friendship quality for boys; subscripts L, M, H refer to low, medium, and high levels of positive friendship quality.

Figure 3.

Angry expectations as a function of public self-consciousness at three levels of positive friendship quality; subscripts L, M, H refer to low, medium, and high levels of positive friendship quality.

Figure 4.

Social withdrawal as a function of private self-consciousness at three levels of positive friendship quality; subscripts L, M, H refer to low, medium, and high levels of positive friendship quality.

Table 1

Associations between YSR, CRSQ, and SCS subscales, for the entire sample, and separately by sex

Subscale	Public SCS <i>r</i>	Private SCS <i>r</i>
Withdrawn behaviours: total sample	.20 *	.29 **
Boys	.26	.21
Girls	.17	.33 **
Anxiety/depression: total sample	.41 **	.43 **
Boys	.26	.25
Girls	.48 **	.51 **
Social problems: total sample	.19 *	.33 **
Boys	.06	.22
Girls	.29 *	.40 **
Angry expectations: total sample	.32 *	.29 *
Boys	.34 *	.11
Girls	.31 **	.37 **
Anxious expectations: total sample	.38 *	.41 *
Boys	.33 *	.10
Girls	.40 **	.52 **

Note. *N* = 119 (44 boys) for comparisons between the SCS scales and YSR scales; *N* = 120 (43 boys) for comparisons between the SCS and CRSQ scales.

* $p < .05$;

** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Partial correlations between YSR subscales, CRSQ, and public and private self-consciousness, for the entire sample, and separately by sex

Subscale	Public SCS (controlling private SCS) <i>pr</i>	Private SCS (controlling public SCS) <i>pr</i>
Withdrawn behaviours: total sample	.05	.22 *
Boys	.17	.09
Girls	-.02	.29 *
Anxiety/depression: total sample	.22 *	.28 **
Boys	.15	.16
Girls	.26 *	.32 **
Social problems: total sample	.01	.28 **
Boys	-.09	.22
Girls	.08	.30 *
Angry expectations: total sample	.17	.16
Boys	.33 *	-.06
Girls	.07	.28 *
Anxious expectations: total sample	.18 *	.28 **
Boys	.32 *	-.08
Girls	.10	.41 **

Note. *df* = 113 (38 boys) for all comparisons.

* $p < .05$;

** $p < .001$.