DISCUSSION

The present study was carried out to determine the effect of sociability and shyness on loneliness and depression among students, to identify the gender differences, to understand the relationship between sociability, shyness, loneliness, depression and socio-economic status among students and finally to suggest some suitable measures to overcome the problems of shyness, loneliness and depression. Data were collected on both college and school students. The sample comprised of both private and government schools. The data obtained were analyzed and the results thus obtained have been presented in detail in the Results Section. The discussion follows – firstly, overall sample and then school sample.

Students studying in school were more lonely, more depressed and more shy compared to college level students.

It has been observed that during the initial stages of one’s life, children usually face difficulty in managing their emotions. Also during this stage, their social skills are not yet fully developed. Therefore, they do not fully share their feelings with others. As a result they tend to be more lonely. As mentioned before in previous studies also, direct relationship exists between loneliness and depression (e.g., Stek et al., 2004). The more the child is lonely, the more he is likely to be depressed. During this phase of life, students are quite hesitant in taking initiatives and being open to others. Since children don’t have much exposure to the outer world also, therefore, whenever they face any unforeseen circumstances they are likely to get anxious. Such anxiousness leads to improper ways of understanding and dealing with others. As a result, they feel shy in their social relationships. This results in maintaining distance and detaching oneself from others. Such type of detachment is likely to develop the feelings of loneliness and depression.
Males were observed to be more lonely as compared to females

There are numerous studies that have been carried out in this direction which show contradictory results. Some studies reveal gender differences in case of loneliness, whereas other studies highlight that there are no gender differences for loneliness. Several studies show males to be lonelier than females (Avery, 1982; Booth, 1983; Davis and Franzei, 1986; Koenig et al., 1994; Page, 1990; Russell et al., 1980; Schultz and Moore, 1986; Stokes and Levin, 1986). Other studies show non-significant gender differences (Archibald et al., 1995; Tornstane, 1992). As stated before, females are more sociable as compared to males. Research reveals that males are usually less socially skilled (Kallipouska and Laitinen, 1991), display more withdrawal and inhibited social behaviours (Renshaw and Brown, 1993; Rubin, LeMare and Lollis, 1990), are less willing to take social risks (Moore and Schultz, 1983) and are less willing to assert their rights to others (Bruch et al., 1988). On the other hand, females spend more time in maintaining social relations with others. They are less competitive, whereas males are more inclined towards prestige and competence. Males and females also differ in their peer-related interaction skills and patterns. Some studies highlight that there are no gender differences observed in case of social participation (e.g., Burleson and Samter, 1992), which is not inline with the results obtained.

However, loneliness is also caused by lack of support from one’s environment. Study by Nicpon (2006) reveals that social support was negatively related to loneliness and positively related to academic persistence decisions. Less loneliness and more social support predicted more positive persistence decisions. Women perceived receiving more social support from both friends and family than did men. Another study reveals that girls report statistically significant higher levels of perceived social support than boys; however, there were no statistically significant gender differences in loneliness (Mahon, 1994).

Social support was considered to be a better predictor of perceived loneliness for males than for females. Uniformly, males with more highly interconnected, cohesive sets of friends reported less loneliness. Males and females may also employ different standards in evaluating loneliness, with males using group-oriented criteria and females
standards in evaluating loneliness, with males using group oriented criteria and females focusing on dyadic relationships. A study by Schultz and Moore (1986) states the hypothesis that males report greater loneliness than females. Their study highlighted that affective and social risk taking measures were more highly related to loneliness among males than females. Loneliness is more likely to be associated with negative personal and affective self-evaluations for males than for females. Males react to loneliness more negatively than females because of tendency to attribute loneliness to personal failures rather than external, uncontrollable causes. Having difficulty in initiating social risks may contribute to loneliness for males more than females. Social pressures may influence one's admission of loneliness, whereby men who display symptoms of loneliness may be regarded more negatively than women who display the same symptoms.

**Females were observed to be more sociable than males**

Females are slightly more sociable than males. And this difference becomes more stable during adolescence and remains during adulthood. Females tend to be more sympathetic, understanding and nurturing and they disclose more as compared to men. Thus their interactions are usually interpersonal and there is an exchange of the affective rewards of praise, soothing and affection. Men, in contrast, tend to channel their sociability into groups or teams. They engage in collective instrumental action more often than women. Relations between men are governed by two apparently contradictory orientations: solidarity and peer ship, on the one hand, and competition for jobs, prestige, and competence on the other. These tendencies are regulated by norms governing their appropriateness. Women tend to be less competitive and so can more easily express sociability interpersonally. Females place greater value on sociability and friendliness (Regan and Sprecher, 1995).

It has been observed that the pattern for each sex derives from our evolutionary history. Tiger and Fox (1971) assume that these male and female roles may be seen in primates. In general, females occupy themselves with interpersonal matters involving face-to-face encounters and focusing that have to do with the bearing, nurturing and training of the young. By contrast, males involve themselves with groups and activities
that extend directly to the whole community. According to this approach the gender differences in social behaviour are rooted in primary ancestry. The sex difference in the qualitative nature of social interaction is assumed to be innate and perhaps linked to hormones. Research reveals that females show greater eye contact than males (Hall, 1985), superior social understanding and sensitivity to emotional expressions (Baron-Cohen et al., 1999).

Women devote a greater portion of their lives caretaking and developing friendships, so they are more accustomed to building and utilizing social networks. While men, in contrast have devoted a greater portion of their lives to their careers, therefore they have not developed the social network/skills that most women have.

**Females were found to be more shy as compared to males.**

Research reveals that shyness can result in painful consequences. There are social problems, such as difficulty meeting people and making new friends, who may leave the shy person isolated and subject to loneliness and depression. It also results in number of cognitive problems, such as unable to think clearly in the presence of others. Studies indicate that girls and boys are treated differently in almost all spheres of life. Gender development involves complex interchanges in which children are treated differently according to their sex (Huston, 1983). These differences in adult responsiveness and also gender differences in the developing child’s self image are crucially influenced by the gender stereotypes of the sociocultural structure of the society (Rhode, 1990; Hinde, 1990).

The caste system in India has traditionally placed males higher in the social hierarchy than females, with women generally being expected to be more obedient and subdued than males (Deshpande, 2002). These societal expectations are reflective of the male dominated nature and patriarchic structure of the Indian family that influences social roles, responsibilities and control of resources (Desai, 1994; Gupta et al., 2003). Recent research by Prakash and Coplan (2007) revealed that girls are more socially withdrawn and shy as compared to boys.
The way the child is being brought up in a family plays a very important role in his/her development of personality. Initial grooming of a child leaves an impact on the way he deals with people around him. Most of the research reveals that shyness is mainly caused by parenting practices that are not consistent. There are differences in the ways boys and girls are being brought up in a family. Usually it is observed in Indian culture that parents are overprotective towards their children. And such overprotectiveness is more towards girls as compared to boys. Girls who are overprotected by their parents often don’t have the opportunity to be independent. Because of this they are often insecure and lack self confidence, which ultimately leads to shyness.

Shy girls have better relationships at home and get on better in preschool, whereas with boys the opposite is the case. The difference was ascribed to the gender stereotypes of the parents. Parents tend to think that it is all right to be shy and even a virtue, if it’s a girl, but not if it’s a boy (Hinde, Stevenson-Hinde and Tamplin, 1985). Results suggest that mothers seemed not to be pleased with shyness in boys. Mother’s interactions with shy girls, in contrast, were characterized by tenderness and affection (Radke-Yarrow, Richters and Wilson, 1988). In girls shyness was associated with a more complex set of personal qualities, such as lower levels of anger, tension, social competence and high levels of affection and compliance; whereas in boys shyness was associated with tension and negative mood.

Also boys in India are expected to assume numerous responsibilities when they get older, many of which are related to providing for the immediate and extended family. Girls in India are rated more socially withdrawn than boys. This would be in keeping with persisting cultural expectations that females should be submissive, obedient and assume more traditional gender roles (Verma, 2000).

**Females at school were more shy as compared to females at college level, however males at college were more shy compared to males at school.**

Usually it has been observed that when girls move a step ahead in life, i.e., when she first enters the school life, she faces some difficulty in adjusting to that environment as she comes from protected family environment. Initially it takes time to acclimatize to
that particular social setting. And gradually as she moves to a higher level of education, she starts getting firmly acclimatized to that situation. Therefore such kind of gradual acclimatization and adjustment makes her come out of the shell of shyness. The more she familiarizes with a particular environmental setting, less will be the feelings of shyness she will experience. This has been observed in the results also that as girls move from school to college level, they were overcoming shyness.

However the same trend was not observed in case of males. Males at college level were observed to be more shy as compared to males at school level. This may be due to the fact that the social setting in which they were studying may not be very conducive to enhance their social skills and hence they remained aloof and didn’t open with others.

**Students from government school were found to be more lonely as well as sociable as compared to students from private school**

It has been observed that students joining government schools usually come from low socio economic background. Such a background affects the personality of the students to a great extent. These students not only show low level of self-confidence, but their personality also reveals some shades of inferiority complex in their Behaviour. Such attitude prevents them in coming out of a shell and as a result they are likely to experience loneliness. It is basically the attitude that the child holds for himself which decides his personality in future. Children coming from low socio economic families also report low self esteem (Zhang and Postiglione, 2001). This feeling of low self-esteem leads to loneliness.

Also these students were observed to be more sociable. Since these students are not status conscious, therefore they don’t maintain any hierarchy when they interact with their peer group. They easily mix well with others and hence display much of sociability skills as compared to private school students. Although, these findings are paradoxical, since usually sociability and loneliness go negative with each other, also confirmed in regression analysis when taken together.
Students coming from private school were more shy as compared to government school students

Students from private school receive less social support from their friends in school, which usually results in shyness. Lack of supportive relationship increases uncertainty among the group. More the uncertainty, more the person will keep himself away from others. Research has shown that social and emotional support from friends help in effectively coping up with stress. Persons maintaining close interpersonal relations with friends and families are more inclined towards approach strategies. Since private school students lack in getting emotional and social support from friends, they are likely to be shy.

But at the same time, these students were observed to be sociable. Though there is not much of the research that is in line with these results, but it may be due to the reason that students from private school usually come from middle or upper middle class families, i.e., they are high in socio economic status. In these families, during the initial stages of child’s development, they are taught certain basic etiquettes. At this stage the child learn basic social skills, which proves beneficial in his later life. These social skills help them to be more sociable in schools while dealing with friends.

School girls were more depressed as compared to boys

Females are twice as likely as males to suffer from major depressive episode. Studies carried out by Nolen-Hoeksema, (1991) and Nolen-Hoeksema and Jackson (2001), females have the tendency to respond to depressed or dysphoric mood with repetitive thought and Behaviours that focus attention on the meaning and consequences of the depressed mood. This is termed as ruminative cognitive style. Gender difference in rates of major depression is a consistent research finding, with women being about twice as likely to suffer from a major depressive episode as men (Kessler, et al., 1993; Nolen-Hoeksema,1995; Weissman and Klerman, 1977). This difference in rates of depression in women relative to men emerges in mid-puberty and remains throughout adulthood (Daley and Hammen, 2002; Daley, Hammen, and Rao, 2000; Kessler et al., 1993; Nolen-Hoeksema and Girgus, 1994). Why women are more vulnerable to depression than men
is not completely understood, although various biological, social, and psychological explanations have been offered. Hormonal changes during puberty, childbearing years, and menopause, for example, are suspected to have some connection to increased depression in women (Denmark and Paludi, 1993; Formanek and Gurian, 1987; Seeman, 1997). Societal gender inequity and the oppression of women (e.g., poverty, lower social status, vulnerability to sexual and physical abuse) have also been linked to adverse mental health outcomes for women (Murphy, 2003).

A study carried out by Bhatia and Bhatia (1999) revealed that the higher prevalence of depression in women is most likely due to a combination of gender related differences in cognitive styles, certain biologic factors and a higher incidence of psychosocial and economic stresses in women.

**Government school boys were more depressed and more lonely compared to private school boys**

It has been observed that males studying in government school usually lack the exposure to the outer world. More the unfamiliar situation, the more it leads to discomfort. Such discomfort cripples the level of depression and anxiety. Not only this, lack of exposure also results in lack of confidence. Students with lack of confidence possess negative self schemas- i.e., negative conceptions of their own traits, abilities and Behaviour. As a result they tend to be highly sensitive to the criticism from others (Joiner et al., 1993). Usually such type of personality trait results in depression. Because of this students are usually unable to resolve problems and this inability makes them depressed which ultimately leads to loneliness also. As mentioned before in previous results that depression leads to loneliness. Another reason can be that students from government school usually reveal the feeling of learned helplessness. This feeling makes them believe that they have no control over their own outcomes. Such feelings of helplessness leads to depression (Seligman et al., 1988).
Private school boys were more sociable as compared to government school boys

Males from private school often have lot of exposure to the life. More exposure results in being sociable with others. Greater level of exposure brings more opportunities to know and understand the outer world in a much better way. Such opportunities make a person gain experience in life. And a person usually learns a lot from experience, which teaches him how to deal with people around them both at the family as well as at the school front. Another reason can be that because of exposure and experience, private school males are often open minded, i.e., they accept the world as it is and are receptive to what the other person says. Such open mindedness increases the level of adjustment among them. And this adjustment leads to flexibility in their Behaviour. Higher the level of flexibility, higher is the chances of being easily moulded. Therefore because of these traits, usually such students are observed to display more sociability in their Behaviour.

Government school girls are more sociable, whereas private school girls are more depressed

Females studying in government school are often observed to be more sociable. This may be due to the fact that in government set up usually there is less of competition. Low level of competition spirit brings people closer to each other. Such females tend to be more sympathethetic, understanding, nurturing, disclose more and hence are more sociable. Also government school females believe in providing more of social support to each other. More supportive relationship seems to reduce uncertainty and increases level of sociability. Also females are found to be sociable, because their interactions are usually interpersonal and there is exchange of affective rewards of praise, soothing and affection in their level of interaction.

On the other hand, private school females are more depressed as compared to government school females. It has been observed that private school females have high competition spirit. Higher levels of competition spirit make the person impatient, thus resulting in stress and depression. It also increases feelings jealously which ultimately leads to depression. Also there is lack of social support in private set up. Such type of lack of social as well as emotional support from friends often results in depression.
Overall Private school students were observed to be more shy compared to government school students

Private school students are more shy because of lack of social support. Usually it has been observed that students studying in private school don’t get much of social support from their social surroundings. It has been seen that students studying in such an educational setting often comes from high family background. Therefore there is less of interdependence among students. Such feelings lead to more of shyness. Such students usually have the habit of show off since they belong to high social status families. Whereas students from government school are down to earth since most of them belong to either low/middle class families. Also it has been observed that parents of private school students usually don’t have much time for their children. They are busy in their own life. Therefore lack of attention makes children withdraw from social situation, which ultimately results in shyness. Such parents often seem disinterested in their children’s life. Decreased parental involvement makes the children believe that they are not worthy of others attention, which in turn affects their social relationships. This results in feeling of uncomfortableness in social situation which ultimately leads to shyness. Another reason can be students from private school are often overprotected by their parents and don’t have the opportunity to be independent socially. Because of this, these children lack the confidence needed to make decisions for them. Such children are often insecure, which can then cause shyness.

Positive significant relationship existed between loneliness and depression

Students who were lonely were found to be depressed. Lonely people suffer from a variety of psychological disorders. A number of studies have shown that those who are lonely are also likely to be depressed. Those who are lonely tend to be anxious. Depression is considered to be one of the important personality correlates of loneliness (Marangoni and Ickes, 1989). Lonely people have insufficient interpersonal relationships, which leads to depression. Lonely people are usually anxious in social a situation, which interferes with their ability to maintain contacts with others. This inhibited social Behaviour ultimately results in depression. There are certain social situations that initially
leads to loneliness followed by depression, like ending a marriage, friendship breakups, unemployment, retirement, etc. Loneliness serves as an important factor in depression (Brown and Harris, 1978). Although depression is more likely to be caused by loneliness than the reverse; it is possible that a depressive reaction to a noninterpersonal stressor (e.g., job loss, financial problems) puts a strain on interpersonal relations and leads to loneliness. Cognitive negativity associated with depression may make the negative aspects of an individual’s interpersonal relationships more salient, leading the individual to feel lonely (Essex et al., 1985). Stek et al (2004) highlighted that perceived health, loneliness, impaired mobility, cognitive decline and function disability were major correlates of depression.

**Positive and significant relationship emerged between shyness and loneliness**

Shy students were found to be lonely. Shyness leads to loneliness. Shy people are anxious in social situations and that’s why they prefer to avoid such situations. Since shy people display poor social skills when they are in social situations, they experience more loneliness. A positive correlation exists between shyness and loneliness (Anderson and Harvey, 1988). A social situation, particularly novel ones and personality characteristics, particularly shyness, contributes to loneliness (Cheek and Busch, 1981). Friendships at the initial stage is concerned as an important part of children’s emotional development. Since shy children do not have the social skills necessary to make friends, therefore they are fearful of social situations. Because of this difficulty in making friends, they often feel lonely. Shy people think poorly of themselves and have inadequate social skills and also discourage others from making contact with them. Since they are unable to overcome their feelings of self-consciousness, they experience fear of rejection, thus leading to loneliness. Shyness interferes with forming successful interactions shy people are often lonely people. Shyness is a special kind of loneliness- a perceived inability to relate effectively to other people in a social situation. It is not a feeling of rejection by other people, but a physical state of separateness caused by the absence of other people, a loss of unavailability of a special friend or loved one, or a feeling of alienation from people within one’s group. A study carried out by Schmidt and Fox (1995), revealed that
high shy people showed more loneliness. On the other hand, loneliness is associated with a variety of individual differences including hostility, social withdrawal, shyness and low positive affect (Ernst and Cacioppo, 1999). A study carried out by Prakash and Coplan (2007) suggests that socially withdrawn and shy children report greater loneliness symptoms.

**Significant and positive relationship existed between shyness and depression**

Shyness has a casual effect on depression, both directly and indirectly through loneliness. The indirect effect highlights that shyness interferes with the healthy development of satisfying interpersonal relationships, which in turn may lead to depression. The direct effect states that the social failures and concomitant anxiety produces negative affect and hence leads to depression. Research reveals direct relationship between depression and shyness (Anderson and Harvey, 1988). Heredity also plays a vital role in determining depression and shyness. Study by Bell et al (1990) revealed that parents who suffer from depression have an unusually high incidence of shy children. There is a direct link between depression and shyness. Shy students are more depressed and have more negative attributional style than nonshy students (Alfano et al., 1994). Smith and Betz (2002) indicated that there is a direct relationship between shyness and depressive symptoms. Shy children are observed to report greater depressive symptoms (Prakash and Coplan, 2007). People who are shy are motivated to avoid social situations. These people display poor social skills, which hampers their interpersonal relations with others. Since these people are anxious in social situations, they tend to keep themselves away from the outer world. Such type of social isolation results in loneliness, which later in turn leads to depression. As a result depression finally leads to sadness, fatigue, agitated Behaviour and reduced ability to function and interact with others.

**Significant and negative relationship existed between shyness and sociability**

Results revealed that students who were shy were less sociable. Though to some extent shyness is genetic. According to Plomin and Daniels (1986), shyness is most
heritable dimensions of temperament throughout the life span. Adult shyness is partly genetic (Kagan and Reznick, 1986). But there are number of reasons that suggests that shyness in students leads to less sociability. Poor social skills are one of the major factors that lead to shyness. Lacking adequate social skills leads to heightened arousal when a social situation is encountered. Poor social skills are a cause as well as a consequence of maladaptive levels of arousal in social situations. Individuals, who are overly submissive in social situations show inhibited, introverted Behaviours (McCullough et al., 1994). Also shy students are strongly motivated to avoid social interactions because of anxiety and negative arousal experienced in such situations. According to Jones et al (1986), shy people are more fearful of social interactions, more self conscious and more lonely than nonshy people. At times, shyness is caused by inconsistent parenting practices also. Because of such inconsistency children feel insecure and have difficulty in being open to others. Shyness may also develop from an excess of parental evaluation and negative comments about publicly observable aspects of the child (Buss, 1986). Decreased parental involvement usually makes children believe that they are not worthy of other’s attention. This in turn affects their social relationships. At times, children who are frequently threatened, teased or criticized either by family members or by other people may learn to expect only negative feedback from others. Therefore this expectation leads to the avoidance of social situations and contact with other people.

**Significant negative relationship existed between depression and sociability**

It was observed from the results that depression is related to sociability. Research reveals that social support plays a very important role in overcoming the problems of depression. Since depressed individuals have fewer social contacts and a less self-affirming social environment, therefore they are likely to be less sociable and more interpersonally submissive (McCullough et al., 1994). Also depressed people lack confiding relationships (Eisenmann, 1985), which affects their social relationships. Lack of close, confiding relationships are well established vulnerability factor for depression (Bebbington et al., 1984). At times individuals are required to compromise under social networks. And when people show difficulty in compromising to social situations, they are
likely to be depressed. Social isolation is considered as an important factor leading to depression (Muller- Spahn and Hock, 1994). The person’s personality depends upon the way he is being brought up in the family. The culture and values laid down by family plays a vital role in the way the person deals with his surroundings. Not only this, the family support serves as a buffer on the effects of life stress on depression (Rich and Bonner, 1987). An individual may experience dejection if his expectations for social support are greater than the level that is realized. Vulnerability to depression is associated with abnormally high expectations for support (Beck et al., 1979) and an unexpected lack of support in times of crisis (Neeleman and Power, 1994). Research suggests that social support plays a very important role in moderating the relationship between life stress and depression (Bonner and Rick, 1987). Depression is not always caused by social exclusion. There are number of other factors like attributional style, cognitive distortions, etc that leads to depression.

**Negative relationship emerged between depression and socio economic status**

Negative relationship was observed between depression and socio economic status. That means students belonging to low SES group were found to be depressed. However, in female college students there was a positive relationship. But however it can be suggested that students from low SES group are not frequently exposed to the new situations. Therefore since they have trouble coping with new situations, they tend to withdraw and as a result it leads to depression. Also it has been observed that children coming from such a low SES group are often threatened, teased and criticized either by their family members or by other people. As a result they may learn to expect only negative feedback from others. This expectation will lead to the avoidance of social situations and contact with other people, which may ultimately result in depression. Also at times parents of children belonging to low SES group display lack of involvement in their children’s lives. As a result the child starts feeling that they are not worthy of other’s attention. Gradually they start feeling uncomfortable and finally it leads to depression. Such children may also have low self opinion of themselves. Such a belief
often results in depression. However in regression, no direct relationship was observed, it is only through loneliness SES seems to be contributing.

Mixed relationship existed between shyness and SES

Results revealed that significant and positive relationship existed between shyness and SES in female school students. That means students belonging to high SES group were observed to be more shy, whereas male government school students exhibited opposite relations, i.e., low SES were more shy. Less research has been carried out in this area that could support this result. However it may be due to the fact that students belonging to high SES group may be coming from such a family environment, where parents are over protective towards their children. Also these children may be pampered to a great extent in a family. Usually it has been observed that children who are overprotected and pampered by their parents often don’t have the opportunity to be independent socially. Because of this, these children often lack the confidence needed to make decisions for themselves. Such children are often insecure, which can cause shyness. Another reason may be that the children from high SES group may come from families, where discipline is inadequate and also inappropriate. At times children who are disciplined too severely often feel that they have no control over their lives and this loss of control may result in shyness. Another possibility can be that parents of students who belong to high SES group may sometimes command to maintain distance from children/age mates of low SES.

Mixed relationship existed between sociability and SES

School students belonging to low SES group were likely to be more sociable. It was also true of female school students. Usually it has been observed that children coming from low SES group are not status conscious. They generally don’t have any inhibitions in talking to other since they don’t hold any status or prestige issues. Therefore they tend to be more sociable. Also not much of ego hassles are observed in such children, which helps them in socializing with others easily. These children are
often quite flexible. Such type of flexibility often helps them in maintaining friendships. It has also been observed that students belonging to low SES are often adjusting, which helps them in being sociable.

**Negative relationship existed between sociability and loneliness**

Lonely people are usually observed to be less socially skilled (Inderbitzen-Pisuruk et al., 1992), display more withdrawn and inhibited social behaviours, are less willing to take social risks and are less willing to assert their right to others (Bruch et al., 1989). Withdrawn social behaviours was a significant predictor of concurrent and future loneliness (Renshaw and Brown, 1993), since the possession of poor social skills lessens the ability to create friendship networks, a condition conducive to loneliness. Also low social risk taking characteristic of lonely adolescents impedes initiation of social contacts (Moore and Schultz, 1983).

Commonly, social withdrawal seems to be understood as withdrawing oneself from the peer group. Withdrawal from peer interaction is perceived to be related to shyness and social reticence. However, regardless of the ‘reasons’ why socially withdrawn children refrain from social interaction in India, such children tend to be disliked and sociometrically rejected by peers. Extremely withdrawn children in India also evidenced greater adjustment problems than comparison counterparts. More specifically, withdrawn children reported greater loneliness and more depressive symptoms (particularly for girls). The social ‘advantages’ offered to males in Indian society may actually outweigh the social disadvantages of being socially withdrawn. That is, because Indian culture naturally assigns dominant status to males, being shy may not actually be as disadvantageous to boys growing up. In contrast, if girls are automatically assigned a more submissive role, it may be that much more necessary for girls to be socially outgoing in order to overcome this ‘stereotype’ and achieve social success.

Alternatively, the lack of more extensive gender differences found in the correlates of social withdrawal might be indicative of the changing nature of Indian
culture with respect to gender inequality. It has been argued that the ‘gender gap’ has been closing over the years (Gupta et al., 2003). For example, a greater number of Indian females have benefited from improvements in living conditions and social development such as increased opportunities to receive university-level education and better employment opportunities (Gupta et al., 2003; Kaldet, 1990).

Indian females need to possess more assertive social skills in order to succeed within school and their careers. It can be speculated that the societal prototype of an Indian girl as docile and submissive would be best exemplified in terms of a ‘moderate’ level of shyness-withdrawal. Such characteristics would be consistent with cultural expectations regarding gender stereotypes, but would also not overly penalize females who are attempting to compete in the rapidly changing Indian society. This change in societal values may influence the outcomes associated with being socially withdrawn.