

Abstract: Successful interpersonal interaction involves accurate listening and attentional engagement. Shy people, however, are "naturally preoccupied" because their attentional resources are often focused on concerns about their adequacy as interaction partners. Under evaluative pressure, and when interacting with non-shy partners, preoccupation increases. Concern about one's adequacy in interpersonal interactions is often related to a communal motive, such as the need for acceptance and inclusion. Therefore, satisfying the motive by removing the threat of failure, should lead to increased attentional focus and more effective social performance. In this study we examine the effects on a speaker of a shy or non-shy listener who is focusing on their own performance, in contrast to focusing on the speaker with the assurance that "there is no right way to listen." We hypothesized that performance-focused shy listeners would have a negative impact on speakers, and that removing a performance-focus would reduce the threat of failure and increase effective listening behavior. Results were consistent with our hypotheses. We suggest ways that skilled social behavior may be increased in shy individuals by satisfying communal motives.

Introduction: Successful interpersonal interaction involves accurate listening and attentional engagement (Tronick and Gianino, 1986; Stern, 1977). Shy people are "naturally preoccupied" because attentional resources are focused on adequacy concerns (Zimbardo, 1977). Preoccupation and critical self-consciousness are hallmarks of problematic shyness and are extreme in shyness clinic clients (Arnold & Cheek, 1986; Melchior & Cheek, 1990; Henderson, 1994; Zimbardo, 1977). Shy people want to connect but become distracted by worry and concern about how others are perceiving them As a result they also have trouble perceiving others accurately.

Self-preoccupation also interferes with self-expression more generally, such as creative expression in writing, but only when shy individuals are under evaluative threat (Cheek & Stahl, 1986). Furthermore, clinical observation suggests that shy clients do NOT have skill deficits, that when they are motivated and feel accepted they show adequate, sometimes superior social skills.

Interpersonal Motives

- Shy people desire inclusion and acceptance.
- Social evaluation threatens the desired state.
- Satisfying the motive may reduce concern and improve performance.

Concern about adequacy may interfere with satisfying a communal motive, such as a need for inclusion or acceptance. Evaluation threatens getting the need met and triggers anxiety and self-preoccupation. Circumplex models of interpersonal motives describe two orthogonal dimensions of motivation, from communal (friendly or connected), to distant (cold or disconnected) and from dominant (influencing) to submission (yielding) (Horowitz, in press). We are interested in the communal dimension.

Because shy people want to connect with others, satisfying the need may reduce their concern. Therefore, removing the threat of failure should lead to increased attentional focus and improved social performance. We therefore hypothesized that shy listeners who anticipated evaluation in a dyadic listening task, would become preoccupied and would have a negative impact on speakers. We thought that removing evaluative threat would reduce the anticipation of failure and increase effective listening behavior.

Connection, Horizontal Circumplex Dimension



The research paradigm involves manipulating a listener's responsiveness. We are interested in the effect on the speaker. In this study we examine speakers' reactions to listeners who are focusing on "just listening" vs. focusing on their performance, which is being evaluated.

Given that shy listeners under evaluative threat become preoccupied with their social performance, we hypothesized that:

- about an experience in which they felt vulnerable.
- threat condition.
- by evaluation and would concentrate on being good listeners.

Non-evaluation Not Shy

Method: There were 67 speaker-listener dyads in four conditions. Shy and non-shy individuals were listening to Speakers' stories about experiences in which they felt ashamed. In one condition they are told to "just listen and be themselves". In the other condition they are told they are being evaluated. **Instructions for the speakers were** the same in all conditions.

Speakers in all conditions are told:

"Social interaction is a very important aspect of life, and in this experiment, we are interested in how people tell stories. You are going to be the story teller and your partner is going to be the listener or audience. Your job is to talk about a personal experience that you have had where you have felt ashamed. Some things that you might include would be to describe the circumstance, exactly what happened, and also how you felt during the experience and any consequences that arose to either you or to the others involved."

Listeners in the evaluation condition were told:

"As you know, social interaction is an extremely important part of life: Socially skillful people are generally more successful than other people. In this experiment we are evaluating people's listening skills as one important aspect of a person's social competence."

"Your partner will be asked to tell you about a personal experience that he/she recently had, and your job is to be an active listener. Be engaged—the way you would want a listener to be. You may wonder about the reason for the video camera. We'll be recording your performance on videotape so expert judges can watch you, examine your listening skills, and evaluate your performance. Most people find that they are able to ignore the camera if they try."

"Following the conversation, we'll ask you to give a short talk describing what you did to be an active listener. Our judges will then evaluate your performance. Afterwards, one of our judges will be able to give you feedback about your success with social competence and active listening skills."

"Really do your best to be an active listener. Do whatever needs to be done to promote and facilitate an engaging social interaction."

Listeners in the Non-Evaluation Condition are "let off the hook" and are told:

"Social interaction is one aspect of life, and one part of social interaction is telling people about experiences we've had—telling a story. In this experiment we are interested in how your partner tells a story to you about his/her experiences."

"Your partner will be asked to tell you a story about a personal experience that he/ she recently had. Your job is just to be there as the listener. Even though you don't

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Speakers would find them aversive as listeners, particularly if speakers were telling

However, speakers would be more comfortable with shy listeners in the reduced

Speakers would also rate non-shy listeners higher in the evaluation condition than in the reduced threat condition because non-shy listeners would not be threatened



have to do much, your being there and being interested is important since it helps the speaker clarify his or her thoughts and feelings about the experience. There are no right or wrong ways to listen. If you feel like saying something, do; if you don't feel like saying anything, that's OK, too—do whatever seems easy, natural, and comfortable to you."

The Speakers rated the listeners on a scale from not at all (1) to very much to (7). Speakers also rated their positive and negative emotions before and after the interaction using a version of the Positive and Negative Affectivity Scale modified to reflect emotions experienced "at the moment" rather than experienced more generally (PANAS; Watson, Clark & Carey, 1988).

Results: Speakers' ratings of listeners were factor analyzed, resulting in three factors: comfort level, degree of involvement and liking, and speakers' degree of vulnerability in telling the story. There was equality of variances across the individual items so scales were constructed to reflect the factors. The means of the combined items in each scale served as dependent variables Three speakers were lost to analyses due to missing data, leaving an N of 64. Reliability was calculated for each scale using Chronbach's alpha (4 item comfort level = 0.73; 10 item involvement = 0.86; 3 item shame = 0.77).

A 2 (gender) by 2 (condition) by 2 (shy) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on comfort level, involvement, and vulnerability scores. Results revealed a three-way (gender by shy by evaluation) interaction F(3, 54) = 3.5, p. < 0.03. Followup univariate analyses with pairwise comparisons revealed that speakers were least comfortable with shy males in the evaluation condition (shy males M = 3.9, SD = 1.1; not-shy males = 5.0, SD = 1.0) consistent with previous findings that preoccupation interferes with social interaction F(1, 56) = 9.2, p. < 0.004. Importantly, however, and as expected, speakers were more comfortable with shy listeners than not-shy listeners in the reduced evaluation condition when they were "just listening" as they would naturally, but these results were significant only for males F(1, 56) = 9.2, p. < 0.03 (shy males M = 5.1; SD = 1.2; not-shy males = M = 3.7, SD = 0.8).



Surprisingly, speakers rated their comfort level with shy as well as not-shy females similarly to not-shy males in the evaluation condition (shy females M = 4.4 SD = 0.9; not-shy females M = 4.4, SD = 0.9, compared to not-shy males M = 5.0, SD = 1.0) suggesting that shy females remained attentive in spite of the threat of evaluation. In the reduced evaluation condition, however, speakers were less comfortable with shy female listeners than not-shy females, a difference which approached significance (F(1,56) = 9.2, p. < 0.08) (shy females M = 4.2, SD = 0.9; not-shy females M = 5.0, SD = 1.1).

Speaker's Comfort with Male Listeners



There were no significant differences between speakers' degree of involvement in the interaction, or speakers' degree of vulnerability in telling about a shame-related experience with shy and not-shy listeners.

However, in response to the single item, "how much shame was involved in the telling of the incident", there was a significant gender difference. Speakers experienced the greatest shame with males and the least with females F(1, 56) = 5.5, p. < 0.05)(males M = 3.6, SD = 0.3; females M = 2.8, SD = 0.2).

For the analysis of the speakers' emotional reaction to the task a 2 (gender) by 2 (condition) by 2



(shy) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on PANAS positive and negative change scores. Results revealed a two-way (shy by evaluation) interaction F(2, 57) = 2.9, p. < 0.06, approaching significance for speakers' change in positive affect. Follow-up univariate analyses revealed that speakers with shy listeners in the evaluation condition experienced a greater decrease in positive affect F(1, 58) = 5.1, p. < 0.03 (shy M = -1.6, SE = 1.2; not-shy M = 0.8, SE = 1.4), but in the reduced evaluation condition the findings were reversed. As predicted, speakers experienced the greatest decrease in positive affect in the reduced evaluation condition with not-shy listeners F(1, 58) = 5.1, *p*. < 0.03, (shy M = 0.6, SE = 1.2; not-shy M = -2.9, SE = 1.4).



Follow-up univariate analyses also revealed that speakers experienced the greatest increase in negative affect in the evaluation condition with shy listeners F(1, 58) = 3.1, p. < 0.09 (shy M = 3.8, SE = 1.2; not-shy M = 2.3, SE = 1.4). Findings again were reversed in the reduced evaluation condition. Speakers experienced the greatest rise in negative affect during the task with not-shy listeners in the reduced evaluation condition, and the least rise in negative affect overall with shy listeners (shy M = 0.24, SE = 1.2; not-shy M = 3.2, SE = 1.4).





Reduced evaluation/natural

Interestingly, the duration of the interaction was longest with male listeners in the evaluation condition and shortest with female listeners in that condition (male M = 255.3 seconds, SD = 165 seconds; female M = 154.6 seconds, SD = 69 seconds). In the reduced evaluation condition, duration of interaction was similar for males and females (male M = 182.6 seconds, SD = 77 seconds; female M = 185.7, SD = 113 seconds) The difference approached significance F(1, 57) = 3.4, p. < 0.07 (N = 65).

Duration of Interaction



Discussion: Overview of findings:

- 1. Speakers' were more comfortable and found their task least onerous when they were telling a story about a shame experience to shy male listeners who were not under evaluative threat, and with not -shy male and not-shy female listeners, as well as shy females, who were.
- 2.Self-reported shame in the telling of the story was greatest with male listeners.
- 3. Speakers found interactions with the shy and the not-shy equally involving, and reported being equally vulnerable with the shy and the not-shy.
- 4. Speakers experienced the greatest decrease in positive emotion with not-shy listeners in the reduced evaluation condition and the least with shy listeners in the same condition.



Speaker's Change in Negative Attitude



Evaluation/preoccupied

- 5. Speakers experienced the greatest rise in negative emotion in the evaluation condition with shy listeners, followed by the not-shy listeners in the reduced evaluation condition, paralleling the findings with comfort levels.
- 6. The duration of the interaction was longest with male listeners and shortest with female listeners in the evaluation condition.

Our results suggest that shy males may be more socially skilled and empathic than non-shy listeners when a communal motive is satisfied; that is, when they are not being evaluated and are just being themselves. Results are consistent with results with shyness and creative self-expression (Cheek & Stahl, 1986), and with loneliness (Vitkus & Horowitz, 1987). When evaluative threat is reduced, or when communal motives are satisfied, the shy person's natural talents and abilities are expressed (Cheek & Stahl, 1986). Our results with shy males are consistent with clinical observations and theories of latent learning (Bandura, 1997; Henderson, 2001; Tolman, 1932) that shy people have adequate social skill levels, they simply may not express them when they feel evaluated and become preoccupied.

It is interesting that our results for shy males are consistent with hypotheses, while results for shy females are not. The behavior of shy females was equivalent to the notshy in the evaluation condition, and more like not-shy males when they were not being evaluated and were just being themselves. Not-shy females and shy males were most alike when acting naturally. It is possible that individualistic norms for males in the United States may make some natural skills less valued than others, such as dominant behavior, which may be the reason shy males were more reactive to evaluative threat than shy females in a listening task, particularly since they did it well naturally when they were not threatened with evaluation. Perhaps shy females were less threatened in the evaluation condition because skilled listening behavior is normative for women. Perhaps they felt less obligated to be good listeners when just being themselves because shy behavior is more positively sanctioned for women in the U.S. culture.

It is important to explore gender differences. Preliminary analyses suggest that shy males may be better listeners and more empathic than not-shy males when they are not threatened by evaluation, while not-shy males do better at listening tasks when their performance is "on the line" and this behavior is explicitly required for adequate performance. Our future research will continue to refine the study of gender differences in shy and not-shy individuals in normative and clinical samples.

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