

Shyness and shame

by Ana Silvia Paula

Abstract

This paper is based on a Workshop presented in the 23rd IIBA International Conference in Recife and later in the PDW 2018 in Salvador, and intends to understand *shyness* and *shame* in the terms of character development concepts from Psychoanalysis to Bioenergetics, setting stages and relational patterns where psychosomatic withdrawal mechanisms are activated, leading to emotional and relational conditions that affect and, in many cases, restrain social life and selfrealization.

Also presents Bioenergetic Analysis as an effective tool in the treatment of emotional disorders that derive from these withdrawal patterns.

Keywords: shyness, shame, mother-baby relationship, castration, libido, character analysis.

Introduction

I begin my work thanking W. Reich and A. Lowen, for it was through the body that I could get to feel more released from the bonds of shyness. I have always been shy, hiding myself and feeling unable to express myself. In a world where extroversion is worshipped, the silence of the timid is discarded and worthless.

But before talking about Shyness, I'll tell you a bit about Shame, because it's a subject quite close to Shyness. Shame is a long-studied subject, including by two colleagues from Bioenergetics, Helen Resneck (Shame, Sexuality, and Vulnerability) and John Conger (The Body of Shame: Character and Play).

Quoting Sartre (1997) in "Ontology of Shame": In order to be ashamed, the presence of the other is indispensable and concreteness happens through the look. For the feeling of experiencing shame is strongly connected to the fact that the self is seen by the other.

That means the OTHER is a fundamental part for Shame to happen. As Shame has to do with the nature of our bonds to others, it has been associated with the very first breaks in attention between mother and child, where secondary narcissism takes place.

For Reich (1975), our primitive shame originates from the breaks in attention between mother and baby, and character structure is built initially from the baby's somatic defensive responses of contraction, avoidance and stiffness. Character may later build its structure on these foundations, suffering under the imaginary gaze of others.

We can, and will, find many similarities between *shame* and *shyness*; these two words really blend as we look at literature, but I usually make the following difference between them: WE ARE SHY AND WE HAVE SHAME (this for me denotes a look with respect to the personality or castration anguishes, as I will describe later in the psychoanalytical thought).

Shyness is a picture little studied by psychiatrists despite the great suffering it causes to people. Psychiatrists study Social Phobia, which is considered a disease and is described in the Brazilian ICD (DSM V) as a mental illness. But it's not Social Phobia what I'm going to talk about. Sartre (1997) says: 'Feeling blushed' and 'feeling revealed,' etc. are inaccurate expressions that the shy individual uses to describe his state: what he really means is that he is physically and constantly conscious of his body, not like it is for himself, but as it is for the other ... I can not be embarrassed with my own body, for I exist inside it. It is my body as it is to the other that embarrasses me.

Shyness is inherently painful. What we see is that many timids turn inward, partly as a haven from a society that so much distresses them. It can be considered a natural defense, because it is associated with 'what others will say about me'.

For some authors like Zimbardo (1977), shyness even has its advantages: discreet and introspective people can better preserve their intimacy, enjoy the pleasures of solitude, generally do not intimidate or disturb others, avoid conflicts, observe, act cautiously and are good listeners.

There is also a difference between being *timid* and *introverted*; Susan Cain (2012) describes these differences. According to her, introverts prefer quiet environments and with minimal stimuli, they are not necessarily shy, they prefer environments that are not too stimulating. On the other hand, timids deeply fear social disapproval and humiliation. A timid person

is afraid of talking, of speaking in public and is very much concerned about other people's opinion on his behaviour.

The word *shyness* comes from the latin *timiditas* and means *fear*. It comes in certain situations of tension and anxiety, in which the individual experiences embarrassment in exposing himself, feeling incapable and inferior to other people.

Shyness is a reaction caused by the presence of strangers or unfamiliar acquaintances and is characterized by tension, worry and discomfort, as well as deflection from eye contact and inhibition of social behavior (Buss, 1986). According to a recent survey, a study from Windson College in Canada found that about half of the population suffers from shyness and that number increases considerably; shyness is not a disease, but it brings suffering as if it were one. According to the psychologist René Schubert the individual even presents physical phenomena of this retraction, muscular pain and feelings of general malaise.

Shyness can be defined as discomfort and inhibition in situations of personal interaction that interfere with the personal and professional goals of those who suffer from it, characterized by an obsessive concern with attitudes, reactions and thoughts of others (Soares, 2008). It can cause isolation and failure to take advantage of opportunities that may arise. It leaves the person many times, inert, without attitude. For example, go to a bar and not be able to call the waiter to place your order. All this because of the concern of what people may be thinking about you.

According to Motta Filho (1969) in his essay on shyness: "Every effort that an individual employs as being-in-the-world is reduced in the shy to an incapacity and a frustration" (p.54). This way, we may affirm that every attempt of the shy individual results in a discomfort of wanting to go beyond; the desire to overcome eventually ends in frustrations and a sense of defeat facing shyness. An individual affected by shyness that prevents him from acting turns his life into a sequence of distressing failures which make it impossible for him to try to act, resulting in the behavior of the so-called timid. Still on Motta Filho's study, he quotes Cassier that "in man we find a partnership between thought and feeling, it happens that this partnership does not function properly for the timid; the result of their activities is a sequence of deficits" in which the timid does not live. This partnership becomes incomplete and unadjusted, focused on frustrations and anxieties especially in the emotional and relational fields. The shy person became deeply withdrawn in his body, can not move and when he tries,

generally feels clumsy; he has an obsessive thought about what he did “wrong” while others probably did not pay attention. But that takes him out of social interaction more and more. Eg, as the shaking of hands in adolescence, to greet.

To better understand Shyness, I brought Psychoanalysis as my theoretical reference.

It is possibly a wound from the childhood what keeps an individual from acting, like a castration. Freud argued that what determines the character of an individual is the way drives or is driven by his libido, and stresses that the restraint or retention of libido may cause hysteria, anguish or the rising of psychic disorders; instincts may appear later as a major problem. (Osborne, 2001).

Thus, it can be said that the individual afflicted by Shyness has possibly been, at some point in his biography, through some type of castration, prohibition or retention of libidinal energy. Based on the fact that the Ego creates anxiety to oppose the instinctive wills of the Id, cathexis would take place, and with the collaboration of the Superego through environment, culture, family imposition of rules, the course of Shyness would ascend, that is, something unconscious would prevent the individual from socializing, taking actions against others as a consequence of the unconscious castration suffered in another moment.

The anguish of castration unleashed by the Ego make it impossible for the timid to go towards the other to act within his reality, trying to avoid the displeasure experienced in the past, thereby promoting all symptoms and inhibitions which are typical of timid people.

Family is key to child development. The models, typical habits adopted in homes, will be the foundation that will sustain children in their adult lives, so if parents are critical people their children will, in most cases, also be critical and if parents are submissive, their children will also be. Same thing will happen with shyness: children will live their parents' shyness and it will become natural in their lives. This is why personal development process is so important for behavioral change.

People are not born shy, they become timid by an inferiority complex they have lived. Traumatic experiences, especially in childhood, can trigger, at any time, the whole mechanism of defense of the body, causing those symptoms such as: flushing, trembling, sweating, chills and others. (Albisetti,1998). E.g.: A family of 5 siblings (3 women and 2 men), all of

them suffer from shyness; asking about their parents, one of them told me their mother was very quiet and the father, very violent. It was common for the children to watch fury strikes from the father to the eldest daughter, who was very “disobedient” and “confrontational”. This probably resulted in an unconscious contraction and learning - or even conscious - that one should not express his/her feelings, as it might cause a lot of pain and suffering.

According to W. Reich, in *The Function of the Orgasm* (1975), character development is a blooming process. The energy diagram on page 125 (Table 1) operates in various directions, and what we perceive in Character Analysis as a compact formation is precisely that concentration of opposing forces that occur in the character structure.

The silence of the shy individual is in general a result of an inability to verbally express its inner impulses. Clearly he would like to speak and open his voice to the expression of the heart, but he can not. So, it is important to welcome the silence and give space for the speech to come. So, he can be relieved from the pressure of “having to talk”.

Young children can not tell when a threat to their lives is real or not. When the response is blocked or inhibited by the fear of being annihilated, the internal condition for a reactive conduct is established (Lowen, 1985).

Being easier to avoid the cause of embarrassment, the timid, by consciously or unconsciously relating their trauma to the situation they face, close themselves and flee from situations that will expose them. Being shy does not depend on the Lowenian characterology, although he realizes that more timid people are present in pre-genital characters. Schizoids, for example, are more likely to be shy. As in schizoids the sense of self is inadequate due to the lack of identification with the body, the individual may not feel connected or integrated, difficulting the contact with the other, tending to live in his world and stay away from people who may try a closer contact.

For an orally structured individual, every contact with the environment has a lower charge than it is required. This character structure, for having had experiences of disappointment in the beginning of life, in the attempt to seek contact and warmth and not reaching them, might carry a great frustration for not having had support from the mother, father, brothers or close relatives. Thus, these disappointment and frustration tend to leave traces of bitterness in the personality, often making them drift away from people not to re-traumatize themselves.

For Alexander Lowen, the baby is born with the ability to cry copiously and this is the act of establishing independent breathing. The strength of this first cry is a measure of the child's vitality, which falls away along the time due to the blocks it faces, taking away spontaneity and the free movements of the body. We adopt learned movements, which are linked to the ego and not to our true self. Of course, we can not be just expressive and move with no control of the ego, otherwise we would get into psychotic states. There must be a balance between ego control and spontaneity.

Back to timid individuals, spontaneity becomes more and more distant from them until they completely lose their expression, concerned about what others are seeing or perceiving of them. They lose the ability to put their voice, lose the ability to move and lose the ability to look at people.

The search for spontaneity is an important function and the body's motility must be retaken. A body full of life is never completely static. In adults, involuntary movements form the basis of our gestures, our facial expressions and other body actions.

In Bioenergetics, we focus on 3 main areas of self expression: Movement - Voice - Look. "It is necessary to recognize that it is impossible for an individual not to communicate. Even total silence tells us something about the person and the way he faces the world", according to Boadella (1992).

Moving the body facilitates behavioral changes

There are possibilities and solutions to these difficulties. Bioenergetic Analysis, through combining expressive movements and the understanding of one's story, is an important tool for the dissolution of the conflict in which a shy person finds himself. The techniques include several exercises of breathing, expression and mainly *grounding*, which enables an individual to feel safe in both affective and professional relations. The timid individual comes to have a low self-esteem pattern for all reasons mentioned above, and the more he is able to *be himself* in *his own* world, the safer he will feel.

Bioenergetic work can help people solve emotional problems and realize their potential for joy, and for the joy of living well, not only in interaction with others, but also for the freedom of moving around the world. One's level of muscle and Energy stasis is often so intense that he may not be

able to leave or take action. We can help this person to diminish muscular and emotional tensions through specific exercises that will release both social and self-inflicted stress.

When an individual develops chronic muscular tension, he also develops emotional tension which disturbs health, retrains motility or self-expression; bioenergetic work includes expressive and respiratory movements that help the person enlarge his inner space and, consequently, outer spaces in life, always on the way to increase vitality and the capacity of joy. As much as the shy individual tries to hide himself, he is indirectly drawing attention to his stillness, withdrawal, and flushing.

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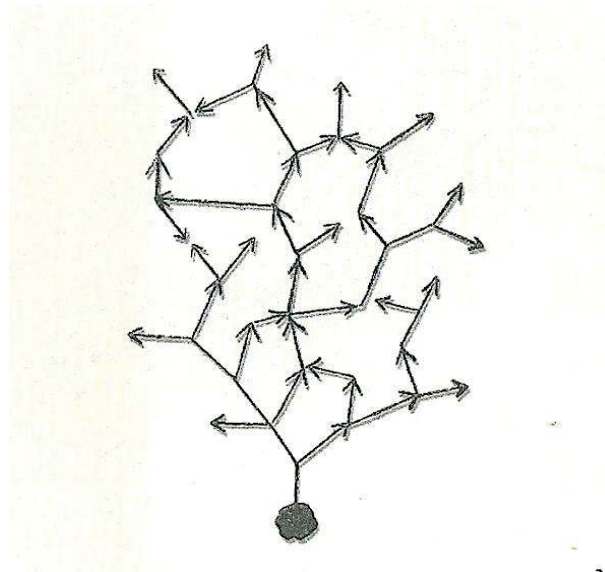
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De Ontologia Fenomenológica – Petrópolis, Rj: Ed. Vozes. Table 1 (Page 6) – Energy Diagram.



Reich, W. The Function Of The Orgasm, Page 125.

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