

## **Shyness: The fear of getting acquainted**

Many psychologists believe that there is an inherent need to affiliate with other people. Meeting other people and forming relationships is a difficult process for many. Many people are shy about interacting with others and creates anxiety.

Shyness refers to a tendency to withdraw from people, particularly unfamiliar people ([page 14](#)). Shyness involves feelings, physical reactions, and thoughts that create anxiety, discomfort, and inhibitions.

- Feelings: feelings associated with shyness include anxiety (which may cause people to drink alcohol), insecurity, stress, loneliness, mistrust, embarrassment, tension, fear and confusion.
- Physical reactions: physical reactions associated with shyness include nausea, butterflies in the stomach, shaking, perspiring, pounding heart, feeling faint, and blushing
- Thoughts: thoughts associated with shyness include: "I'm not an interesting person," "I'm not as good as they are," "I lack self-confidence," or I don't have the social skills ([page 14](#)).

## **Differences between a shy and non-shy person**

The major difference between a shy person and non-shy person is a matter of self-evaluation. How capable do you perceive yourself. Often we compare ourselves to those around us, or images we see on television (Jean Killbourne does a series Killing Us Softly argues that repeated images of attractive women who represent 5% of women body types decreases women's self-esteem about their body image).

## What causes shyness?

Like many things with people, there are multiple factors that influence people. There is no one cause of shyness. Shyness can arise from different sources.

If you don't know what is causing a particular outcome, you are going to take the wrong corrective action, which may allow the problem to continue and lead to learned helplessness.

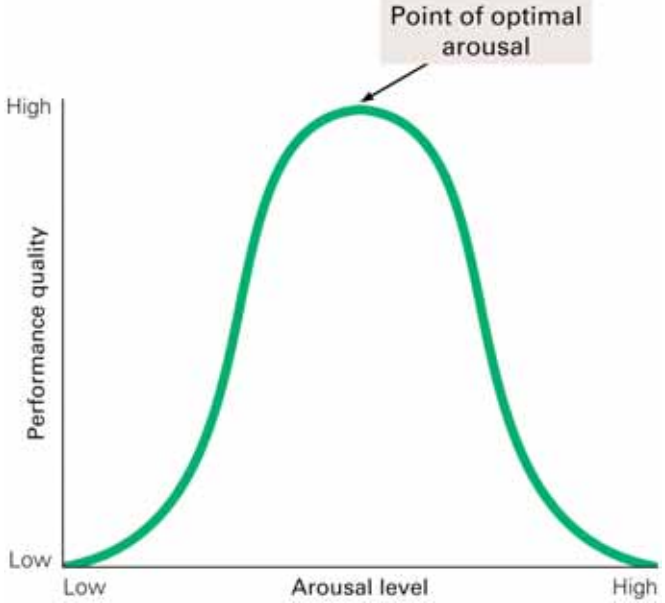
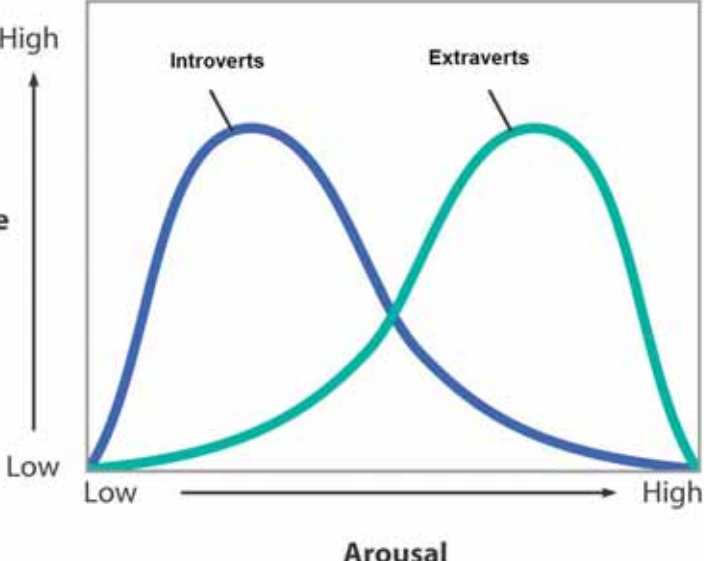
Factors listed in your text include:

- brain chemistry,
- reactivity of the nervous system,
- harsh treatment by teachers, classmates, peers, over protective parents, strangers, hotel clerks, etc.
- faulty self-perceptions,
- poor adaptability,
- increased intolerance to ambiguity,
- physical appearance,
- life transitions (going to school, going to a new school, divorce, a new job, becoming a parent, marriage),
- cultural expectations, and
- some people are more easily embarrassed than others ([page 16](#)).

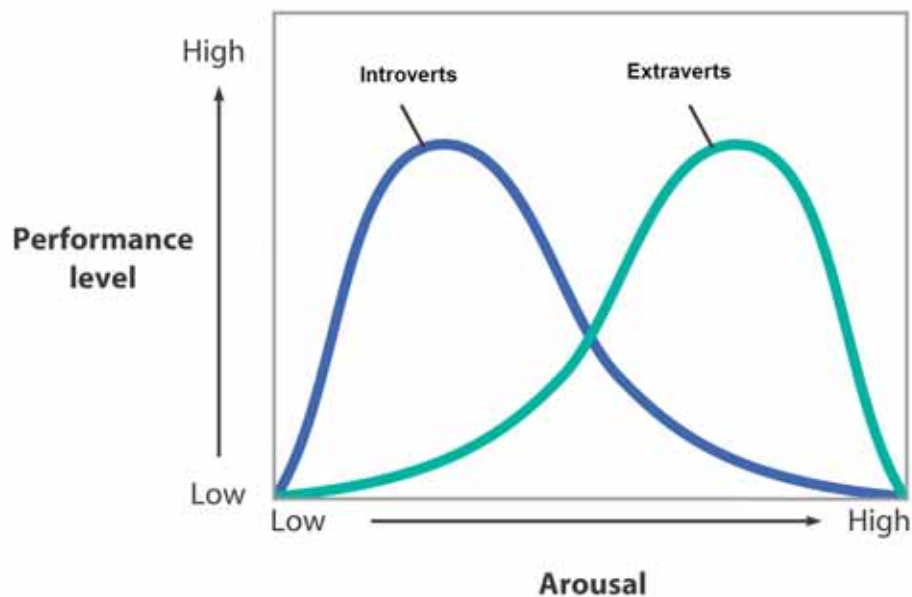
## What causes shyness?

reactivity of the nervous system

Individual differences arise from biological differences. Introverts require less cortical stimulation and arousal than extroverts to operate efficiently and perform at optimal levels

<p>General Relation between Arousal and Performance</p>	
<p>Relation between Arousal and Performance for Introverts and Extraverts</p>	

## What causes shyness?



For example, when comparing extraverts with introverts, the average introverted person

- tends to need less barbecue sauce to like a hamburger,
- is more sensitive to lemon juice,
- prefers a lower volume of music to feel comfortable, etc.
- prefers low traffic areas to study (instead of high traffic areas) in the library
- in addition, when assigned to a task, extraverts perform at an initial high level and gradually declines. Introverts will perform at a consistently at a moderate level.

## **What causes shyness?**

- harsh treatment by teachers, classmates, peers, over protective parents, strangers, hotel clerks, etc.

Negative interaction with others can make people shy. This can be especially true if these interactions and experiences occur at an earlier age. Negative reactions can occur because people are sleep deprived (sleep deprived people are more irritable), people with low self-esteem can harm someone else's self-esteem to make them feel better about their own low self-esteem (when your self-esteem takes a hit, one thing to make you feel better about yourself is to lower someone else's self-esteem). Stress can make it harder for people interact with each other in a constructive manner.

## **What causes shyness?**

If you take the initiative and try new things and aren't perfect by someone else's standards, they may withhold approval or yell at you (punishments) to decrease the odds you will take the initiative. One will become negatively reinforced by avoiding the disapproval or getting yelled at.

- faulty self-perceptions,

We may tell ourselves irrational messages such as

- "I'm no good"
- "It has to be just right or I am a complete failure"
- "There is no use trying, nothing ever works out"
- "nobody likes me"

When these messages are repeated often, they become automatic and unconscious. Beliefs about ourselves can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy or anxiety that hampers performance for new and difficult tasks (see arousal curves and stereotype threat)

## **What causes shyness?**

- physical appearance,

Often we compare ourselves to those around us, or images we see on television (Jean Killbourne does a series Killing Us Softly argues that repeated images of attractive women who represent 5% of women body types decreases women's self-esteem about their body image). Not matching to these unrealistic expectations of what is attractive in your culture can make us uncomfortable with who we are as a person.



## **Overcoming Shyness**

Overcoming shyness will take time. It may not come easy, but in the long run, it will be beneficial to most people (see consequences of being shy on [page 15](#)). In order to overcome shyness, you need to

- (1) Analyze your shyness
  - Look at the factors that create shyness. Identify which factors are probably leading to your shyness. If you have a large blind self (see Johari Window), this process may be more challenging for you and may take more time.
- (2) Build your self-esteem
- (3) Improve your social skills

## Overcoming Shyness (page 16)

- (1) Analyze your shyness
  - Try to pinpoint exactly what social situations tend to elicit your shy behavior
  - Try to identify what causes your shyness in that situation. Use a diary or journal to track the times you experience this feeling
  - Have a friend or relative [*trusted teacher, mentor, pastor, etc.*] give you feedback. Discuss how you interact with others and how you can improve.
  
- (2) Build your self-esteem
  - Recognize that you ultimately control how you see yourself.
  - Set your own standards. Do not let others tell you how to live your life.
  - Set realistic goals. Do not set your goals too high or too low. Many people demand too much of themselves [*you also need to know what your goals are appropriate for your skill level. Find a mentor/ "teacher" to show you how to be successful.*].
  - Talk positively to yourself. Tell yourself that you can do it [compared to not doing it, avoiding failure, etc.] and that you are a good person.
  - Learn to take rejection. Rejection is one of the risks everyone takes in social interactions. Try not to take it personally; it may have nothing to do with you. [this is especially true if you are trying with good intention].
  - [Capitalize on your strengths. Do what you enjoy doing and expand your repertoire.]

(3) Improve your social skills

- Follow a role model. Select someone you respect and observe how they interact. Imitate their behavior.
- Learn to listen.
- Talk to one new person everyday about something.
- Smile.
- Reinforce yourself for each successful interaction.
- Use your imagination. Rehearse in your mind new situations—how you will respond. [don't simply rehearse a good outcome. Rehearse HOW you will attain a good outcome.]
- Practice with a friend—interviews, dating situations, etc.
- Find your comfort zone. Not all social situations are for everyone. Go where your interests are. You might be happier at an art gallery, book club, or on a volleyball team than you are at a cocktail party or bar. [see set your own standards above]
- [make sure you get enough sleep. Sleep makes it easier to concentrate and less makes us less irritable.]
- [practice stress management techniques. Stress makes it harder for us to do new and difficult tasks].

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