The Socially Mute

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The primary focus of the paper was to analyse the difference in the occurrence of shyness between a rural and an urban population, with the hypothesis that the rural population will show higher incidents of shyness. A questionnaire designed to measure chronic shyness was used. The mean and standard deviation, for the two populations was calculated. The inferential statistics used was a t-test for randomised groups. The results obtained show a trend that agrees with the hypothesis. It was also seen that people who have greater exposure to technology show lesser incidents of shyness. Religious minorities tend to show greater incidents of shyness.
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Shyness has been understood and explained as an emotional state and as a personality factor. As an emotional state, it is a blend of fear, interest and has an adaptive value in evolution. As a personality factor, shyness is expressed as excessive self-focus, negative evaluation of the self. It interferes with a person's normal functioning in interpersonal situations, often rendering them socially dysfunctional. Shyness has been largely underreported, which is why the severity of its influence has not been assessed. In the year the year 1975 an article published by Stanford University psychologist Philip Zimbardo, entitled "The Social Disease Called Shyness" it was revealed that ,in a survey conducted at several American colleges it was found that a shocking 40 percent of the 800 students questioned had considered themselves to be shy. (Carducci, B., & Zimbardo, P. G. (1995). Shyness, in individuals, is characterized by an intense or irrational fear that their behavior in a public situation will be ridiculed or criticized by others. Shy individuals are extremely self-conscious, who constantly think about how to behave and plan the next course of action. In a social setting, they are preoccupied with how they will be perceived by others around them. Although they recognize their behavioras baseless and unreasonable, yet they are unable to stop themselves from worrying that they are constantly being scrutinized. Their common fears include the following: their mind going blank, saying something embarrassing or inappropriate or feeling of being unable to hold a conversation. Shy individuals are characterized by self-doubt and feelings of insecurity causing intense anxiety. These feelings generally surface when they are under the scrutiny of others leading them to rethink and analyze their behavior and actions, during and after any social occasion. The experience of shyness occurs at multiple levels, cognitive, affective, behavioral and situational; all these may be triggered by situational factors. Among the many situational factors are interactions with authority figures and with the opposite sex. (D'Souza. L, 2003).

The social problems they face affect all aspects of their lives. They have difficulty meeting new people and forming successful relationships, which leads to greater periods of loneliness that may result in depression. Their cognitive processes are affected in the presence of other people; hence they freeze up during conversations. These tendencies make them appear disinterested. Their nervousness is overlooked, and often trivialized. Some shy people are excessively egocentric and are preoccupied with their own appearance and behavior. They adopt a cautiously conservative or protective style of self-presentation, seeking to get along with others rather than to get ahead. Shyness can be a major source of concern in children. Shy children may have fewer friends this continues into adulthood. Lesser participation in activities and greater isolation from others might create serious troubles as they enter into adulthood. The shy child may have low self-esteem leading them to develop physical effects such as stammering, trembling, etc. thus, making it important to understand the symptoms of shyness at an early stage in life. In one

study conducted it was seen that shyness significantly correlated with measures of global self-esteem, external locus of control and perceived competence across different domains of the self. Additionally it was seen that girls were shyer than boys.(Crozier, W. R., 2011). It has been found that an irregularity in neurotransmitters and hormonal level can result in shyness. Some surveys also show evidence for excess daylight exposure during the prenatal development can develop into a person being shy. Certain life experiences wherein a person has been humiliated in public can create an aversion towards such situations eventually leading to avoiding them entirely.

Several components have been found to influence shyness. The cognitive components lead to a shy individual indulging in negative evaluation of the self. These manifest as extremely negative emotions, which forms the affective component. The physiological component is expressed through bodily changes, as expressed in anxiety provoking situations such as heart palpitations, sweaty palms etc. Occasionally, shyness is affected by situational factors.(Henderson, L., Zimbardo, P., & Carducci, B. (2010).

There are several forms of shyness manifested across different situations such as public shyness, private shyness and socially anxious shyness. These manifestations may vary among individuals. Publicly shy people exhibit their shyness outwardly. They tend to be excessively quiet, awkward and may resort to inappropriate behavior in social situations. Individuals, who are privately shy, encounter distress privately and experience symptoms such as heightened psychophysiological arousal, such as a pounding heart, muscle tension, and anxiety reactions (Pilkonis, 1977).

Socially anxious shy people experience their shyness cognitively. They may feel excessively self-conscious and afraid of being judged by others. The shy extrovert is another type of shyness mostly overlooked and hidden under their more outward counterparts. These individuals are cool, calm, and collected whose insides are in fact churning. They may be politicians, entertainers, and teachers. They have learned to act outgoing-as long as they are in a controlled environment. (Zimbardo et.al, 2000). Shyness has not been found to have a genetic component, but there is evidence to support the claim that certain individuals are born with certain personality traits that may signify a predisposition toward shyness. Research studies of identical and fraternal twins indicate that the temperamental predisposition for shyness has the highest heritability in the normal range of individual differences in personality traits. Infants with this highly reactive temperament in the first year of life are more likely to be wary or fearful of strangers at the end of the second year, and they are also more likely to be described as shy by their kindergarten teachers than are children with an opposite, behaviorally uninhibited temperament. Retrospective reports indicate that 75% of young adults who say they were shy in early childhood continue to identify themselves as shy persons.

Technology and culture can be attributed to the increase in shyness. Cultures define what is normative and expected behavior in various situations. This is probably why cross-cultural studies of shyness indicate changes in the prevalence of shyness. However, a common pattern established across researches reports that there is a universality of shyness across cultures. As

explained by Karen Payne in her article "Understanding and overcoming shyness", the increase in shyness across university students is attributed to the increase in usage of the internet and similar forms of technology. While shy people are found to benefit from the anonymity offered by these alternate forms of communication, they are now substituting traditional communication, thereby reducing interpersonal contact and providing more opportunities for the shy to hide themselves away. (Payne.K, Understanding and Overcoming Shyness   )

In one laboratory study of the process of getting acquainted, shy college women reported spending 33% of a 5-minute social interaction engaged in self-focus compared to about 20% of the time for those who were not shy. Moreover, the content of their self-focusing was dominated by negative thoughts about being tense and making a poor impression, as would be expected by the conceptualization of shyness as a propensity for engaging in anxious self-preoccupation. Not surprisingly, shyness is related to poor performance on a measure of sensitivity to the verbal and nonverbal communications of other people. The tendency to be anxiously self-preoccupied has a pervasive influence on social behavior.

Shyness results in people becoming afraid of doing or saying things that can be potentially unsafe and trigger negative reactions such as being laughed at, mocked, or criticized as a consequence of which, the individual might avoid social situations completely. However, this trait is not always considered negative. There are some positive effects outlined by various theorists. Thomas Benton claims that because shy people "have a tendency toward self-criticism, they are often high achievers, and not just in solitary activities like research and writing. Perhaps even more than the drive toward independent achievement, shy people long to make connections to others often through altruistic behavior." Susie Cain believes that the balance in society would be disrupted without the characteristics that shy people bring to the society such as sensitivity to others' emotions, good listening skills, etc. Various cultures regard shyness in a different light. In individualistic cultures, shyness is often perceived as a weakness and less peer acceptance. Collectivistic cultures, however, perceive shy people as being thoughtful, intelligent thus leading to a greater approval by peers.

Method

Participants:
- 172 girls aged15-17 from two Junior Colleges in Mumbai
- 237 girls aged15-17 from a Junior College in Goa

Materials:

Henderson-Zimbardo Shyness Questionnaire (Henderson, Zimbardo, 2000) - A 100 statement, 5 point rating scale. 27 statements were used (items 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 16, 18, 27, 28, 37, 39, 44, 49, 53, 58, 59, 69, 71, 73, 76, 80, 83, 84, 93, 95), which measured incidental shyness.

In addition to answering the questionnaire, the respondents were asked for their age and religion and whether they owned a computer/laptop at home, a personal mobile phone and a personal email id.

Procedure:

A comparative study was done junior college girls from two colleges. A 27 statement, 5 point rating scale questionnaire was administered. The data collected was evaluated. Major findings are presented here.

Results and Discussion

On the basis of the raw data collected, the mean and standard deviation was calculated for the entire population. The same was done in 3 sub-groups, on the basis of religion to observe any differences. The calculations have been tabulated and presented here.

	GOA				MUMBAI			
	Hindu	Christian	Muslim	Total	Hindu	Christian	Muslim	Total
N	91	101	45	237	54	34	76	172
Mean	59.78	63.13	80.11	63.91	68.24	71.94	77.18	75.25
SD	9.34	12.16	13.13	14.01	13.66	12.68	11.22	15.03

Table 1: Means and SD of the two female samples from Goa and Mumbai

	Mean difference	t-value
Hindu	8.46	*24.88
Christian	8.81	*8.87
Muslim	2.93	*25.91
Total	2	*5.5

*p <.001

Table 2: Mean differences between Goa and Mumbai samples & t-values.

Table 1 shows the tabulation of the mean and standard deviation for the two samples. A separate mean was calculated on the basis of the respondent's religion.Table 2 tabulate the difference in means and the t-value. The t values for randomised groups design with unequal samples were tested against Student's table. $t_{(407)}$=5.5, p<0.001.

Shyness can be seen as a direct influence of the culture. Rural setups are believed to be more inhibited than an urban set up, which could contribute to greater instances of self-report of

shyness. In addition, it was noted that lesser incidents of shyness are observed in people who live in cities. The hypothesis is further validated by the observation of the data collected from Mumbai. It was observed that people who were not native to Mumbai showed a greater score on the shyness questionnaire. This could be due to limited time spent in the city which causes discomfort or could be a direct consequence of reduced exposure to the city and its lifestyle that causes this kind of response. Instances of greater report of shyness from the respondents of Mumbai have been observed. This could be because the shy feel even more intimidated by the cultural set up of an urban location.

While collecting data, the respondents were asked for their religion, this was done to see the influence of restricted religions on the occurrence of shyness, and to avoid the results being manipulated by a confounding variable. The mean score obtained for Hindus was seen to be 68.24 (SD 113.66) in case of Mumbai and 59.78 (SD 9.34) in case of Goa, difference between the two means being 8.46. A higher mean score in the urban settlement as compared to the rural settlement, which is not in line with the hypothesis, could be caused by unequal samples being tested against one another, yet the t-value was found to be significant at a probability of 0.01 which is supported by the variability of the population.The difference between the means was large (8.46), pointing towards a greater variance between the populations. $t_{(407)}$=24.88, $p<0.001$. When testing for Christians, similar results were obtained. The mean observed in Goa was 63.13 (SD 12.16), compared to 71.94 (SD 12.68) for Mumbai,$t_{(407)}$=25.91 $p<0.01$ Similarly, when testing for Muslims, the mean observed in Mumbai was 77.18 (SD 11.22), compared to 80.11 (SD 13.13) for Goa. The mean was greatest among the three groups, while the difference between the means, 2.93 was the least, showing that the variance in the populations and the cultures was the least. The higher mean can be accounted for the Muslim culture being the most restrictive. The results obtained are in line with the hypothesis. Another reason could be due to the fact that Muslims are a religious minority in Goa. The results, as the others were found to be significant at a probability of 0.001. $t_{(407)}$=8.87, $p<0.001$. In addition to their religion, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they own a personal computer, cell phone and an email id. This was done to check the use of technology and the way it may manifest itself. It was observed that those who were exposed to either of the above, or were exposed to only one of the above forms of technology showed a greater score on the shyness questionnaire.

Shyness and technology can be linked in two ways, one that focuses on the increasing use of technology acting as an aid to increasing shyness as the virtual world distances people from the real. The other school of thought looks at shyness being reduced due to exposure to technology as it gives shy people a medium to interact with the world, which they find difficult in real life. Greater scores on the shyness questionnaire in people with limited use of technology either by choice or otherwise show that people exposed to technology tend to be lesser inclined towards shyness.

Further, Shyness may be used as a soft sign for a predisposition for subclinical neurosis. It has been reported that depression and anxiety at a subclinical level have overlapping symptoms

and are conceptually interrelated. One of the most prominent theoretical developments that explain this association is Clark and Watson's tripartite model. This model combines subclinical depression subclinical anxiety arising due to social stress in adolescents can manifest into shyness, strong social phobia and social apathy. (Clark & Watson 1991).

Conclusion

Restrictive cultural set ups do not provide individuals with the autonomy of acting out in the way they want. In addition, they impose rules and regulations about the acceptable and unacceptable behaviours which limit an individual's expression. This could be one of the causes for greater instances of shyness, as observed in the paper, in cases of religious differences and in a rural and urban set up. In addition, other contributors to shyness could be technology, but the way it manifests itself is not known yet.

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