THE SHYNESS & SOCIAL ANXIETY SYSTEM

HOW TO USE LITTLE-KNOWN PSYCHOLOGICAL TRICKS TO PERMANENTLY DESTROY SHYNESS & SOCIAL ANXIETY, MAKE PEOPLE LIKE YOU, AND BECOME POPULAR...

SEAN COOPER

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Part 1: A Blueprint For Long-Term Permanent Change

Introduction

From Lone Wolf to Social Superstar

Hey, it's Sean Cooper. Welcome to the Shyness and Social Anxiety System. In here I'll share with you the exact same strategies and techniques that I and countless others have used to overcome our shyness and social anxiety and, in doing so, change our lives.

You're about to be introduced to knowledge and information that can have such an amazing impact on your social life.

If you read this book and make an ongoing effort to learn its content, then your perspective on people, social life, and relationships can change. This change could mean the difference between being happy and having many friends or lonely and bored.

I'll Tell You Exactly What to Do and When

Best of all, you'll learn the truth about shyness and social skills without having to go through the painful failure and embarrassment that other shy people have suffered.

Psychologists, social scientists, writers, thinkers, etc.tend to focus on telling shy people that they should "get out more" and get more experience (which is great), but they never tell shy people exactly what they should do when they do get into these situations so that they can avoid embarrassment and grow.

It's taken me a long time to figure out the things that you're about to learn. I've spent years on this stuff and discovered that learning about social skills and dynamics play a HUGE role in building the foundation and setting the course for a long-term social life.

How To Use This System

This system is jam-packed with information. It's meant to be used as a reference. The best way to use it is to read and find all the parts you like and all of the ideas, skills, and techniques upon which you would like to improve. Then take those sections and write them down or print them out so you can remind yourself. Read them out loud and maybe talk about it with other shy people you know who might need the help of this book.

But don't assume that reading it once will solve all your problems. Make a note when you find a section that applies to your situation.

Get a journal and jot down the ideas that grab your attention. Keep these ideas processing in your mind.

The best thing to do is to take one piece of advice and apply it immediately. Let it set for maybe a week, and then continue, applying another.

It's Not Enough to Know All the Info ... You Must Go and Apply It

Right now it's up to you. I can't do all the learning and practice for you. It's you who has got to make the decision that you'll do whatever it takes to get to that next level of understanding.

Social success is like learning to play a musical instrument. It takes practice and learning. At first none of it makes any sense. Sometimes it seems as though all of your practice isn't making a difference.

But if you keep at it, eventually you'll be playing songs. And then you'll be writing songs. The next thing you know, you've become a master.

Personal Trainer Analogy

Let me put it to you another way.

Imagine you went into the gym and hired a personal trainer. They taught you everything there was to know about fitness. But then you never worked out and ate junk food all day.

If you do not apply what you learn, then the information by itself is useless to you. But if you put in the work, you can experience a complete transformation.

This is not a magic pill. You need experience out in the real world. If you never had a social life throughout high school, that means that now is the time to get out there and get that social experience you're missing.

You Need a Long-Term Level of Commitment

Like learning any new skill, there are going to be ups and downs. You'll make brief spurts of progress, then decline to a level slightly higher than the one you were at before. Your progress may look something like this:
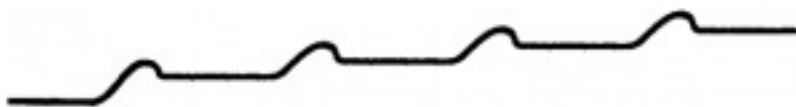
In order to master social skills, you have to be willing to practice diligently, striving to hone your skills even when it seems like you are getting nowhere in your progress or even going backwards.

In the long-term, your success will become evident. So don't give up just because you experience short-term setbacks and disappointments.

Keep On Studying and Improving

So take this book and use it as a workbook. Come back to it often. Reread the parts that you want to learn and integrate them in your daily life. Take a look and learn from some of the other books and information I've referenced. And most importantly, DON'T STOP READING UNTIL YOU'RE DOING IT.

Many people make the mistake of reading a book and say "I know that stuff" before they've mastered the information. Don't make this mistake yourself. Keep reading and practicing until you HAVE IT DOWN.

At some point you'll develop your own insights beyond what's in this book, and you'll become an expert in the world of social skills, conversations and confidence.

Congratulations, by the way. You're taking an amazing step by investing in your own life to figure things out. If you stay with it, you'll have amazing results in lots of other areas.

Do me a favor. E-mail me with your ideas, comments, and complaints. I want to know what you think. You can email me at:
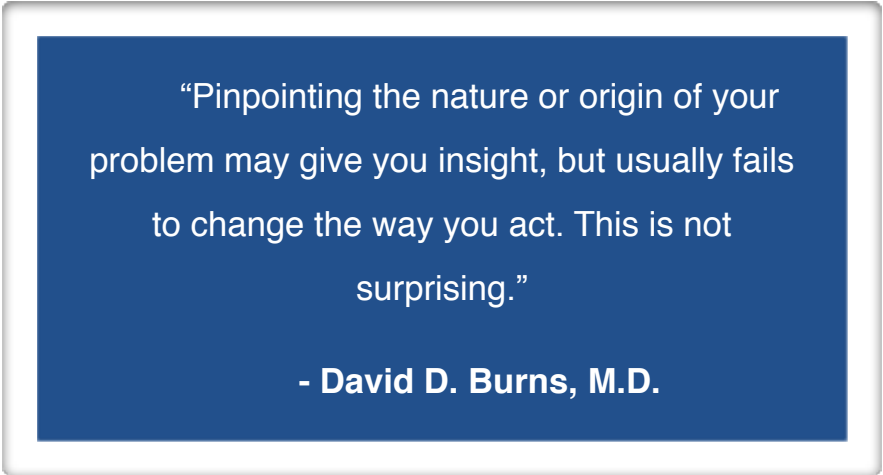
support@shyness-social-anxiety.com

The "Secret Cause" of Your Shyness or Social Anxiety ... and the Solution

This chapter is going to be mostly about the science behind your shyness or social anxiety. You'll get a better understanding of what it is and how it works.

Quick Reality Check

That being said, I'm not going to bore you with long pages of science. Most of the books out there on SA seem to be written by psychologists who know a lot about how SA works, but **don't actually tell you how to overcome it!**

> "Pinpointing the nature or origin of your problem may give you insight, but usually fails to change the way you act. This is not surprising."
>
> **- David D. Burns, M.D.**

All I want to do is give you a rough working understanding of your condition. Why? Because when you don't know how your old, outdated emotional system works, then the fear and anxiety feels so real. Knowing how it works allows you to get perspective on your fears and change.

In the other sections I will give you techniques which you can use immediately. For now let's cover the important fundamentals. Here we go.

Is There a Difference Between Shyness and Social Anxiety?

The only difference between the two is the **degree to which they affect your life**.

If you only feel somewhat uncomfortable in some situations, then you have "shyness". But if that feeling of discomfort or anxiety become more serious, to the point where your body reacts strongly physically (i.e. panic attacks) and it affects your daily functioning, then you have "social anxiety".

Both shyness and social anxiety have the same root causes and can be treated in the same way. That's why I can write about both in one system.

However, for some people who are only a little shy, some of the things I talk about are going to be things which they already know how to do, like making eye contact. If this applies to you, feel free to skip the sections which you don't feel can help you.

NOTE: For the sake of faster and better reading, from now on in these modules I have <u>shortened both shyness and social anxiety into the letters SA</u>.

What Causes SA?

Have you ever wondered if shy or socially anxious people are born that way? Or if it's a developed personality trait?

The truth is: IT'S NEITHER.

What do I mean by this? Let me explain...

SA Is Not A Real Illness

SA is not a real disorder or illness, despite the name "social anxiety disorder".

99% of the people out there who have SA have <u>nothing physically wrong</u> with their mind or body that needs to be fixed through medication. (Of course, always see your doctor just in case you happen to be in the minority.)

SA can be fixed, but not by altering your body's chemical balances through medication. Medication helps some people manage their anxiety better, but it will never make it go away. It can only be a temporary fix.

To make it go away permanently, you need a different approach, which I'll share with you later in this module.

SA is Not a Personality Trait

This is also a common misconception many people with SA have.

When they are young, someone may tell them, "You're shy." This assumes that SA is a trait of a person. It's something they are born with or have developed over time to become a part of them, like their hair. Or like being athletic or overweight or smart. But the truth is, SA isn't a trait.

Think about it: Are you shy all the time? Even when you're by yourself? Are you equally anxious when you're talking to someone new as when you're talking to your closest friend?

No, you aren't. So what does this mean?

SA is a Learned Behaviour

SA is a learned behaviour. It's a set of mental and physical behaviours you may use to react to certain situations. The amount and the type of reaction you feel depends on the situation.

SA isn't something you are, it's something you do, sometimes.

The important thing to understand is that nobody has anxiety in every area, it always relates to specific situations. You may not be confident in social situations, but there are areas of your life where you are confident.

So stop assuming SA is a part of your personality and turning it into an unchangeable identity. Don't say: "That's the way I am." Say: "In this situation..."

SA is a set of thoughts and behaviours you have learned to use in certain social situations. This also means you can unlearn these thoughts and behaviours and replace them with new ones. Everything you need to do to unlearn these thoughts and behaviours will be explained a little later in this module.

The Purpose of SA is to Avoid Disapproval

SA is driven by an **extreme fear of disapproval**. People who have SA are scared to death that:

• someone will criticize or reject them based on their behaviour,

• they will make a negative impression on someone,

• someone will judge their actions negatively.

SA is often based on the assumption that you are in some way weak, inferior, inadequate or less good that others, combined with the fear people will notice this (supposedly inherent) defect and disapprove of you. And the disapproval will have dire consequences for your ability to get on with people and to feel you belong.

Because of their fear of disapproval, people with SA react to situations where they think they will experience disapproval or rejection in the same way that most people would react to real danger. They may experience physical or mental symptoms.

In order to avoid getting disapproval, people who have SA will usually be quiet and withdrawn, they don't want attention going their way because attention could mean potential disapproval.

It's actually a pretty bad situation for people with SA. By adopting this set of behaviours, other people won't disapprove of them ... but they also won't even notice them! That's the whole irony of the situation: Why do fears of disapproval make people act in ways that increase the chances of disapproval occurring?

The only time people with SA will be louder and more outgoing is in situations where they are unlikely to experience disapproval. Like around close friends or family. In these situations, they know the people well enough to know how they will react to what they do. And they know it won't be with disapproval.

Why Avoid Disapproval?

This is going on a slight tangent, but you need to understand an important idea. It is why we avoid disapproval.

The idea is many of our actions are motivated by instincts you have no control over. Instincts that were developed over millions of years by evolution in order to help you do two main things: survive and reproduce.

Believe it or not, our basic emotional system is almost the same now as it was a few thousand years ago in cavemen times. Evolution happens very slowly.

Principle: Many of our behaviours are secretly driven by a subconscious, instinctual need to survive and reproduce. This is based on millions of years of evolution. Often you don't even realize when your behaviours are being driven by these instincts.

What does this have to do with SA? Well, we've already established that SA is a fear of disapproval and that our brain has developed to try to help us survive. Now imagine if you lived in a tribe back in caveman days. Why would a caveman want to avoid disapproval from his tribe?

Because if a caveman's tribe disapproved of him severely, they would kick him out of the tribe. And back in those days, being out in the wilderness on your own meant that you probably wouldn't survive.

In caveman days, disapproval meant death. This is why, even to this day when our survival does not depend on other people's approval, we still have a drive to not experience disapproval. It's a built-in survival mechanism.

> "The psychoanalysts sometimes state that the root source of all fear is the fear of death. I think that in a way they are right."
>
> **- Kenneth H. Wilson, M.D.**

Knowing the source of SA, you can see that SA is not always a problem. If you were never concerned about being judged by others, you would probably do things that would get you into trouble. A certain amount of social anxiety protects you from doing things that could lead to severe social consequences.

The problem is that people with SA take it too far in the other direction. They are so worried about not getting disapproval, that the quality of their life suffers. SA becomes a problem when the person who has it has difficulty functioning and is unable to achieve important life goals.

Now I'm going to explain to you the exact process that occurs whenever someone becomes shy or socially anxious.

It Starts With the Idea of Social Learning

Social learning is how we figure out what is "good" or acceptable behavior at a young age. When we are young, we learn by doing things and then looking toward others to see if they approve.

Think about toddlers for a second. Most of them don't understand language. If their mom says "Don't do that", they don't actually understand the words that she is saying.

But what they do understand is if they are getting a positive or negative reaction from their parents to what they are doing. This is social learning.

And since we're hardwired to believe that disapproval is a threat to our survival, we would slowly stop doing things that resulted in disapproval.

This makes sense. If a toddler was about to touch an electrical socket and his mom said "DON'T DO THAT!", then the toddler is a lot less likely to try to touch the electrical socket in the future.

How does this relate to your SA?

So, if at a young age you tried to step up and be confident and your parents told you "be quiet" or something similar, then you would learn that that isn't acceptable behavior. You wouldn't do that again. **You would learn that acting in a shy or introverted way was the best way to get acceptance from the people around you.** And social acceptance is one of the very basic human needs.

Trying to Be Confident is Actually Painful...

In fact, a recent University of California, Los Angeles study found that this negative social feedback activates the same area of the brain as when we feel pain.

So, just like when you put your hand on the stove as a child and you learned very quickly not to do that again, you can also start to avoid social situations that might result in the pain of rejection.

Trying to be confident and the center of attention is now seen by a certain part of your mind as being a behaviour that will result in you getting rejected. Which is painful.

So here's Social Learning in a nutshell: <u>We are constantly looking at how other people react to what we do in order to figure out what is "good" behavior.</u>

Simple. And this happens ALL THE TIME. In every interaction that you have ever had, you have looked at other people's reactions to what you are doing to see if it was "good". And you don't even know you were doing it 99% of the time. Everybody does this.

"If Everyone Does This, Why Doesn't Everyone Have SA?"

People with SA are born with a genetic trait that makes them see other people's responses **with greater intensity** than a regular person.

Regular people can see some of this social learning, but they can't see it as well as someone who eventually develops SA. So a lot of negative reactions they get don't register in their brain. This lets them seem to care a lot less about what other people around them think of them than people with SA.

Okay, get it? So, because you saw negative reactions when you tried to be confident as a child, you slowly developed negative feelings to social situations. This is what made you become SA.

In summary, your SA was caused by a combination of you being genetically predisposed to developing the condition (increased sensitivity to other's reactions), combined with being in the wrong place at the wrong time (getting disapproval to being confident).

Another possible cause of your SA could be learning by example - maybe you had anxious parents or an older sibling growing up and you were just imitating their behaviour.

Now how to correct it? Here's the basic strategy:

Your Amygdala -- Anxiety Control Center In Your Brain

The Amygdala is the most important part of your brain when it comes to SA. It's the part of your brain that connects a certain stimulus to pain. So it's the part of your brain that makes you fear disapproval.

The Amygdala makes you react immediately when it detects something which may mean danger. The Amygdala activates a "fight or flight" response.

This is why many people with SA experience physical, mental and behavioral symptoms when they are in social situations.

Symptoms like: rapid heart, trembling/shaking, short of breath, sweating, cold hands, blushing, etc. A panic attack is when these symptoms come very quickly and intensely.

The Amygdala is a primitive part of your brain that's designed to keep you safe from perceived threats. By primitive, I mean that it isn't a part of your conscious, reasoning brain. It operates on a more basic level, underneath your conscious control. All the Amygdala does is automatically associate pain to certain experiences and pleasure to others based on what it has witnessed in the past.

Experiences, Not Rational Knowledge

The Amygdala works by interpreting past experiences. This is an important point to grasp, because it means **you can only un-learn any anxiety by showing your Amygdala through new experiences that there's nothing to be afraid of.**

You can't use logical, rational arguments to change what your Amygdala knows to be true through experience or memory.

Let me give you an example. Have you ever tried to be confident before a group presentation and tried telling yourself "What's the worst that can happen?" How well did that work out? How about any other logical reasons you tried to tell yourself not to feel anxious?

Logical thought doesn't overcome SA. You cannot simply talk your Amygdala out of reacting to certain stimuli that it has learned to identify as painful. You can't just learn some new piece of knowledge and "think your way out of your condition".

The only way to change the Amygdala's reactions is through exposure to the feared stimulus combined with an experience that teaches the Amygdala that nothing bad happens.

> Acquiring information itself is passive. Experiencing is active. When you 'experience', something happens inside your nervous system and your midbrain. New 'engrams' and 'neural' patterns are recorded in the gray matter of your brain."
>
> **- Maxwell Maltz, M.D., F.I.C.S.**

This is not just A way to overcome anxiety, it's THE way, THE ONLY WAY. Because it fixes the problem of SA at the core of where it started. So I'll repeat:

> The ONLY way to change the Amygdala's learned reactions is through exposure to the feared stimulus in a way that teaches it that nothing bad happens.

You have to slowly desensitize yourself to social situations and your Amygdala will start to realize that there's nothing to fear. This can only be accomplished with A LOT OF repetition combined with changing how you think and behave on a core level.

But it's not just about getting more exposure to social situations. If that was the case then no one would have SA. It's also about getting the right type of exposure, because it's possible to keep pushing yourself into social situations and only have negative experiences, which would just reinforce your SA.

Exposure: The Method For Overcoming Anxiety

In this section, I want to show you the key method that will permanently remove all of your SA. This is not just a method, it's the ONLY method to retrain your Amygdala that there's nothing to fear in social situations.

Avoidance Maintains Anxiety

When someone feels uncomfortable, nervous, or afraid, the natural tendency is to try to feel better in any way possible.

If their fear is being triggered by a particular object or situation, the easiest way to get rid of the fear is to escape from the situation or to avoid the situation altogether. These types of behaviours are called <u>avoidance behaviours</u>.

Avoidance behaviours can help you not feel anxiety and fear in the short term, but in the long term they help to maintain your anxiety because they prevent your subconscious brain from learning that a situation is safe.

Avoidance stops your brain from getting used to being in certain situations. Like the first time you tried to swim, you were probably tense and uptight. But, over time, you got used to the feeling of being in the water to the point where you could actually relax. So from this point forward it is essential for you to continually face your fears instead of avoiding them.

Fear Is Your Friend

There are so many people running away from their fears. They are constantly avoiding what they fear. Trying to find pills to take away the anxiety. Looking for ways to distract themselves.

Little do they know that fear not only helps them improve their life, but it's actually their greatest ally. **Fear is like a compass that points you towards the life you want.** All of your deepest desires are fear-ridden, from approaching someone you're attracted to, to starting a new business, to conquering your social anxieties. Whenever you feel fear, you know that you are going after what you truly want and growing as a person.

If you use fear as a guide for your actions, you will find something amazing happening. After you do something many times you fear, slowly, the fear will disappear. In psychology this is called habituation or progressive desensitization. The thing you used to fear now becomes commonplace and you wonder in disbelief what you were so afraid of in the first place.

It is essential you let fear guide you to your desired life but not overwhelm you. It's bittersweet to find that fear is your ally in this. All those years of trying to avoid it, you realize that it actually tells you something positive about yourself.

Fear is not something to be avoided. Fear is your friend. A revolutionary thought.

DIWA - Do It While Afraid

Many people with SA waste a lot of time thinking about ways to destroy fear, as if fear is the enemy. They look for medication, hypnosis tapes, or they seek that one last piece of knowledge that will make all of their fears disappear.
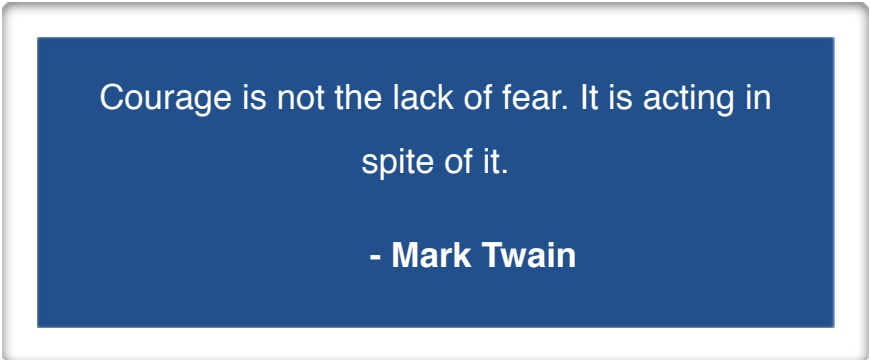
From now on, don't try to get rid of your fears before entering social situations. Instead, make it your policy to do it while afraid. DIWA for short. Ironically enough, this is the only way to get rid of your fears permanently.

Haven't you done anything while afraid? Have you ever jumped in a pool while thinking the water will be cold? If you think long and hard you will find you have done many things in your life while afraid. Not only that, you accomplished your proudest achievements, scared.

Focus on changing your actions, not your feelings. One of the most profound concepts in psychology is the fact that when you do something (actions), your emotions follow along behind. If you wait around to feel good or feel non-anxious, you'll be waiting forever. If you are scared of making eye contact with people when you walk past them, that fear isn't going to go away until you first start making eye contact in spite of that fear. You need to start DOING, and then you will BECOME.

I go by one mantra: **"acknowledge feelings and take appropriate action."** Say to yourself that you are afraid, but that you will do it anyway. Don't let the fear stop you. Don't try to make it go away either. Just watch your fear in a detached way. Recognize that it's just a chemical reaction in your body. If you spot it and act anyways, fear will lose its paralyzing grip.

> Courage is not the lack of fear. It is acting in spite of it.
>
> **- Mark Twain**

Fear doesn't go away by learning about it. You would think by this time, having studied so much about fear and anxiety, that I wouldn't be afraid of

anything. Nope. I am still afraid. It's just that I'm afraid of different things now. I suspect I will be for as long as I live. Continually "leaning into your fears" is a healthy part of life and a great way to grow as a person.

Trying and Failing is Better Than Not Trying

Sometimes when you are faced with a potentially anxious situation, you will feel yourself wanting to avoid it. Avoidance usually comes as a "tug" or urge to run away from a situation. For example, if you spot someone you know walking towards you in the distance, you may get an urge to cross the street to avoid them or to turn into a side street.

Whenever you feel this "tug" of avoidance, go against it. Use your willpower or discipline, or whatever you want to call it. Don't fight the feelings inside you and try to make them go away. Instead just accept that you are experiencing some emotions and make your feet move to face the situation anyways. Like my mantra goes: "acknowledge feelings and take appropriate action."

Do the thing you feel least like doing. Sometimes you won't be able to. It'll seem like you have no control over yourself when trying to face certain situations. It'll feel like your feet are moving themselves away from it. That's okay, all it means is that you have to start smaller and build your way up. The important thing is to get into the daily habit of facing, rather than avoiding, the things which cause you to feel anxiety.

If you keep to the habit of facing your fears daily, you'll find that you never regret facing your fears. Even if something doesn't go well, you still feel a sense of pride and accomplishment for stepping up. It's the times when you avoid your fears that make you feel bad.

"Exposure Doesn't Work For Me!"

I always get some people telling me: "I've been going to school/work and getting exposure for years. It hasn't done anything for my anxiety."

The reason why exposure does nothing for some people is because they do it the wrong way. If you do exposure <u>the wrong way</u>, your Amygdala won't unlearn the anxiety. That's why it's ESSENTIAL that you follow the guidelines I lay out in the next few pages.

Eliminate Partial Avoidance and Safety Behaviours

It's not enough to physically step into the situation that makes you anxious. You have to stop avoiding it in every way possible.

Many people with SA try to decrease their anxiety when in a stressful situation by avoiding certain parts of the situation that are particularly frightening. What they don't realize it that this type of "partial avoidance" is almost as bad as completely avoiding the situation.

Partial avoidance is bad for the same reason that avoidance is bad. In the short term, when someone does partial avoidance or safety behaviours, it lowers their anxiety. But in the long term, these habits actually maintain anxiety because they stop you from facing it. Since you never face the situations you fear head-on, your brain never gets the chance to unlearn its anxiety and learn that the situation is safe.

Alcohol/drugs/medication

These are effective at reducing anxiety in the short term, but actually maintain your anxiety in the long term. If you drink alcohol at every social

gathering you attend, then your brain will never be able to learn that social gatherings are safe.

Some people do require medication (see a doctor) but usually their therapist's goal is to continually cut back the dosage so the patient can slowly get used to being in situations and not require any anxiety medication at all. If you currently have to get very drunk at social gatherings, next time cut down by a significant amount. (By the way, if you don't even get invited to any parties right now, don't worry. We'll cover that in module 4.)

Keeping an anxiety pill in your pocket "just in case" is also a safety behaviour. It makes sense to have a safety net "just in case", but it actually works against you because in the long run you will ALWAYS need that anxiety pill to be there.

Restricting Your Behaviour

Whenever you are getting exposure for your anxiety, always ask yourself "what am I trying to accomplish here?"

If you want to be able to have fun at parties in the future, then you can't really expect to simply show up to a party, spend the whole time standing in the corner and make your anxiety get better. You have to continually be trying out more risky behaviours that are outside of your comfort zone. Whether that be eye contact, asking people simple questions, starting to carry longer conversations, starting to speak a little louder, and so on.

Whenever you catch yourself restricting your behaviour in some way, you know that you're partially avoiding the situation. This can be anything from

avoiding eye contact with the people around you, only talking to a "safe" person (one you know well), or only going to "safe" places.

Mental Distraction

Another common problem - and this was a HUGE issue for me - is going into situations that cause you to have anxiety, but then mentally distancing yourself from them.

<u>Stay mentally involved with the situation.</u> You have to actually be present, stay engaged, and focused on what's happening right in front of you.

I'll teach you specific techniques on how to deal with this in the section called "Being Present". But for now just try to keep your focus on the external world and start noticing when you start drifting off into your own little world. Every time you catch yourself daydreaming, bring your attention back to the situation you are in.

Anxiety is Necessary

What do all of the partial avoidance and safety behaviours have in common? They are all trying to lower the level of anxiety you feel in some way. Here's the shocker: If you try to to lower the anxiety you feel when carrying out an exposure session, you've missed the point completely.

The point of exposure is to EXPOSE yourself to the anxiety in order to show your brain that there's nothing to be afraid of. **As a rule, if you don't feel anxiety when you do it, then it's not real exposure.** You won't get any lasting benefits from it.

You have to ask yourself: is it worth it to suffer some short term anxiety and discomfort in order to live the remaining decades of your life with much less overall anxiety and the types of relationships you desire?

Stay in the Situation Until Anxiety Drops

Here's a VERY IMPORTANT part of exposure therapy. Whenever you enter an anxiety-causing situation, you have to stay in it long enough for your anxiety levels to drop noticeably. Here's an example graph of what a typical exposure session will feel like:
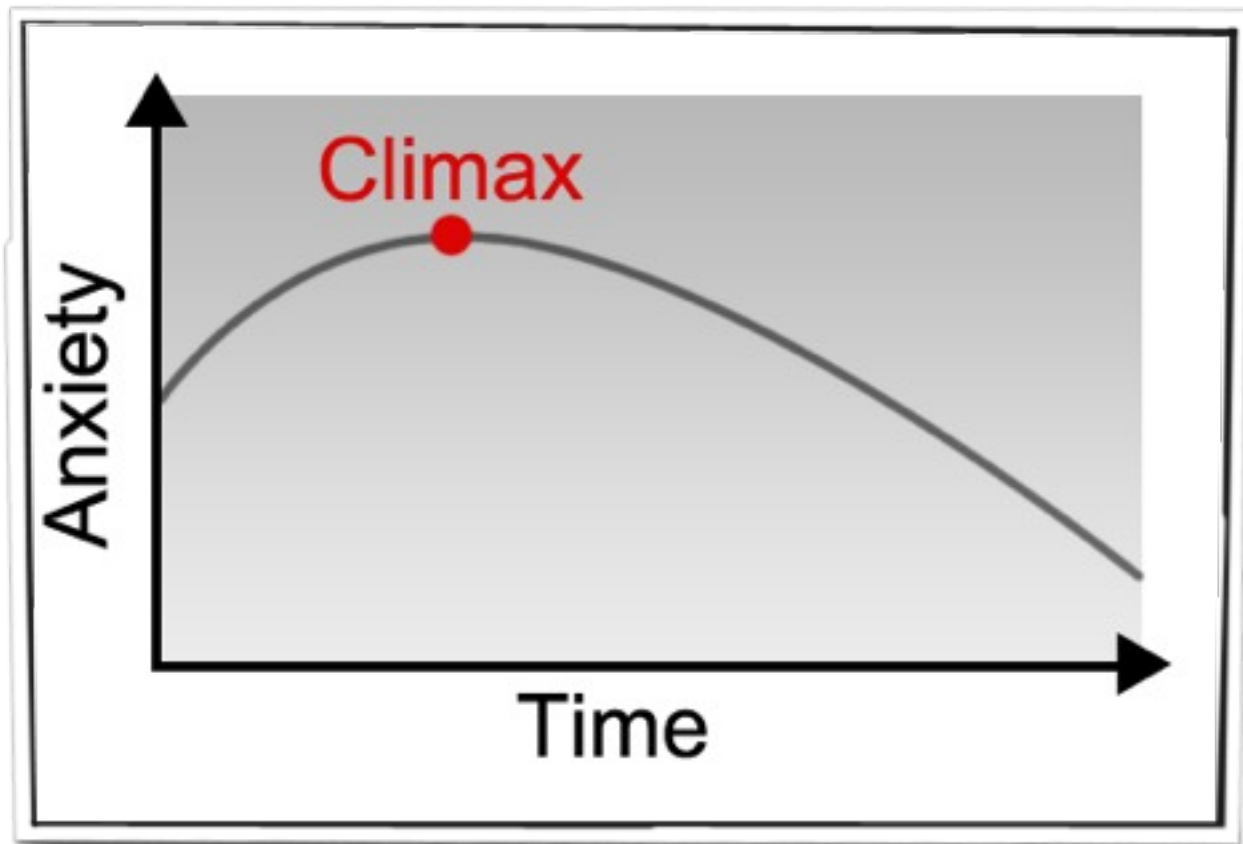
When you first enter the situation you'll feel very anxious. The feelings of anxiety will start to increase and you'll want to leave the situation. In a few chapters I'll teach you techniques to lower your anxiety that work like magic.

You'll need to learn these anxiety-reducing techniques BEFORE you start your exposures.

So the right way to do exposures is to enter the situation that causes anxiety for you, do the anxiety reducing techniques I'll show you until your anxiety drops noticeably, then leave. You'll notice that over time your anxiety will diminish and, if you keep at it, it'll go away entirely.

However, you MUST stay in the situation until you notice your anxiety levels drop. **If you escape from the situation while anxiety is still rising, before it reaches its climax, then you will feel more anxiety the next time** you try to face the situation.

Why? Because if you escape from the situation feel better temporarily, then you are conditioning your brain to associate running away from the situation with safety. Then if you try not to give in the impulse to escape next time, you will find that your anxiety reaction is stronger. This is because you have taught your brain that staying in the situation means possible danger that needs to be run away from.

Staying in exposure-type situations long enough for your anxiety levels to drop is what shows your brain that there's nothing to be afraid of. It proves to your mind that you can handle the anxiety and allows your body to get used to (habituate to) the anxiety and feel calmer the next time you enter an anxiety-arousing situation.
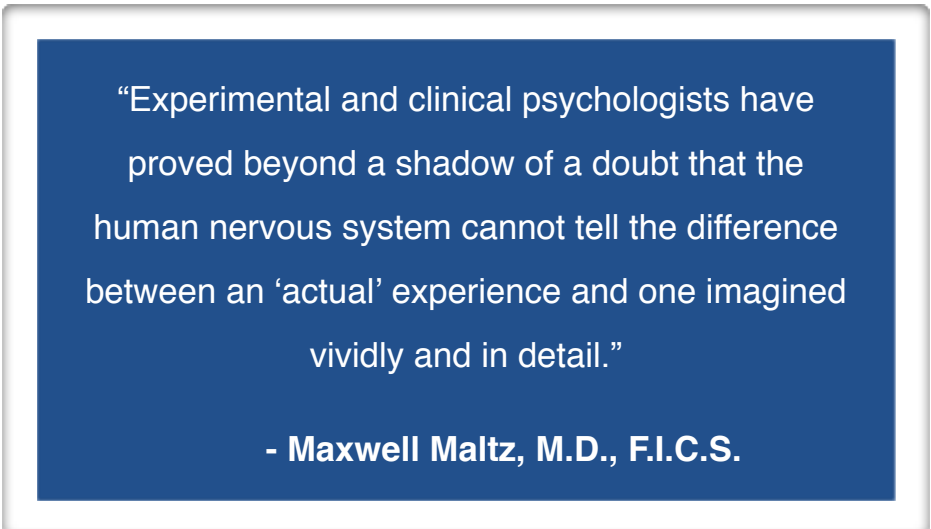
Imaginal Exposure

A lot of people ask me something like: "I've heard that I can lower my anxiety by using visualizations. Is that true?" The short answer is, yes, exposures

through visualizations do have some effect in decreasing anxiety, and can be useful to some people, but only if done correctly.

The basic trick if you are going to be doing it this way is to make the situation in your head so real that you actually start to feel some anxiety. If you don't start feeling somewhat anxious when you do the visualization, then it doesn't count as exposure, and your anxiety will stay the same.

Feel the anxiety (i.e. BE SOMEWHAT UNCOMFORTABLE) while doing this and stay in the situation mentally for long enough for your anxiety levels to drop noticeably. Use the anxiety-reducing techniques I'll show you in part two.

> "Experimental and clinical psychologists have proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the human nervous system cannot tell the difference between an 'actual' experience and one imagined vividly and in detail."
>
> **- Maxwell Maltz, M.D., F.I.C.S.**

It is a valid method of exposure, but only when done correctly, and it's much less effective than exposure to real life situations. It seems to me that many of the people who ask me about this type of exposure are trying to weasel their way out of the discomfort of facing their fears in real life. What they don't realize is that they should be feeling the same type of discomfort when they are visualizing, otherwise it does nothing.

The only real benefit imaginal exposure has is that you are more in control when facing the situation in the comfort of your home, and it can help to prepare you for real life exposures. IT WILL NOT CURE YOUR ANXIETY BY ITSELF. Remember that. You don't have to do visualizations, but it is 100% essential that you do real life exposures.

What Is an Exposure Hierarchy?

An "exposure hierarchy" is the idea that you should expose yourself first to situations that only make you feel a little anxious (i.e. making eye contact with a stranger). Then you work your way up to situations that make you feel more and more anxious (like approaching and starting a conversation with someone you find attractive).

The benefit of this is that it increases your chances of success. If you start out trying to do something which scares you a lot before you can handle less intimidating situations, then the intense fear you feel during the interaction, and the nearly certain failure, may cause you to stop trying to overcome your fear at all. So it's usually much better to desensitize in steps, where you move on to the next level when you feel reasonably comfortable with less intense situations.

If you ever feel you are slipping backwards, it could be because you are trying to run before you can walk. One step at a time. Take things slowly and understand that debunking old patterns of behavior takes time and effort. Even a small victory means you are not stuck, but need to keep working.

A Hierarchy of Behaviour

A hierarchy doesn't just apply to the types of situations you feel comfortable in. It can also apply to the <u>types of behaviours you feel comfortable doing</u>. Let me tell you what I mean:

Right now you may be a person who is quiet, timid, and keep to yourself. From childhood, you've never been as confident as you'd like to be. So whenever you see someone who can be confident effortlessly, and was "born that way", you don't really believe that you can be like him or her. Well, I've got a secret for you: you CAN get better at social skills just like you can get better at any skill.

Have you ever joined a gym or taken a dance class? When you first walk in, you see all the advanced people, and it's maybe a little bit intimidating.

They move about effortlessly, doing things you couldn't do if your life depended on it. But over time, your skill improves, until you eventually BECOME one of those people. This means expanding your comfort zone, progressively desensitizing yourself.

A typical sequence might look like this:

- Learning to hold eye contact.

- Saying hi to people.

- Holding brief conversations.

- Being more assertive.

- Being louder and more expressive.

- Beginning to interact physically.

- Getting comfortable with being the center of attention.

- etc...

The thing is, a lot of people think that being confident is something someone is born as. This is incorrect. It is a skill like anything else. Fake it 'till you make it.

Creating Your Exposure Hierarchy

Okay, let's get back to the hierarchy of situations we were talking about before. First you have to make a detailed list of all situations in which you experience fear of disapproval. These are the ones you want to get good in. Pick situations that come up fairly regularly, or at least ones that you could arrange to happen regularly. Be specific. Where is it and who is there?

Next, rank your feared situations. It doesn't have to be perfect, you just need a general sense of which ones trigger low anxiety, which are medium, and which are high.

The last step is to form a schedule of when you'll be facing each situation, hopefully in rough order of difficulty. If you generally have a fairly busy life and just have to stop avoiding or partially avoiding the situations that come up. If you are alone at home all the time, you'll have to be more assertive about this and make the time to get out there and start conducting exposures.

If you are going to be using imaginal exposures or visualizations as well, the best way to do it is to conduct the imaginal exposure of a situation sometime before the real life situation. So your hierarchy would look like this:

- Imaginal exposure for situation #1.

- Real life exposure for situation #1.

- Imaginal exposure for situation #2.

- Real life exposure for situation #2.

- Imaginal exposure for situation #3.

- Real life exposure for situation #3.

- etc...

After An Exposure Session

Any time you face your fears instead of avoid them, you've succeeded. Give yourself a pat on the back. So don't start beating yourself up over minor screw ups. It doesn't matter if you did something wrong, or if the exposure didn't go well, or if you made a fool of yourself, or even if you think everyone is thinking terrible things about you.

What matters is that you keep getting new experiences that you can learn from and improve. Instead of beating yourself up, say to yourself "I'm taking steps to become better every day." Constant improvement towards a better you is what's important, not being perfect right now. As long as you did what you said you were going to do, you've succeeded.

A good idea is to reward yourself in some way after you enter a challenging situation, whether or not it went well. It can be a candy bar or some other indulgence. A healthy one is better, but I'm trying to be realistic here. Why reward yourself? Because this type of positive reinforcement is often what is needed for some people with SA to push themselves into a situation that scares them.

The opposite way is to punish yourself. Every time you avoid a situation, do something that you don't want to. Skip something that you like to do, make a deal with yourself that you'll donate a few dollars to charity for every offense. You can also combine both reward and punishment if you really need that extra push. Make sure you actually carry out the consequences you say you will, so that you know that you're serious next time. If you don't actually do the reward/ punishment, then it's not gonna motivate you in the future.

Progress and Motivation

The most important thing is to keep moving forward and getting used to more and more difficult situations. That part is up to you. If you need any more help, try getting a book on goal setting. I'm not going to try and motivate you, all I'll say is this...

It's your life. I've laid out for you a path that you can choose to walk down or not. I figure that the pain of years of loneliness and the potential of future friendships and romantic relationships is enough to motivate you to deal with the short term pain you'll encounter. It's what motivated me.

Don't be fooled: most people who try to overcome SA will fail at it. Just like most people who try to lose weight will fail at it. Why? Because most people are dabblers. They try something half-heartedly and then give up before they see any real change. Overcoming SA is simple, but not easy. Just like losing weight is simple: eat less, exercise more. But not easy.

The problem is not that both SA and being overweight are "not curable". The real problem is that most people just don't have the willpower to stick at it and do

the steps that are necessary to succeed. In SA, your progress will be the direct result of:

1. <u>How often</u> you enter anxiety-provoking situations.

2. <u>How long</u> these situations last on average.

A good number to shoot for is 4 times a week, at least 1-2 hours a day. Have small and achievable goals that are specific, so you know when you're making progress and when you need to push yourself or adjust your goals.

Focus on execution, not perfection. Instead of rating yourself on how well you managed to do, or how good your performance was, just focus on stepping up and doing what you are afraid of. Make your only criteria for a successful exposure that you actually put yourself into the situation that causes anxiety for you and didn't avoid it either completely or partially.

Part 2: Proven Anxiety-Reducing Techniques

If you remember, one of the most important, if not <u>the</u> most important, parts of exposure is that your anxiety must go down significantly before you leave. As shown in the diagram to the right, you have to wait until after you pass the "climax" point of your anxiety. This is so that your brain learns that you can handle the situation in the future and that it's safe. If you do this correctly, then in the future you'll experience less anxiety. If you keep doing it, your anxiety will go away completely.
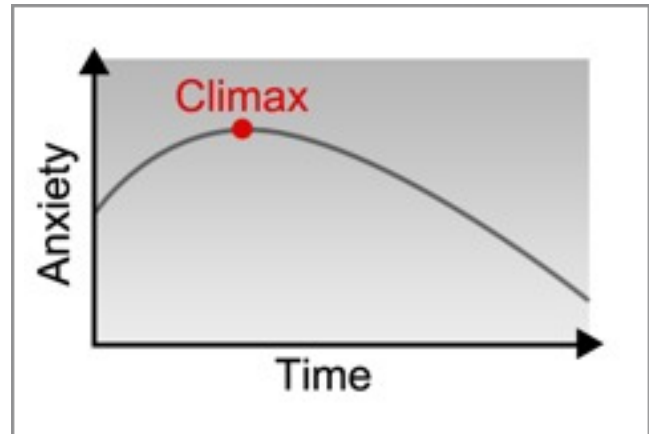
The following techniques will be your best tools for overcoming anxiety as you are experiencing it in the moment. Learn them well because they are the keys to overcoming SA.

Technique #1: Diaphragmatic Breathing

Shallow Breathing

Don't get intimidated by the word "diaphragmatic". It simply means to breathe deeply using your stomach instead of your chest. People with shyness and social anxiety breath in a shallow way most of the time. Especially when they are in an anxiety-provoking situation.

Why is this? In every mammal, there's an automatic response when they're anxious, called the "fight or flight response". They start breathing faster, and shallower. This type of breathing causes you to be even more nervous, tense and "on edge" than you already are.

The "fight or flight response" is a legacy of human evolution that dates back to when we had to watch out for predators in caves and jungles thousands of years ago. It is a useful mechanism developed to help humans react quickly to potential danger. This is why, whenever you feel anxious, your muscles become tense, and your breathing becomes quicker and shallower.

Shallow breathing not only fuels your anxiety, but it also causes you to have a weak, quivering voice and also...

Cold hands

This comes as a surprise to many shy and socially anxious people. The fact that their cold hands are caused by their anxieties. I remember my parents would always tell me to dress warmer and wear gloves when I was young whenever they would feel how cold my hands were. Happened every week in church.

The fact is that your cold hands are not the result of not wearing enough clothes most of the time. Your cold hands are the result of not enough blood circulation, which is the result of shallow breathing. When you breath in a shallow way, your body doesn't get enough oxygen to recharge all of your blood cells completely. This means your body's ability to circulate blood is severely cut down. That's why your forearms may be warm, but your hands, especially your fingertips, are always cold. Your blood doesn't have enough oxygen in it to go that far.

Diaphragmatic Breathing Step By Step:

Breathe Using Your Belly, Not Your Chest

First, relax your neck and shoulder muscles as much as possible. Now it's time to see how you usually breathe. Take a deep breathe and feel what parts of your upper body move. Do you feel your chest moving, or your belly?

When you breathe, you shouldn't feel your upper chest and shoulders rising and falling. This is bad -it's shallow breathing!

To do diaphragmatic breathing, put one hand on top of your belly button and the other hand on your chest. Like the cartoon on the right. It may be easier to practice this lying down at first.

When you breathe in, you should feel
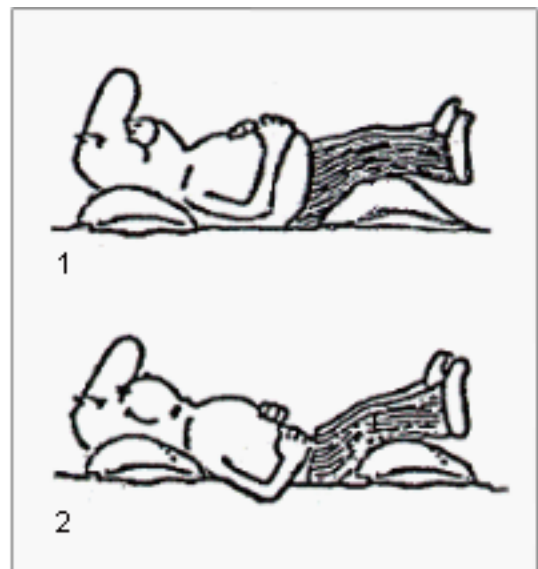
your belly expanding. When you breathe out, you should feel your belly going in. Your chest and shoulders should barely move at all.

Use your hands to make sure you are doing this correctly. You should feel only the hand on your belly should move. The one on your chest should not move at all.

Take Long, Slow Breaths

Another key part in using diaphragmatic breathing in order to relax is to slow down your breathing. When you are feeling anxious and the victim of the "fight or flight" response, the natural tendency is to breathe faster.

In order to relax, you must breathe slower. Once you start breathing slower, your mind and body will catch up and start to relax more. Breathe S-L-O-W-L-Y. Breathe in for at least 2-3 seconds. Breathe out twice as long as you breathe in.

When you are breathing out, let the air escape naturally, don't try to force the air out of your lungs.

Breathe In Through Nose, Out Through Mouth

Breathe in through your nose. This may feel uncomfortable at first, like you can't get enough air, or like one of your nostrils is clogged, but you'll get used to it. This is actually how most people breathe who don't have anxiety.

Breathe out through your mouth. When you're practicing, it may help to purse your lips, as if you were blowing out a birthday candle. Remember to breathe out slowly and just let the air flow, don't force it.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Diaphragmatic or belly breathing isn't just something you do when you're feeling anxious. It should be the way you breathe the majority of the time. This means that you can practice diaphragmatic breathing anywhere.

Whenever you catch yourself using your chest to breathe, switch to breathing using your belly. If you keep consciously making yourself breathe in a new way, over time it will develop into a habit and you'll do it all the time without thinking.

Technique #2: Muscle Relaxation

One of the most important things you can do to reduce anxiety when it happens is to relax yourself as much as possible physically. It will make you calmer and less anxious in every situation you enter. Just by getting rid of the tension in your body, the tension/anxiety in your mind usually becomes far less intense. *(In psychology this effect is called "psychosomatic".)*

Physical relaxation works so well for anxiety because when there's danger, your body's instinctive reaction is to tense up. So when you are relaxed, you are sending your brain the opposite message. You are telling your mind: "there's nothing here to be afraid of; there's no danger." Therefore physical relaxation also leads to less inner anxiety.

Other Benefits of Relaxation

Even beyond that, you'll find that when you are totally relaxed, you have better body language automatically. Many people with SA tense up when they are anxious so they have trouble walking and moving in a "natural" way. This causes all of their actions to look uncomfortable and self-conscious. Learning to relax your muscles properly goes a long way to fixing this problem.

Muscle relaxation also causes you to speak much, much better. Do you ever remember a time when you had to say something in front of many people and your voice sounded weird? Yet when you are just talking to one person you know well you can talk fine? This is because it's virtually impossible to talk well when your chest and vocal muscles are tensed up. Your voice ends up sounding tense and unnatural.

The solution to this is to learn how to relax even in situations when you feel anxiety, and what you say will come out much, much better. Dr. James S. Greene, founder of the National Hospital for Speech Disorders, New York City, had a motto: <u>"When they can relax, they can talk."</u>

Learning How to Relax

The first step in being able to relax on demand when you are feeling anxious is to practice at home. Yes, many people who have social anxiety start tensing up so often that it becomes habitual. For them, being relaxed is what feels unnatural because they're not used to it. It's good that there's a way to relearn how to be relaxed. Here's what you do:

1. Sit down so you are comfortable or lie down on your back.

2. Go through your muscle groups one at a time. If you are sitting, go from head to feet. If you are lying down, go from feet to head.

3. For each muscle group, first you have to tense it, hold it for a couple seconds, then let it relax. After you tense, hold, and release each muscle group, you should feel a significant increase in how relaxed it feels. *(If the tensing part isn't helping you become more relaxed, then try to just let go a little tension as you shift your attention to the various muscle groups.)*

4. One possible sequence for this is: forehead, face, jaw, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, back, abdomen, buttocks, thighs, calves, feet and toes. It doesn't have to be perfect, just try to hit as many major muscle groups as possible. Spend about five minutes on this.

5. The next step is to relax even deeper by using mental imagery. If your mind is focused on something relaxing, then your muscles will automatically become less tense. Go back in your memory to some relaxing and pleasant scene from the past. There is always some time in everyone's life when they felt relaxed, at ease, and at peace with the world. If you can't think of one, then just imagine a scene you find relaxing. Maybe it's walking along a warm beach in the sand or maybe it's sitting at a peaceful lake in the mountains. Pay particular attention to the little details in the environment. What sounds were present? Did you hear leaves rustling through the grass nearby? How did the sand feel against your skin? Could you feel the warm, relaxing sun? Was there a breeze blowing? Were there gulls on the beach? The more of these little details in the environment you can remember, the more successful you will be.

6. Daily practice will help to condition your body to be relaxed instead of tense. The more you do it, the easier it will become to enter that relaxed state again and again. More importantly, you will be able to use the relaxed state as a tool against anxiety.

Bringing Relaxation Into Daily Life

It's one thing to be relaxed in the comfort of your home while you're alone. It's a whole new challenge to make the decision to relax when alarm bells are going off inside your body.

First, make sure you are doing diaphragmatic breathing. Then, try to "mentally remember" the relaxed feeling you had. If you've been practicing, the feeling should be easy to replicate. See if you can feel any significant tension left in your muscles after you do this. If you can, release it by letting go. Mentally repeating several times "I feel more and more relaxed" also helps.

At first you'll find that your muscles are tense all of the time and you have to relax the tension every single time you check. But over time, you'll slowly find yourself becoming more and more relaxed. Eventually, you won't have to keep remembering to do it, it'll become an unconscious habit.

Technique #3: Acceptance

Don't Try to Suppress Anxiety Symptoms

One of the things that makes social anxiety different from other anxieties is the fact that a person with SA is afraid of the symptoms of the anxiety itself. When you feel anxious, you don't want anyone to know about it. You don't want them to see you sweating, shaking or blushing. So you try to suppress or make the symptoms go away as fast as possible.

The more you try to make people not see your symptoms, the more pressure you put on yourself. And the more pressure you put on yourself, the more anxious you become. It's a vicious cycle. By putting pressure on yourself, you just increase your sweating, shaking, blushing, etc.

In reality, your symptoms are not nearly as noticeable to other people as you think they are. And even if they were, they still wouldn't really care. Would you care if you saw someone else sweating, shaking or blushing? You may say you would, but you'd probably be too focused on what other people thought of you to worry about them.

Other Ways of Struggling and Fighting With Anxiety:

Here are more strategies that don't work when trying to overcome anxiety:

1. INSISTING you shouldn't be this way. Why should you be afraid of talking to people? Why should you be uncomfortable in restaurants and other public places?

2. FIGHTING feelings of anxiety using anger. "I'm sick and tired of living this kind of life!" "I'm going to get over this today, damn it!"
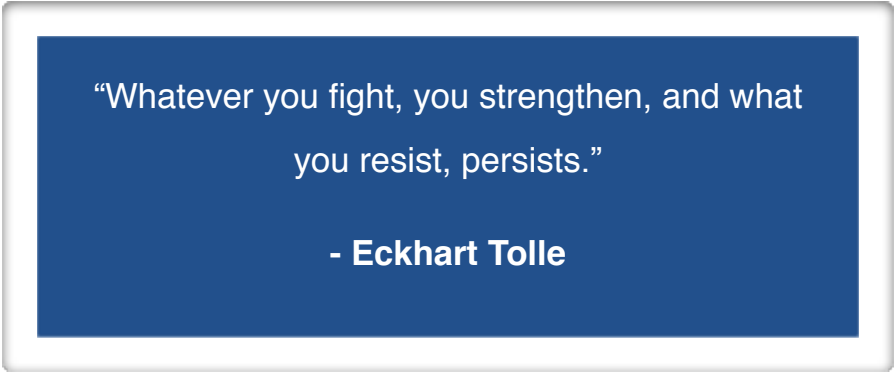
3. <u>COMPLAINING about the fact that you have social anxiety.</u> "Why must I have this stuff anyway? No one else I know has this. They can do whatever they want. I can't even make friends. I have no one to talk to about this. It'll never get any better. I'll be anxious, miserable, and fearful until the day I die!"

4. Trying to argue that <u>"It's not FAIR"</u> that you have SA or that <u>"You don't DESERVE"</u> to have it.

The Problem With Resisting

When you are experiencing a lot of fear and discomfort, it's only natural to want to try to get rid of these emotions in any way possible, at all costs.

Unfortunately, using these types of strategies is <u>similar to throwing gasoline on a raging fire</u>. There's a saying that goes like this:

> "Whatever you fight, you strengthen, and what you resist, persists."
>
> **- Eckhart Tolle**

Which means that resisting, fighting, battling, attacking, and getting aggressive with the anxiety - just brings the social anxiety on STRONGER.

What you think should make the anxiety better is actually making it worse. You can't fight a negative emotion with another negative emotion, all you do is fall into a vicious cycle that gets very hard to break out of.

The Chinese Finger Trap

Have you ever tried one of those chinese finger traps?

First you put two fingers into it at opposite ends. When you try to take them out again, you realize that you're stuck.

The more you fight and try to pull your fingers out of the finger trap, the tighter it gets. The only way out is to relax and slowly pull your fingers out as you push the ends in. Do you see how this relates to anxiety?

The more you fight it, the tighter its hold grows on you. That is why overcoming anxiety is counterintuitive; that's why we call it a paradox. If your fingers get stuck in a chinese finger trap, the WORST thing you can do is to start pulling and struggling to get out of it.

So, what do you do when anxiety tries to attack and hurt you?

Play Dead

PLAY DEAD. Do not respond to it. Do not panic. Slow down. Take your time. Use the breathing technique you learned before. Calm down, relax, cool it. Do not respond to negativity by reacting negatively.

You already know the more you fight, battle, struggle, and attack, the tighter the trap will get around you. Anxiety likes it when you fight back because then it has you trapped. Your fingers won't go anywhere if you keep fighting.

On the other hand, if you are calm and still, it becomes much easier to slip out of the trap unnoticed. By not fighting anxiety, it will IGNORE you... you are not giving it any power to be able to harm you.

Don't get your fingers caught in the anxiety trap. Take it easy, stay calm... then they will continue to have less and less power over you... and you will realize that YOU are the one who is in charge.

> "Whenever fear comes to you, don't suppress it, don't repress it, don't avoid it, don't get occupied in something so that you can forget about it.
>
> No! When fear comes, watch it.
>
> Be face to face with it.
>
> Encounter it.
>
> Look deep into it.
>
> Gaze into the valley of fear.
>
> Of course you will perspire, and you will tremble, and it will be like a death, and you will have to live it many times. But by and by, the more your eyes become clear, the more your awareness becomes alert, the more your focus is there on the fear, the fear will disappear. Like a mist."
>
> **- Osho**

Part 3: Changing How You Think

Value and the Social Hierarchy

Introduction

Do you ever feel like some people you try to talk to automatically brush you off? They don't let you talk, and don't really listen to what you have to say?

And then you see these same people giving their full attention to other people, who are seen as being popular.

Doesn't that just piss you off? I remember that used to happen to me all of the time. It seemed like everybody cared about themselves and other social people, but nobody seemed to care what I had to say, even if I tried to be more outgoing. Even if what I said was funny or interesting.

If you've ever wanted to know the hard-core psychological science behind what makes some people magnets for friends and attention, and others desperate for any social contact, then what you are about to read will blow your mind.

The Concept of Value

Have you ever seen a totem pole? It's a tree trunk carved to show a series of heads, one on top of the other. There's a picture of a totem pole on the right so you get the idea.

Social groups work the same way as a totem pole in a lot of ways. There is usually a social order or hierarchy from the highest to lowest member of the group. It's like a scale from the most important to least important person.

Everyone has a place on this hierarchy, that determines how people treat them. At work, do you treat your boss differently than your co-workers? Of course you do, because he is "higher up the food chain", so to speak.

How does this relate to social anxiety? Well, you already know that social anxiety is fear of disapproval. What you may not know is that <u>you only really fear the disapproval of people you think are higher value or superior than you.</u>

Think about this long and hard, because it's a crucially important point. You only care about the disapproval of people who you think have a "higher value" than you do.

How Value Affects Our Behaviour

Here's an interesting concept: <u>we interact with people differently based on how valuable we see them</u>. If you place a lot of value or importance on someone, then you are going to act a lot more inhibited and anxious around them then someone you don't care much about.

If you don't believe me that you treat different people differently based on how much you value them, then try this exercise: go out and ask two strangers for the time. One is a ten year old child, the other is someone your own age you find attractive. What do you think would happen? You probably wouldn't even be able to walk up to the attractive person.

Here's a different scenario that relates to fear of disapproval. Let's imagine you were walking down the street. If the 10 year old child ran up to you and said "you suck!", how much would that affect you emotionally? Maybe you'd care a little, but not that much. What about if the attractive member of the opposite sex came up to you and said the exact same words? Now how much would you be affected? A lot more, I bet.

"How Does This Relate To Social Anxiety?"

It's great to learn that we treat people differently based on their value or social status, but what does this mean for you? How can we use this knowledge to help you overcome SA?

The first way this knowledge helps you is by making you aware that <u>at the core of your SA is a feeling of inferiority or inadequacy</u>. Notice how your anxiety levels differ based on which person or people you interact with. Chances are, the more superior you believe the other person is to you, the less confidently you will

be able to behave. This awareness really helps you when it comes to building your own confidence and self esteem.

The second way this knowledge helps is that you can reverse-engineer social value in order to make other people see you as valuable. This is how you become more popular and make friends easily.

It Happens Everywhere

From now on, notice when your anxiety is being triggered by being intimidated by someone's Social Value. For example:

- Can you can easily talk to people who are seen as being "uncool", but struggle to say the right thing when talking to someone popular? (By the way, popular is just the word I'm using because it's easily understandable. You can substitute many traits, like how aggressive, assertive, confident or intelligent the other person is.)

- Have you ever wanted to be seen with someone because you thought other people would see you with him/her and think you were a cooler person because of it? This may be as subtle as trying to stand close to the "cool" person.

- When you walk past people on the street, are you more anxious when you are walking past an elderly couple or someone attractive around your own age? I'm guessing it's the latter.

- Are you ever much more energetic or do you <u>try harder than usual</u> to come up with something interesting to say when you're talking to someone popular?

- And I bet you're much more laid back and "natural", much less shy, when you're talking to someone most people think is a loser?

- Do you ever want to show someone popular your better qualities, like being much more social when they are around, name-dropping, or mentioning things (material possessions, etc.) you hope will impress them?

- Do you have a lot more anxiety and difficulty speaking to authority figures?

If you do any of these things, you aren't alone. The important thing to notice is that you are never actually trying to treat everyone differently. It just happens. Everyone has this type of automatic system of valuing people. It controls how they act around who.

Here's the basic overview: In every interaction between two people, one person is higher status. He or she may be better-connected socially, more dominant, a better leader, or just more popular with everyone. For girls, good looks also are a large factor. So one person is always "cooler". The person who is lower status usually ends up trying harder to get the high status person's approval. From now on, notice when you do this.

I know it sucks when you are on the lower end of this "social value scale", but it's very important to see how this works. And to understand that everybody does this unconsciously. They don't know they are doing it. You probably didn't even realize how much this affects your behaviour until now.

But here's a warning: now that you understand that people pay more attention to people of higher status, and almost ignore people who are lower status, YOU'RE GOING TO SEE THIS HAPPENING EVERYWHERE.

Don't say I didn't warn you.

Value, Self-Esteem and Anxiety

Okay, so from now on notice how your anxiety is much greater whenever you are talking to someone who has "high value". These are the people you consider superior to you. You perceive their worth to be greater than yours, so you don't feel entitled to express yourself confidently around them. In a way, you feel intimidated.

On the other hand, when the person you are talking to is someone you don't think is superior to you, if you feel that you are "on their level", then you are naturally going to be much more confident and free to express your personality.

If this is true, then one of the best ways to decrease your anxiety and increase you social skills is to raise your perception of your own worth. This is also called your self-esteem.

> "Self-esteem is a term used to reflect a person's overall evaluation or appraisal of his or her own worth."
>
> **- Wikipedia.org**

I'll show you how you can improve your self-esteem, or perception of your own worth, in the next chapter. For now just remember how it fits into anxiety and value. Keep in mind that, <u>when you don't feel inadequate compared to the person you are talking to, your confidence and social skills come easily and naturally</u>. It's only when you are intimidated by someone else or feel inferior to a group of people that your mind goes blank and you start acting shy.

What Makes You See Someone As Valuable?

We will talk much more about this in the next section, but I'll touch on it briefly here. What you may be thinking about right now is: what makes someone high value or superior in the first place? I'll try to answer that quickly here.

The first thing to understand is that value is all in your mind. In reality, there are no "superior" or "inferior" people. The only reason why you see some people as more valuable than you is because you have some rules in your mind that determine whether someone is valuable to you or not. If someone passes all these rules and criteria you have, then you see them as valuable.

So let's talk about what some of these rules could be. Ask yourself:

• Does someone's confidence, decisiveness, assertiveness or aggressiveness often intimidate me?

• If I see someone as having a lot more friends and social connections than me, do I feel inferior to them?

• If someone is very physically attractive and/or wears the most stylish clothes, do I act differently around them? (Pay special attention to how

differently you treat women who are below-average looking and women who are drop-dead gorgeous.)

- Do I like someone better if I find them funny and they give me positive emotions? (This one's a no-brainer...)

- Am I more anxious around people my own age, the very old, or the very young? (It's usually people your own age or older people in positions of authority that are most intimidating.)

If you have low self-esteem, it means that YOU DO NOT THINK YOU MEET OTHER PEOPLE'S RULES FOR BEING A VALUABLE PERSON. You believe you can see yourself through other people's eyes, and you judge yourself by what you imagine other people's standards to be.

As you'll discover in the next chapter, the "rules" in your head that cause you to see yourself as inferior to certain people are often false and irrational, and they can be removed.

The key is to start judging yourself by your own standards, instead of other people's. And make yourself live up to your standards so that you "become a hero in your own mind."

How Do You Offer Value?

Now let's switch gears a bit and talk about how you offer value to the people around you? This is absolutely key if you want to have friends, become popular and have people want to be around you. If you see that people are brushing you off and not really making an effort to be friends with you, then often it's because they just don't see you as valuable to them. They just don't see a reason why

they should spend the time and energy being your friend or paying attention to you over someone else.

In the long run, people only want to hang out with you if they get a benefit from that. So the question you have to ask yourself is: what type of value do you offer to the people you want as friends?

Now, don't get me wrong. I don't mean that you have to buy people gifts to gain friends. I mean that you need to provide something valuable to the person or group of people for your presence to be wanted.

In my experience, sharing enjoyment and good feelings is how friendships and deep relationships are formed. How can you increase people's enjoyment? This can come in many forms—some better for your situation than others. For instance, you might be able to make them laugh. Or, you might be able to put others at ease and make them feel relaxed.

Or you can be optimistic and pump them up with positive emotions. Even the nerdiest people you can imagine can have friends. Mainly, you don't want to be negative... either about other people or down on yourself.

Loneliness often comes from your mindset. When someone feels insecurity, depression, and in general has a poor self image, it's no wonder few people want to hang out with them.

Remember that in the long run, people only want to hang out with you if they get a benefit from that. If you cause someone to feel negative emotions, they're going to have limited patience with you. Nobody likes someone who's down on themselves and always wanting you to feel sorry for them. If you have feelings of hostility or sullenness, try to keep them to yourself.

From Inferiority to Self-Esteem

What's Your "Secret Reason"?

One thing that I have noticed time and time again when it comes to people who are unsuccessful in some area, is that almost all of them have a "secret reason" to justify their failure.

When it comes to your SA and lack of social life, what is your "secret reason" for not being able to do what other people can do?

Often it is a physical defect, many people with SA have some serious body image problems. You may feel other people can't or won't accept you for how you look. Short, tall, bald, hairy, skinny, fat, bad teeth, large nose, foreign accent, ugly, etc.

Other times the "secret reason" is based on your upbringing. Maybe you blame your current condition on how your parents brought you up. If your parents were very introverted and didn't have much of a social life, then you say you "learnt it from them." If your parents were very loud and outgoing, then you may say "their outgoing nature caused me to retreat and become introverted."

Ask yourself: **"What is my secret reason?"** Dig deep, find out what it is. What story you use in your mind to justify your failures up until now?

At this point in my career of helping people overcome their shyness and social anxiety, I think I've heard every possible secret reason that exists. Of course I've heard the ones about having a bad childhood and a bad appearance, but I've also heard some more bizarre ones.

- I had one guy tell me: "I'm so good looking that people are intimidated. That's why I can't have relationships." And he wasn't kidding or trying to be arrogant. This is something he actually believed to the core. He believed the reason people didn't like him was because they were either secretly jealous or intimidated.

- I've had some people tell me that they "turned out this way" because their parents never took an interest in developing their social life. I've had other people tell me that their parents caused their SA because they encouraged them to participate in sports at a young age, which made their problems much worse.

- Sometimes the "secret excuse" was a traumatizing childhood event, other times it was being too sheltered and protected in childhood.

- And here's one that I have to mention purely because it's so common. Many men feel inadequate based on feeling like they have too small sex organs, and many woman think their sex organs are too large! Some feel they have too low sex drive, others feel their sex drive is too high.

Are you starting to see a pattern here? The range of "secret excuses" people have is gigantic, and often one person's excuse is the exact opposite of someone else's. With this in mind, I want you to start to open your mind to the possibility, just the slight possibility, that your "secret excuse" is not the cause of your social problems, but only a justification for them.

Your Image of Your Self

What really put me onto to trail of the "secret reason" was a book called "Psycho-Cybernetics," written by Maxwell Maltz, a plastic surgeon.

What Maltz noticed was that he had two types of patients who came in for plastic surgery. The first type of patient would receive plastic surgery, and many of their inner psychological problems would be solved. They would no longer feel inferior, inadequate, or embarrassed because of their appearance. This makes sense, doesn't it? If you get rid of the cause of embarrassment, then what is there left to be embarrassed about?

Then there was a second type of patient. Even when the "defect" was fixed, many patients still had the same psychological problems. They still felt the same low self worth they always had. The same sense of embarrassment about themselves remained even though they had "fixed" the cause! The outer scars were healed, yet the inner scars remained the same. What did this mean?

What Maltz discovered was that everyone not only has an outer image or appearance, they also have an inner image. Everyone has a self-image, it's a picture in your mind of who you think you are. Even though plastic surgery had gotten rid of the patients' "secret reason", their self-image remained the same.

> "The self-image controls what you can and cannot accomplish, what is difficult or easy for you, even how others respond to you just as certainly and scientifically as a thermostat controls the temperature in your home. Specifically, all your actions, feelings, behavior, even your abilities, are always consistent with this self-image. Note the word: always. In short, you will "act like" the sort of person you conceive yourself to be."
>
> **- Maxwell Maltz, M.D., F.I.C.S.**

Why is it that when you try to be more confident and social, it always feels like you have to force it? Like you're putting on an act? It's because you are trying to change your outer behaviour without changing your self-image. That's why you can "fake" confidence for maybe a couple of minutes, but then you go back to being shy and introverted. When you try to act confident, it's like a fish that's trying to swim upstream. It can do it for a bit, but eventually the stream overpowers it and it is swimming in the direction it always has. The stream is like your self-image, and it is always bringing you back to acting in ways that fit your self-image. If your self-image says you are inferior to other people, then you will find it difficult to act in ways that contradict your inferiority. At least, not for long.

For example, an overweight person can lose weight through sheer willpower, but if they see themselves as a "fat person", then they will feel a gravitational pull to become the person they conceive themselves to be.

Your Self-Image Forms Through Experiences

Okay, so where do you get these beliefs into your self-image that "you are inferior"? You don't believe something ever unless you think there are good reasons to believe it is true. Well, we discussed how social anxiety often forms by seeing too much negative feedback at an early age. That is also how your self-image forms in the first place.

But the way your self-image reinforces itself and becomes stronger is through the experiences you have on a daily basis. If you have a ton of experiences that show you you are inferior, then that's what you are going to believe. If nobody ever invites you out or makes an effort to get to know you, then you will feel even more inferior than you already do. If you are the girl who didn't get asked to dance at the dance, then you will definitely believe you are less desirable than the other girls. Your beliefs or image about yourself develop through your experiences, and what you believe they say about you.

Your Self-Image Is a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Okay, now here's where it gets interesting. In the quote above, do you remember how it said "[...]all your actions, feelings, behavior, even your abilities, are always consistent with this self-image"? This is the key.

If you believe deep down that you are inferior, then you will behave in ways that communicate to people that you believe you are inferior. You will be much less confident around them, unable to hold eye contact or your voice will become quieter. Or you may just try too hard to seek their approval. When you act as though you are inferior, the other person sees this and has no choice but to believe you. If YOU think you are inferior, then you must be. After all, who knows you better than you know yourself? He will then treat you as if you are inferior to

him. When you see this you will gain further "evidence" of your inferiority. Your beliefs are a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Here's a specific example from the plastic surgeon from before:

> "A young girl who has an image of herself as the sort of person nobody likes will indeed find that she is avoided at the school dance. She literally invites rejection. Her woe-begone expression, her hang-dog manner, her over-anxiousness to please, or perhaps her unconscious hostility towards those she anticipates will affront her--all act to drive away those whom she would attract. Her actual experiences tend to 'prove' her self-image is correct."
>
> **- Maxwell Maltz, M.D., F.I.C.S.**

Your experiences tend to reflect your self-image back to you. Because of this objective "proof" it very seldom occurs to people that their trouble lies in their self-image or their own evaluation of themselves. Tell the girl at the dance that she only "thinks" she is unattractive and she will question your sanity. If boys do not ask her to dance, then she must be unattractive! The evidence proves it.

The Truth About Your "Secret Reason"

So what am I saying here? I am saying that whatever your "secret reason" is, it is bullshit! Your background, your looks, any physical "defects", your life situation, your upbringing -- all of these do not matter when it comes to achieving social success! They may have contributed to making you feel inferior or

inadequate up until now, but they do not have to control your future. <u>Any "secret reason" you have of why you can't be as outgoing and popular as other people must be dropped.</u>

It's not your looks themselves, but your thoughts about them that hold you back. I know this may sound hard to believe at first, but think about it: haven't you ever seen anyone with the exact same "problem" you have still be able to be confident and outgoing?

Maybe you feel insecure because you are overweight or unattractive -- there are plenty of people out there who are overweight and not good looking, yet they are still able to have self esteem that allows them to be confident and express themselves. They may be overweight, but they don't see themselves as inferior or a failure because of it.

Maybe you feel depressed and miserable because of your upbringing, your parents were never very social so you "learned it from them." Or maybe you remember some embarrassing event from your past that started your social anxiety.

> "Most people who fear rejection act as though they have some terrible secret that would mean instant loneliness if it were discovered."
>
> **- Jonathan Berent**

I'm not saying that these are all perfectly valid reasons for someone to develop social anxiety or an inferiority complex, but here's the cold, harsh truth:

Every single excuse ever made for why someone cannot have a social life and friends ... has been met and conquered by people with more flaws, less brainpower, less money, less skill and less resources than you. There are people out there who have the same source of inferiority or shame you do who are still socially successful in spite of it.

This doesn't mean you have to blame your social anxiety on yourself, but you do have to acknowledge the fact that you are able to respond once you decide to do something about it.

If you don't believe me, then go and watch this video:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8ZuKF3dxCY

It's a video about a guy who was born with no arms and no legs, yet he doesn't let that hold him back. Notice how he is still able to be confident and doesn't think he is inferior in any way?

> "Freedom is what you do with what's been done to you."
>
> **- Sartre**

The Comparison Trap

Maybe you have heard before how inferiority is the result of comparing yourself to others. If you compare yourself to others and come up short, then you feel a sense of shame about yourself. It's easy enough for others to tell you to "stop comparing yourself to others," but it's much more difficult to live that philosophy.

In the first place, you have been conditioned since childhood to achieve. The importance placed in modern society on proving one's worth, on material success, on status, on measurable achievement is acutely felt by children. To be loved, accepted, and valued, they must produce the desirable responses. People are recognized on the basis of what they have produced -- not on who they are.

You know there's a problem when the values of society put such an overemphasis on competition and individual achievement. I remember my parents would always treat me better if I brought home good grades and didn't get into trouble. This makes sense on the surface -- all parents want only the best for their kids. Unfortunately, they were inadvertently conditioning me to believe that performing well was the way to get love and approval. Maybe your parents liked you better when you performed well in sports, dance, school, work, or some other area. And when you didn't live up to their expectations you wouldn't get the same amount of approval.

This type of early childhood conditioning is what makes your self esteem an confidence bad to this day. You may have deep-seated beliefs that you are not a worthwhile person unless you achieve, unless you are the best, unless you live up to society's expectations when it comes to your social life, relationships, and

financial situation. When you equate what you do with who you are, you feel inferior or superior to others.

Beauty and Self Esteem

This is the second part of the comparison trap. In our culture, beauty is the considered the prime measurement of human worth. All you have to do is turn on the TV or walk down a magazine aisle to see it. People are being conditioned and brainwashed into believing that the more good looking someone is, the more valuable they are. This is crazy if you think about it, it's literally insane!

The vast majority of movies, advertisements, TV shows and magazines out there try to make you buy into their philosophy. The philosophy of "look like this or you're ugly. Buy our product to make yourself more valuable." You have to reject their message and not buy into it, because if you buy into the superficial values of the media, then you will never measure up. You could be a doctor who's saved thousands of lives, but you'll still feel inferior to someone who happened to be born good looking by accident!

Ask yourself: Do people really deserve to be valued and put on a pedestal based on their <u>luck</u> in getting the right genes? Am I thinking rationally when I am intimidated by someone like the woman on the right, or have I been conditioned by the media to value looks over virtually everything else?

Whether you feel inferior based on your looks, upbringing, race, or current level of success socially, financially or relationship-wise, all feelings of inferiority come down to the same thing. You judge and measure yourself, not by your own standard, but against someone else's. When you do this, you always come out inadequate.

> "Jealousy is comparison. And we have been taught to compare, we have been conditioned to compare, always compare. Somebody else has a better house, somebody else has a more beautiful body, somebody else has more money, somebody else has a more charismatic personality. Compare, go on comparing yourself with everybody else you pass by, and great jealousy will be the outcome; it is the by-product of the conditioning for comparison."
>
> **- Osho**

Striving For False Superiority

Okay, now that we have looked at why you feel inferior to some people, we are going to examine the other side of the issue. Looking at the two pictures above, you may have looked at the one on the right and said to yourself "Yeah, it's true, she's got nothing going for her. She only works at Hooters and has probably never even finished high school. I, on the other hand, am more intelligent, have a good job, etc..." If your thought process went something like this, then you are still falling into the comparison trap. Now, instead of settling for feeling inferior, you are try to come up with reasons in your mind why she is inferior to you, and why you are entitled to feel superior. This is still inferiority.

Let me ask you, when you see someone who is better than you at something, do you feel the need to pull them down from their podium by criticizing? Are you uncomfortable if someone younger than you is more

successful than you? Do you feel like you need to put down people you are threatened may be more attractive than you?

When someone thinks they are inherently inferior in some way, they will overcompensate. Belittle, put down, criticize someone they are jealous of, even if it is in their own head. It's a way of reducing the uncomfortable feelings caused by thoughts of inferiority. All it really does is reveal your own insecurities. The way to overcome feelings of inferiority is not by trying to come up with reasons why you are actually superior.

> "If you go on condemning, your condemnation shows that somewhere there is a wound, and you are feeling jealous — because without jealousy there can be no condemnation. You condemn people because somehow, somewhere, unconsciously you feel they are enjoying themselves and you have missed."
>
> **- Osho**

It is similar to when people try to use affirmations to improve themselves. In case you don't know, affirmations are positive statements that try to change the way people think. They usually involve the people saying to themselves "I am a valuable and important person" or "I am confident and strong." The problem with saying these statements is that they secretly reinforce the opposite of what you want. Why would you have to tell yourself constantly that you are valuable and important, unless you secretly believed you were really worthless and

unimportant? Numerous psychology studies support this -- that by trying to suppress or "override" certain thoughts, you just make them come up even more.

> "The irony of thought suppression, then, is that actively trying to manage our own minds can sometimes do more harm than good. Although it makes perfect intuitive sense to try and suppress unwanted thoughts, unfortunately the very process we use to do this contains the seeds of its own destruction. The more we try and push intrusive thoughts down, the more they pop back up, stronger than ever."
>
> **- Dan Wegner, Harvard Psychologist**

You Are Unique

So if trying to make yourself superior doesn't work, then what does? First you have to realize that inferiority and superiority are two sides of the same coin, and the solution is to realize that the coin itself is false.

The truth about you is this:

You are not "inferior."

You are not "superior."

You are simply "You."

"You" as a person are not in a competition against anyone else, simply because there isn't a single other person in the universe the same as you. Your

value comes from your uniqueness as an individual. Stop measuring yourself against "their" standards. You are not "them" and can never measure up. Neither can "they" measure up to yours -- nor should they. Once you accept and believe this simple, rather self-evident truth, your feelings of inferiority will disappear.

> "Imagine you are passing through a garden and you come across a very big tree. If you start comparing, then the tree is so big, and suddenly you are so small. If you don't compare, you enjoy the tree, there is no problem at all. The tree is big -- so what! So let it be big, you are not a tree. There are also other bushes around which are not as big as the tree, but they are not suffering from an inferiority complex. I have never come across a plant or animal which suffers from an inferiority complex or from a superiority complex. Even the highest tree does not have a superiority complex, because comparison does not exist in nature, everything is unique."
>
> **- Osho**

On "Real" Inferiority

Sometimes I get people who tell me "But it's not just in my head, I really am inferior to other people." -- Really?

Just because you can't do something as well as someone else does not make you an inferior person. Let me put it this way -- I know for a fact that I am an inferior boxer to Muhammed Ali, I am an inferior actor to Clint Eastwood, I am

inferior in some specific area to almost every person I meet. But it does not make me feel inferior to them. Similarly, I am probably superior in several ways to all of the people I meet on a daily basis, but that does not make them feel inferior to me.

I know I am inferior to almost everyone in some way or another for a fact, but this does not induce feelings of inferiority within me and make me feel depressed -- simply because I do not compare myself unfavorably with them, and feel that I am no good just because I can't do certain things as skillfully or as well as they.

Just because you are inferior in doing something, does not make you an inferior person. It comes down to a core belief that you are not ratable. Your actions can be good or bad, but not you. You can condemn and think low of acts, but not any human beings for any reason whatsoever.

For example, say you make a presentation in front of a group and do poorly. In this case, your performance was bad, but does that mean you are a bad or inferior person? No, it doesn't. It is essential to rate your performance in order to correct it, but do not rate yourself based on your performance.

The Approval and Inferiority Contradiction

Do you remember back to the beginning of this book when I told you that social anxiety was rooted in a fear of disapproval? Yes?

You are socially anxious because deep in your mind you have a core belief that says: "I must be loved. I must be approved of." When you are in social situations, you are constantly trying to make sure people do not disapprove of you.

You act in the ways that you hope will get you acceptance from the majority of people. If you stay quiet, then there's very little risk that you're going to offend anyone. You only feel free to express yourself or "open up" when there is no chance that the other person will reject you -- a family member or close friend.

Okay, now let's bring in your "secret reason." You think some part of you is inferior in some way. Are you starting to see the contradiction here? You <u>need</u> and <u>demand</u> approval, while at the same time feeling it is <u>impossible</u> for other people to approve of the "real" you because of some defect.

Needing Some Result To Happen Causes Anxiety

Let's explore this concept further...

<u>You are only anxious when you need something from someone.</u> It could be approval, social status, or a job. You are anxious in situations when you think the consequences of your behaviour is very important and you NEED a situation to result in a certain outcome.

I'll give you a few examples of what I mean.

Why are you more anxious when talking to someone popular than someone who is unpopular? Because you see the popular person as a potential doorway to friendships and relationships. They have more to offer you than the unpopular person, so you place more importance on how they perceive you.

Another common example of this is the job interview. Even some people who usually have zero inhibition get anxious and nervous before a job interview. Why is this? They get anxious because they want something from the interviewer (the job), so they are more concerned about how the interviewer perceives them.

How about public speaking? If you are just talking to one person, then you may be able to talk fine. But in front of many people, you can't seem to be able to talk nearly as well. This is because you feel a pressure from the combined influence of all the people. If one person doesn't approve of you, then it may be no big deal ... but if everyone in your class or work suddenly decide they don't like you, then it could mean major consequences.

Okay, one last example. Do you get anxious talking to someone you find attractive? Part of that is because you want something from them. You want them to like you, and part of you probably thinks if they were your boy/girlfriend other people would see you as higher status and not just brush you off.

So a huge factor in anxiety is the fact that anxiety is triggered if you want something from someone. You want them to react to you in a certain way. You think the potential consequences of your performance will make a big difference.

Unconditional Self Acceptance

Living Up To Other People's Standards

If I was going to summarize the basic insecurity problems of people with social anxiety, it would be this: **Most people with social anxiety are constantly trying to live up to other people's standards.** They are constantly worried about if their appearance will appeal to others and whenever they do or say anything, they look to see how other people reacted to decide if it was good or not. If other people react well, they feel pride. If other people appear to disapprove, they feel shame.

By the way, I am not talking in abstractions here. This "looking for the reaction" is an actual physical behaviour in the real world. You can witness it yourself. Next time you see someone shy in a group conversation, look carefully at what they do after they say something. 9 times out of 10, their eyes will dart quickly to the person or people who are the highest social value. It's because they are looking for their approval. Meanwhile, the people who are self-confident will not look for reactions after they talk. Seriously, once you see this happening in the real world, you won't believe your eyes. *(Sidenote: Try to cut out your own behaviours of looking for a reaction. Next time you talk in a group, make yourself keep eye contact with whoever you were talking to or look away instead of looking at the person you feel the urge to look at.)*

A Band-Aid Solution

Okay, back to so if the main issue of inferiority. You feel inferior because you are constantly trying to live up to others people's standards so they accept you.

So how do most people try to get rid of their inferiority? Well, one way is to start trying to fix yourself to make yourself more acceptable to people.

If you have crooked teeth, you may get them fixed. If you are overweight, you go on a diet. If you are ugly, you get plastic surgery. Whatever you think is a barrier to other people's approval, you try to get rid of.

This is not a great solution to the problem. You haven't really fixed your self esteem -- you are still completely dependent on getting other people's approval in order to feel good about yourself. If other people still have total control over how you feel about yourself, then you haven't really fixed anything. You have a temporary fix of confidence, not real self esteem.

If you remember, I talked before about how there was a fascinating book written by a plastic surgeon named Maxwell Maltz called "Psycho-Cybernetics." The book is full of stories of people trying to get rid of their "defects" and inferiority through plastic surgery. Some succeeded in changing their inner

feelings about themselves by changing their outer appearance, but many did not.

The problem with "getting rid of" a perceived inadequacy is that you are not fixing the real flaw -- which is in the way you think! If you feel like a loser because you are overweight, and you become skinny, then there is always the threat of you sinking back down

to being a worthless loser as soon as you gain a few pounds! As soon as you stop meeting the standards, you immediately turn into a worthless loser in your own mind.

Another common pitfall many people with low self esteem fall into is to rate themselves based on how well they perform in something. You tie up your self esteem in how well you do in school, how well you play a certain sport, how popular you are, how many friends you have, how confident you appear, and so on. If you feel inadequate for these types of reasons, then you are trying to make your behaviour, instead of your appearance, live up to other people's standards. The "quick fix" for this is to try to perform perfectly. Try to appear flawless to everyone outside of you.

Many shy and socially anxious people make the mistake of thinking that if they had just been born looking like a model, then they wouldn't be shy and insecure. This is a huge misconception. <u>People who are confident aren't confident because they have no flaws.</u> They are confident in spite of their flaws. In fact, their flaws just make them more unique and interesting. Think about the most confident people you have witnessed in real life and think about the major flaws many of them had. They may have flaws that you yourself would be ashamed of, but they didn't see them as an issue. <u>They do not feel they needed to be perfectly acceptable to people to feel okay. They do not need to live up to other people's standards in order to be able to accept themselves.</u>

Avoiding failure, dodging criticism, or attempting to have all your humanly characteristics as being better than average -- all of these are bandaid solutions to the larger problem. None of these solutions is going to work for long. So what is the alternative?

The Alternative: Unconditional Self Acceptance

I want to teach you a new way to look at self esteem. Really, a much better word for self esteem is UNCONDITIONAL SELF ACCEPTANCE. When you accept yourself, you feel okay to be confident and outgoing. You feel comfortable to be confident and expressive instead of anxious and insecure.

Next time you are in a social situation, look at how the difference between how cool and popular people act and unpopular people do. What is the main difference between them? The popular people accept themselves, and think highly enough of themselves to talk freely and say what they want to say. The people who are not confident are on edge because, at any second, their acceptance of themselves can drop based on if other people's acceptance of them drops.

From now on, you need to actively shape your thinking from conditional self acceptance, to unconditional self acceptance. Instead of needing other people to love and approve of you, you accept and feel good about yourself for no logical reason whatsoever.

Here are some examples of behaviours that come from needing to meet other people's standard to get them to approve of you:

•**Insecurities:** If you are concerned about any "defect" you have, and constantly check how it looks in mirrors, and measure it somehow constantly, then you are worrying that the defect makes you unworthy of their approval.

•**Self-Consciousness:** If you can walk and move normally when alone in your house, but then feel tense and self-conscious in social situations, it's because you are super aware of how other people are seeing you. Instead of

letting your legs and body move themselves like you usually do, you are trying to monitor what other people will think of your actions and you try to adjust them manually. (By the way, many psychologists think self-consciousness is a misleading name, they prefer to call it "other-consciousness" -- being overly conscious about how you look from other people's perspectives.

•**Conversations:** If you can't think of what to say when around cool people, but you can speak perfectly fine to close family members, it's because you are trying to get them to accept you. You don't feel comfortable talking freely like you do around the close family member because you are worried that, if you say the wrong thing, they will stop accepting you. So instead of risking disapproval, you weigh every word carefully for its effect to try to control how people will respond to you. *(I'll go into this further in the next chapter...)*

What is the common denominator behind all of these behaviours? Trying to get other people to love and approve of you by trying to live up to what you think their standards are. You only do this because your own acceptance of yourself hinges on other people's acceptance of you. You accept and feel pride about yourself only if other people love and approve of you. Otherwise, you feel shame.

If you think the past few paragraphs apply to you, that means you have conditional self acceptance: you accept yourself only if you meet certain conditions, like being good looking, being popular, having a boy/girlfriend, having other people like you, and so on. Conditional self acceptance is what ALL people with social anxiety have. So what is the solution? Unconditional self acceptance. In other words, you accept yourself no matter what.

How do you Develop Unconditional Self Acceptance?

1. **Whenever you feel anxious, you need to trace to the root of it and find out how it relates to fear of disapproval.** Anxiety is usually caused by you commanding yourself that you must do well. When anxious, look for the should/must. Are your actions a result of thinking that "you must be loved/accepted/approved of?"

2. **Actively work on implementing a mindset of unconditional self acceptance on a minute-to-minute basis.** Think about it: If you didn't rely on other people to determine your own acceptance and worth, then you would have none of the problems I listed above. It's not going to happen overnight, but your thinking will slowly change over time as long as you keep exposing yourself to anxiety provoking situations and realizing when your behaviours are driven by approval-seeking.

3. **From now on, do not rate yourself in any way, shape or form.** If you do badly on a test or lose your job, it does not mean you are an inferior person. Your worth as a person does not change depending on how well you do and what other people think of you.

4. **You must develop a core belief that <u>you</u> are not rate-able.** Your actions can be good or bad, but not you. You just exist. So if you get a bad mark on a test or lose your job, it may mean your actions weren't the right ones, but it says nothing about you. It's essential to rate your performance in order to correct it, but don't rate yourself based on your performance.

5. **What goes for you also goes for other people.** Do not rate them. You can condemn acts, but not any human beings for any reason whatsoever. If

somebody steals money from you, then their actions were bad, but it does not mean they are an inherently bad or inferior person.

6. **You can't give up shame without giving up pride.** They are two sides of the same coin. You can't stop condemning yourself for doing poorly until you stop making yourself feel somehow superior to others when you do well. Whenever you are thinking of some logical reason why you should feel confident, let it go. The fact that you are more educated, smarter, or more mature than someone does not make you superior to them. The fact that you may have more money or possessions or "more going for you" does not make you superior to anyone. You need to quit the habit of trying to logically convince yourself why you should feel confident. There are no "reasons" to feel confident, because your acceptance of yourself is now unconditional.

For each person building self esteem based on an accomplishment, an ability, physical appearance, and so on, they feel good about themselves for as long as their skills, abilities, and accomplishments remain intact. Yet when their skills, relationships, accomplishments and so on change, they lose themselves in the process. Is this self-worth? No, it's "things' worth," not self-worth.

> "[...] Give up all your ideas about self esteem, stick only to those of unconditional acceptance, and choose to accept your self, your existence, your humanity whether or not you perform well, whether or not you are loved by significant others, and whether or not you suffer from school, work, sports, or other handicaps."
>
> **-Albert Ellis, Ph.D.**

Implement this mindset in everything you do. The fact that sometimes you get approval and sometimes disapproval from other people says nothing about you. It's useful feedback, but the idea in your mind that you must/should/ought constantly meet other's standards to get approval and positive reactions or else feel hopelessly inadequate is completely false.

How do you prove to yourself it is false? Ask yourself: "Why the hell do I have to meet other people's standards and get them to approve of me?" Ask it 3000 times until you consistently get the answer:

"I don't have to be anything." That's a good start.

Questions

There are two main questions I get when I teach unconditional self acceptance. They usually goes something like this: "If I don't care at all if other people accept me, then won't I just sit at home all day anyway? Won't I lose all motivation to become more social?" and the second one is, "If I don't care about if other people accept my appearance, or behaviour, then won't I start being rude

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and abrasive? Couldn't I start punching people if they made me mad and saying things that could lose me my job?"

In other words, if you stop doing things for the need for approval, because you must prove yourself, then why not sit around all day and be completely repulsive to other people?

Here's the answer to these questions:

You may not NEED other's acceptance in order to accept yourself, but there are still things which you'd <u>PREFER</u> to have, like friends. Friends are more enjoyable than no friends, so it's perfectly normal to be motivated to improve your social life because of the pleasure of connection and company.

In the same way, the reason why you shouldn't be completely repulsive to people is not because you fear their disapproval, but <u>because it is advantageous</u> to you. If you prefer to have a job, then it is advantageous to not repulse your boss. But never forget that this is not something that you <u>have</u> to do, only something you <u>choose</u> to do because you enjoy the benefits.

Desire/wish/preference for approval is good, even human. As long as you don't say you MUST MUST MUST have it. Why? Lot of the time you won't get what you want, and even if you do, who's to say you'll still have it tomorrow?

It's okay to feel appropriately sorry and sad if you some of your basic human needs aren't being met. If you mess up on a public speech it's normal to feel sad that your performance is bad. The issue is when you feel inappropriately horrified and ashamed of yourself for it.

So although you don't NEED to do anything, <u>there are certain things you'd LIKE to do</u>, and they're no longer driven by a clinging desperateness for people's approval, but from a pure desire to enjoy yourself and have a better existence.

Your new outlook on life is: "I don't need anything. I just exist. Now what the hell do I do to enjoy myself?" This is a much better type of motivation than the kind that depends on temporarily filling your addiction to approval.

So instead of feeling ashamed of yourself if you aren't doing as well as you'd like to in some area, say "Ah, such-and-such is a pain in the ass. I wish it weren't so, now what do I do to either change it or live with it?" This applies to lack of friends, lack of a social life, lack of romantic relationships, lack of success, any insecurities about your physical appearance you may have, and your current level of social skills. You no longer NEED them to be different in order to accept yourself, but you may wish to improve them.

You may wish to improve them in order to increase <u>your own quality of life</u>, not because improving them may make you more worthy of other people's acceptance and approval.

Cutting Yourself Free From Other People

One of the biggest issues I see with people who have shyness and social anxiety is that they are very dependent on other people's validation and approval. They rely on other people's acceptance.

If someone has the ability to make you feel worthless simply by giving you disapproval, then they have all power and control over you. You have given your power away by requiring their validation.

What I'm teaching you to do here is to cut yourself free from this dependence. I'm not saying to distance yourself from other people, but to become independent. People, in fact, like people better who are not needy for their validation or approval. It makes an equal relationship and connection possible. So how do you do this?

Value your own opinion of yourself over other people's opinion of you. Just because someone doesn't like you does not mean you are unlikable. If someone does not value you as much as other people, it should not affect how much you value yourself.

If someone teases you, do you feel affected? If someone criticizes you, do you feel the need to keep talking and convincing other people you are not what they said you were? It simply shows you care about their opinions too much. Instead, you want to remain unaffected by people's negative reactions. You want to get to a point where you are much less dependent on other people's reactions for you to feel okay about yourself as a person. You want to start having more control over your own emotions and increase your indifference to what people think of you.

Unfortunately, as great as this sounds, there is no magic technique to achieve it. It happens over time, as you gain more experiences and start to live the concepts I have laid out here for you.

From Self-Consciousness To Spontaneity

Many people with shyness or social anxiety are constantly stuck inside their heads. They are caught up in their thoughts. They are worrying about how other people perceive them. They are thinking about what might happen in the future or they are reliving past events. This constant thought and inner analysis is one of your biggest obstacles in overcoming SA. Let me show you the way out.

Why You Don't Know What To Do

Imagine you're back in high school. The teacher you hate most has just asked you a question. Typical of her to pick the only one you don't know the answer to.

Suddenly, your mind goes blank.

What do you do? You desperately try to think of something to say, and an awkward silence falls across the class. They're all looking at you. Everybody's watching.

Suddenly you're not sure where you should put your hands. You move them awkwardly to the back edge of your desk, and you feel how cold and sweaty they are. But there's no time to worry about that. You have to say something, anything. Quick!

You blurt out an answer. Why does your voice sound so weird? Everyone keeps looking at you for some reason. Now your voice sounds a little better. You wish the teacher would move on with the other people in the class...

What Did You Do Wrong?

Maybe that situation has happened to you before. Maybe it's happened to you many times. Or maybe some other, similar situation has happened. It's happened to me, and it happens to most people who are shy, for a reason.

The reason is shy people tend be <u>preoccupied about what other people think of them</u>. In the classroom, you were very aware that everyone was watching you. You didn't want to mess up.

You didn't want other people to get the wrong impression of you, so you had to think carefully about what you were going to say or do next. Unfortunately, your plan backfired horribly.

You Fell Into A Trap

It's a trap many people with SA get caught up in: they try to micro-manage and control what other people think of them. They constantly think about little things that are unimportant.

For example: Is what you say next going to be liked? Are your clothes representative of your personality? Will the way you walk give off the right vibe? What's the right body language? Will doing this or that make you seem less smart? Do people secretly respect the way you are?

This is the process shy people go through before they say or do something:

1. "What should I say next?"

2. "Will it sound good?"

3. "What's the best way to say it?"

4. ...and only then do they actually say it.

This type of thinking is called **Self-Monitoring**, and it's bad for several reasons:

1. You Hesitate

Instead of just letting go and expressing yourself, you think and think and think. And when you finally do something, it feels unnatural. It's not fun for you and it's not fun for other people. The more you hesitate before doing something, the more contrived and phony it will seem when you finally do.

For example, if you think of something to say, and them wonder if you should say it, you get nervous. It stops becoming something that just popped into your head and becomes YOUR own idea. You put more and more importance on how people will react to it the longer you wait. When you finally do say it, you're nervous. You spend too much time and attention controlling how your act, and it comes out unnatural.

2. You Seem Out Of Focus

When you Self-Monitor, you seem out of focus. Like you're actually 10 seconds in the past or 10 seconds in the future, instead of being in the NOW and enjoying it.

Only shy people and those who are extremely self-conscious monitor what they do. Normal people don't. What normal people do, is not think at all before they act. They don't think about what they're going to say next. They get a general feeling of what they want to communicate, and they say it.

Often when I tell this to people with SA, they feel confused. If they don't know what they are going to do before they do it, then couldn't they start spewing nonsense and repelling everyone? And is it really a good idea to become one of those loud, obnoxious people who say everything without thinking first?

Once you learn how to stop self-monitoring, I guarantee you'll change your mind. You'll find that letting go of needing to tightly control everything you communicate will actually make you communicate better. It will be like you've been driving your whole life with brakes on socially, and just now you discovered how to release your brakes.

Think back to one of your best experiences socially. Chances are, it felt like the right words were somehow coming out of your mouth automatically. You weren't stuck in your head, trying to come up with something to say. It was all flowing, and you felt in the moment and connected to the other person. Best of all, you were having fun.

3. You Seem Inauthentic

Oh, the irony. You want people to like you and think you're a swell guy or girl, but they don't. They think you're inauthentic.

When you think about everything you say and do, it doesn't come from you directly. It's been filtered by your brain, and people can feel it. They can sense the slight off-ness when you've been thinking of a remark for a minute. They don't feel the same energy coming from you as from a person who comes up with something to say on the spot, and that lack of energy turns them off.

Basically, any time you are trying to create some sort of impression on people, you are sabotaging yourself. Only someone needy and desperate for

approval would be trying so hard to make others perceive him well. On the other hand, if you don't really care about the particular impression you make on someone, it shows that you are secure in yourself because you don't require other people to approve of you.

Self-Monitoring Causes Self-Consciousness and Inhibition

Let's think about what self-monitoring actually is. This will help you figure out a way to stop it. <u>Self-monitoring when you're trying to consciously control actions and behaviours that are normally unconscious.</u> What does that mean?

Most of the time your breathing is an unconscious behaviour. You are not conscious of it because your body takes care of it without you having to do anything about it. But if you started to make yourself breathe differently, you have now made breathing into a conscious behaviour. Now you have your focus on it. It's like the difference between letting an airplane run on autopilot versus taking control of it using the steering wheel.

So the point is, you self-monitor when try to take control of behaviours that should happen on their own because you are afraid of the impression you're making.

Do you control how you move your mouth when you talk? Do you consciously control how you're breathing? Do you think about how your arms and legs move as you walk or sit down? Do you worry about what position your arms are in? Maybe you aren't doing it now, but <u>in tough social situations you do it.</u>

I often get people who ask me things like "How can I walk/speak more naturally?" The problem is, they are usually looking for some tip they can use to force their walk to be more natural. What they don't realize is that <u>the fact they</u>

are even thinking about this is what's causing the problem to begin with! Most actions that relate to socializing should come naturally, not by conscious effort.

Your eventual goal should be to socialize naturally, that means without thinking. Just like you can ride a bike without thinking. What gets in your way is self-monitoring and overly controlling your actions. This is what causes you to act self-conscious and inhibited. So don't consciously force your mouth to move when you're talking. Don't try to make your arms to move a certain way when you're walking. Let go control and allow them to do what they may. Here's how...

How To Stop Self-Monitoring

1. First you have to **realize when you are self-monitoring**. You have to "catch yourself in the act." This can be hard at first. When you realize you are self-monitoring, you then have to...

2. **Switch your focus.** Your attention never stops. It can't be shut off or lowered, only directed. One of the most important things you can do to overcome your SA is to focus your attention in a way that will serve you instead of holding you back.

In a social situation, if you think about all the things you are doing wrong, and are focused on not embarrassing yourself, you will end up "playing it safe." You might say as little as possible and when you do speak, you'll be self- conscious and it'll come across weird. But if your focus is on getting to know others and sharing laughs with them, you will fit right in and people will accept you into the group. If you are totally immersed in a conversation so that all you are thinking about is what is being discussed, then the words will come automatically and spontaneously. Again, this is a simple shift of focus.

If you are just walking by yourself and feeling self-conscious, you can still switch your focus to something else. Think about being on the beach. Count to one hundred. Observe and become fascinated in the environment around you. Think of something that will take you mind completely off what you're doing physically.

3. **<u>Stop talking to yourself.</u>** If you're constantly doing this in your head, stop. Shy people often talk to themselves to avoid talking to other people. Switch your focus using the technique I just showed you. When you quiet your mind and put your focus on the situation in front of you, you will find yourself becoming much more likely to say something.

4. **<u>Don't think before you act.</u>** Don't wonder in advance of what you are "going to say." The worst thing is when you rehearse what you are going to say in your head before you say it. Very social people just get a general gut-feeling of wanting to say something, and they open their mouths and say it. Don't plan - act first, then correct your actions as you go along.

5. **<u>Don't hesitate.</u>** When a thought pops into your head, express it within 2 seconds. The longer you wait the worse your fear of expressing it badly becomes. You build it up too much in your mind. The solution is to downplay. You could be in a war zone right now. Instead, you're just talking to someone. Being spontaneous is a muscle, the more you use it the easier it becomes to rely on it.

6. **<u>Don't criticize your actions.</u>** After you do something, do not analyze how well it went. Here's how a typical inhibited person acts: after he has gotten up enough courage to say something, he immediately says to himself, "Maybe I shouldn't have said that. Maybe the other person will take it the

wrong way." Stop being so self-critical. Your criticism is unnecessary because when you make a mistake in a social situation, your mind learns the lesson and automatically adjusts your future behaviour.

It's the same as learning to ride a bicycle. If you fall, your brain gets feedback from the experience. Over time, you learn how to keep your balance and not make the same mistakes again. Learning social skills works the same way. You may start out awkward and weird, but your brain continually learns from your experiences and improves your behaviour automatically based on the feedback you get from interacting with other people. So stop tearing yourself apart. Useful and beneficial feedback works subconsciously, spontaneously, and automatically. Constantly second-guessing yourself on a daily basis is defeating.

"But What If I Say Something Embarrassing?"

If you don't run through whatever you're going to say in your head, how do you know what you're actually going to say?

You don't. You just have to trust that over many years of conversation and hearing other people talk, you have enough knowledge to be able to come up with what to say automatically. This takes a leap of faith at the beginning.

You've been thinking about what to say for so long, that just talking without a filter will seem unnatural at first. Trust me, it's much easier and it's how most people actually talk.

"Isn't Some Inhibition Good?"

One common piece of feedback I receive when I teach this to people is they'll say to me: "But isn't being totally uninhibited bad? I mean, if I completely didn't care what people thought, then I might go around insulting and offending everyone and then nobody would like me. Doesn't the world need a certain amount of inhibition, otherwise we would live like savages and civilized society would collapse. If we express ourselves without any restraint, freely expressing our feelings, we would go around fighting with everyone who disagreed with us."

How do I respond to this? Yes, the world does need a certain amount of inhibition. But not you. The key words are "a certain amount." You have such an excessive amount of inhibition, you are like someone with a fever telling me that some temperature is necessary for people to stay alive. If you have a fever, the best thing to do is to focus completely on reducing your temperature. Don't worry about your temperature being too low, that's not your issue right now.

Yes, there are some people who could benefit from being more inhibited. But if you are reading this book, that's not you. You need to focus on disinhibiting yourself. The "cure" to inhibition and self-monitoring is in taking a long step in the opposite direction. By focusing solely on disinhibiting yourself and not caring at all what other people think of you, you are working against your normal habit of inhibition, and what winds up happening is that you wind up somewhere in the middle.

It's really not possible to totally not care what other people think of you. You will always care no matter what, it's built into your psychology. So do not worry at all about being "too uninhibited", only focus on practicing being less careful, less concerned, and less conscientious of your actions.

It's like a basketball player practicing jumping. His coach tells him to "jump and touch the sky." Of course, he will never reach it, but by focusing on trying to do it, he will jump a lot higher than if his goal was just to get 3 feet off the ground.

From Impression-Making to Authenticity

There's one last idea I want to touch on. I've been hinting at it throughout this entire section. The idea is that spontaneity allows you to express yourself much more authentically.

Like we said above, self-monitoring stems from inferiority. You don't think that people would accept you for who you truly are so you feel the need to alter people's impression of you.

> "It is unlikely that a socially anxious person will take the perceived risk of sharing intimate thoughts or feelings, for fear that the acquaintance would find 'the truth' horrifying or even merely unattractive or unacceptable. Most people who fear rejection act as though they have some terrible secret that would mean instant loneliness if it were discovered."
>
> **- Jonathan Berent**

Becoming authentic means removing the gap between the persona you try to put out to the world and your real "core" personality. It means letting go of needing to make any sort of impression on the people you interact with and just expressing your real personality freely.

Ironically, the best way to make people like you is not to try to make them like you. The best way to make people like you is to express your personality freely without worrying about possible disapproval. The way to make a good impression is to never consciously try to make a good impression. Express yourself freely and let whatever happens, happen. Leave it up to fate, but do not try to control other people's reactions to you by changing your behaviour. Never "wonder" consciously what the other person is thinking of you, or how he is judging you.

Connecting To Your "Natural" Personality

What I am trying to get you to do here is to get in touch with the way you naturally act when you don't feel the pressure of other people's eyes on you.

Do you ever notice how at home you walk completely relaxed and normal, yet become self conscious in public? Or maybe you have one or two people who you can "be yourself" around, but when you try to talk to other people you don't know what to say and become inhibited?

Many people who I teach often assume that they need to learn some new social skills to improve their personality. This isn't true at all in most cases. Most

of the time, it's not a question of adding anything to your personality, but removing the barriers which hold you back. Your fears, self-consciousness, and inhibition. Once these are removed in a given situation, you'll find that expressing yourself is both simple and enjoyable, and it requires almost no thought.

Believing In What You Say

A HUGE barrier in becoming this sort of authentic person is making the jump from someone who closely monitors what they say and to someone who is spontaneous. What stops you from just saying whatever? Often times it is an issue of how underlined entitled you feel to speak your mind around the people you are with.

> We can become overly sensitive and become too carefully concerned with whether we 'have a right' to succeed in even a worthwhile endeavor, about whether or not 'I deserve this.' Many people, inhibited by the wrong kind of conscience, 'hold back,' or 'take a back seat' in any kind of endeavor, even in church activities. They secretly feel it would not be 'right' for them to 'hold themselves out' as a leader, or 'presume to be somebody,' or they are overly concerned with whether other people might think they were 'showing off."
>
> **- Maxwell Maltz, M.D, F.I.C.S**

There's a filter in your mind between what you think and what you say. The more you can remove that filter, the more spontaneous what you say will

become. <u>The more you hesitate and think about doing something, the more unnatural, contrived and phony it will seem when you finally do.</u>

What you say doesn't have to be that interesting, either. Instead of trying to say the right thing all the time, start to lower the bar on what you allow yourself to say. What you say does not have to be funny or interesting all of the time. In fact, it usually just exposes the fact that you think you have to entertain people for them to want to be around you.

Once you start to value yourself more as a person and build your own self esteem, this will become much easier. You'll start to truly believe that people can like you just for you, instead of always needing to make some funny comment to keep their love and attention.

If you are ever wondering "What's the right thing to say in this situation?", STOP. Start to install the belief that what you say is the right thing to say, not because it's a great comment, but because it comes from you. Don't be afraid to say things that are boring or obvious. People are perfectly satisfied talking to another, regular, normal person.

Mindfulness and Being Present

In this chapter I'm going to share with you a few of the biggest practices that helped me to overcome social anxiety. I'm going to teach you techniques that will allow you to quiet your anxious thoughts, naturally put you into a state of relaxation instead of tension, and allow you to be completely "in the now" and present.

Some of these ideas are central teachings of buddhism and zen. Others are adapted from various mindfulness-based therapy programs. Combined, they form a powerful set of techniques to help you with overcoming social anxiety.

I'm going to start with explaining how Mindfulness works...

Swimming In Our Thoughts

Most people are like fish swimming in their thoughts. When fish swim, they don't know they are underwater, they just swim.

Thinking is the same for most people. Our thoughts are like the water. We are so immersed in our thoughts most of the time that we hardly realize they are there.

Although we are thinking all the time, we almost never consciously notice we are thinking.

Thinking becomes a process we do unconsciously and automatically. We pay no attention it. Do you have to think about blinking or breathing most of the time? Because most people think unconsciously and automatically, they become incredibly wrapped up in the contents of their thoughts. They are so identified with their thoughts that their mind becomes like a hard shell.

Mindfulness is about putting attention onto your thoughts. By doing so, you are able to gain an awareness and perspective you didn't have before.

Suddenly, you aren't swimming in your thoughts anymore. You have jumped out of the fishbowl and are able to observe your thoughts swimming around inside the fishbowl.

"What's The Point?"

If you are wondering what benefits mindfulness will have for your anxiety, then I'll tell you.

First of all, mindfulness is incredibly helpful for those with anxiety because it is the first step to changing your anxious thoughts. You are able to observe your anxious thoughts from the outside instead of being INSIDE your anxious thoughts and looking at the world through the lens of your anxious thoughts.

Secondly, mindfulness is the stepping stone to learning how to be present in the moment instead of constantly thinking about the past, future and living out fantasies in your head. If people have ever told you that you zone out or daydream often, then you need to learn how to live more in the present.

How To Become Present

So how to become mindful? The technique is deceptively simple, but not easy. **All you do is observe your thought process without interfering with it, judging what you observe, or commenting on it.** Just allow your mind to chatter on about whatever it likes, and your only goal is to remain a detached observer or witness.

What you'll find is that at first it'll be hard to remain detached. You'll forget about only observing and get involved with your thoughts automatically. When this happens, just go back to witnessing and being aware of your thoughts without involving yourself in them.

The process of mindfulness is simple to write down, but not easy to practice. It takes time to rewire habitual patterns, especially compulsive thinking. But as long as you get the basic concept of detached observation of your thought processes, then you should be able to get better at it with practice.

If you do it right, you'll find that you have started to create a gap between you and your thoughts. You are no longer as identified and immersed with your thoughts as you were before. You can now see the water you've been swimming in all your life. It's a shift towards looking at your thoughts, instead of looking at the world through your thoughts.

Deepening this gap between your thoughts and you as the observer of them is at the core of mindfulness and it is what will make you present instead of caught up in your thinking.

Living "Moment-to-Moment"

If "being present" is a hard idea to grasp, then think of this as learning how to live moment-to-moment. You are training yourself to keep your attention away from constantly thinking about what might happen in the future or what happened in the past. Living moment-to-moment means to have the majority of your attention always focused on the moment and situation you are in, without thinking. It means being focused on the reality of what is happening right now, instead of the illusion of your thoughts.

Why do I called you thoughts illusions? Because the future in your mind is not real. It is just a collection of thoughts. These thoughts can cause anxiety and fear if you imagine something bad happening in the future, or hope if you imagine something good happening. Either way, the future you imagine is not real, because it is only happening in your head.

Your thoughts about the past are also not real. When you think about your past, you are reliving something that happened before. It may be true that you are thinking about a real event that happened, but the point is actual event is not happening right now. If you are constantly focusing on things that happened 10 years, 10 months, 10 minutes or even 10 seconds ago, then you are not able to focus on the only place where your actions can make a difference, which is the present.

You can't affect the past or the future. I remember when I was learning to play a new instrument a friend said: "If you mess up or play the wrong note, forget about it! It's done man, you can't go back to that. The river keeps flowing. Stay in the present!"

This is exactly the mindset you must be in when you are talking to someone or a group of people. If you mess up, don't think about it! Bring your attention back to what is happening right now, not what happened a couple minutes ago. Plenty of people say dumb things occasionally, but it doesn't matter to them because they don't dwell on it and just stay in the conversation.

If you are thinking of something that may happen in the future, like what you're gonna say, then stop that as well. It kills your spontaneity and delivery. Don't pre-plan what you are going to say. You have to start trusting that what you are going to say will come to you naturally when, and only when, you need it. All you need to do is to keep your focus in the present moment as it unfolds.

How do you do this? Practice mindfulness as I explained above. Practice being very alert and aware, but not thinking. Observe your thoughts instead of being controlled by them. Widen the gaps between your thoughts. This is the way to become incredibly responsive in social situations.

How Presence Reduces Anxiety

The greatest benefit to learning how to be present for people with social anxiety is being able to become present whenever you are feeling anxious. All of the techniques I talked about for reducing anxiety -- diaphragmatic breathing, muscle relaxation and acceptance, are supercharged if you can combine them with being present.

When you become present, your anxious thoughts simply stop. Worry and anxiety are both caused by anticipating something bad is going to happen. They are caused by thinking about some situation in the future and projecting a bad outcome. When you are present you don't have these thoughts because the

totality of your focus is now centered on the moment in front of you. In this state, it becomes a lot easier to face your fears. You may still have some anxious feelings running through your body, but you don't have to fight the anxious thoughts that usually sabotage you.

Presence Is Not Thought Suppression

One of the comments I often get when I teach this is: "So you're basically saying to suppress my anxious thoughts?" The answer is no. Thought suppression is not something I teach.

In order to stop thinking and become present, you should not try to suppress or fight your thoughts. In fact, you should do quite the opposite. Allow your thoughts to wander wherever they like. All you must do is become the observer of your thoughts. Watch your train of thoughts as it passes by, but do not try to stop, control, judge or interpret them in any way whatsoever. Simply observe.

This practice of observing your thoughts in a detached manner will naturally lead to gaps in between your thoughts. The gaps will happen naturally, do not try to force them. Just pay attention.

Here's your homework assignment: Follow the instructions on mindfulness and being present in this chapter. Sit down for 20 minutes a day across from a blank wall, set up a timer so you do not constantly need to check the time, and observe your stream of thoughts. Review this chapter regularly to make sure you are practicing correctly. Once you get the hang of being present by yourself, start to become more and more present in every area of your life. Learn to do it when you are hesitant about facing an anxiety-provoking situation.

I hope you understand what I have told you here because it really changed my life. And you "understand" it by doing it. Once you become present, then anxiety will have lost most of its control over you. You may still feel it, but you will be much more free to take the steps needed to get rid of it. If you need more resources on this, the best book I have found is "The Power of Now" by Eckhart Tolle, or you can look up other resources on zazen meditation.

A Life Of Your Own Design

In this chapter I'm going to cover some loose bits and pieces that I didn't think fit into any other chapter, but still really shifted the way I think and helped me to overcome my own shyness and social anxiety.

Treating Yourself Like You Value Yourself

I have found that it is much harder to be confident around people if I don't take steps to show myself that I value myself. For example, if you've sat around your house all day eating Cheetos and playing video games, it's going to be pretty difficult to not think other people are superior to you. It's going to be pretty difficult to feel like you are entitled to other people's friendship and affection when that is the way you are living your life. You are acting in a way that says: "I do not value myself," and that comes across when you talk to other people.

So the first step is to start treating yourself like you value yourself. Think: "If I valued myself, what would I do?" Would you start by taking care of your body? Of course you would. Start exercising and working out, eat healthy food, etc. Once you start doing this, you really do feel entitled to be confident and expressive, because your mind sees that you are taking actions that show you value yourself.

Having Personal Boundaries

If you let people walk all over you, they will quickly lose respect for you. If you show them you have no boundaries and will let them do whatever they want, then that's exactly what they will do.

You need to have firm personal boundaries of the types of behaviours you will and will not accept from other people. This can be small things like making them take their shoes off in your house to showing them you are disappointed when they say they will meet you somewhere and don't.

My favorite example of boundaries happens in everyday conversations. One of the things that shy and socially anxious people don't usually get is that <u>you do not have to respond to everything someone else says</u>! If their comment is lame, you don't have to respond to it. By responding to lame comments, you show them that you don't mind if they don't put in an effort into the conversation. Have a new personal boundary that if someone says something that doesn't really contribute to the conversation, you will not respond to it. This will make the other person realize that they can't just get away with saying something that has no value. They will realize they have to put in an effort if they want to talk to you, and therefore they will value and respect you more.

Dealing With Family and Old Friends

If you start to change your personality, your family and friends will often do things to sabotage your progress. It's not that they don't want to see you succeed, it's just that most people are scared of changed, and unwilling to accept that you are changing. So what are some obstacles?

1. **Not being able to act confident around them.** Once you start implementing what you have learnt here, you may start to notice a funny thing happening: you will be able to be confident around new people you meet, but around your family and old friends, you will act more like "the old you." This frustrated me for a long time, until I figured out the reason why.

I found out that the human brain is set up to create "anchors" for how you act. This means it remembers how you acted around a person in the past and it pushes you to keep acting that way whenever you are around them now. So while you may be able to be confident and extraverted around a new person you meet, it will be a lot harder to be that way around someone who knows "the old you" well. Unfortunately, there is no quick fix for this. It may take many months to change the way you act around someone you have known for years.

2. **They may "test" you.** The second way family and old friends may hold you back if you start trying to act more confident is by "testing" your new confidence. It's almost like they are testing to see if you really are confident and more independent of them now or if you are just putting on an act. How will they test you?

They may try to point out your behaviour and see if you are affected by the attention. They may mention some new clothes you are wearing and see if you appear to be embarrassed. If you try to be more independent they may start telling you to do or not do things just to regain control.

The key to passing these "tests" is to stay calm. That's all. Be as calm and relaxed as possible to overcome any feeling of anxiety you may have. The second step is to agree. If they made some observation about your clothes or behaviour that was supposed to embarrass you, simply agree to it. Don't try to defend or justify yourself, just repeat what they said and agree with it. Don't get emotional over it.

For example, "I see you're too good for your family now that you have your new friends," so you can simply respond "Yeah, I have new friends" in the most unemotional and passive voice possible. If they are trying to provoke a reaction

from you, they will not get one. Remember, if they can provoke you to react, then they have control over you, which is exactly what they are trying to regain.

Conclusion

There isn't much left to be said. If you have read this entire book, I congratulate you. most people won't even get past the first chapter. Review this book often, keep learning and relearning the principles inside here, and most importantly, DON'T STOP until you have this part of your life handled for good.

It sucks that you have this problem in the first place. I know, because I was in your shoes not too long ago. Unfortunately, you cannot control the past. But the good news is, you do have control over what your future will look like.

I'll leave you with this quote:

> "There is nothing for you to go back and live over, or fix, or feel regret about now.
>
> And so - now - knowing all that you know from where you now stand, now what do you want? The answers are now coming forth to you. Go forth in joy, and get on with it."
>
> **- Esther Hicks**

To Your Social Success,