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1
Introduction: Entering the Secret World of the Shy

1. Why do we need a sociology of shyness?

Many of us think we already know what shyness is. If you picked up this book because its title sounded interesting, the chances are you think of yourself as a shy person or know somebody else who is. These words belong in our common parlance, as part of the vocabulary of motives (Mills 1959) that we use to make sense of social behaviour in everyday life. When we call someone shy, we usually mean that they are quiet and reticent in the company of others, they may blush or stammer, and look as if they want to fall through the floor if we try to talk to them. Shy people, you might think, can be identified by their visible discomfort in social situations and their inability (or is it unwillingness?) to interact with other people. Thus the Oxford English Dictionary (2005) defines shyness as being '*easily frightened away; difficult of approach owing to timidity, caution, or distrust*', underlining the point that this is a socially oriented state of mind.

We may also think that we know how to deal with shy people. If shyness is simply a display of confusion and befuddlement in social situations, then surely all we need to do is identify those who are shy and teach them the 'social skills' needed to get by. This approach is reflected in the plethora of self-help books and websites aimed at helping people to overcome their shyness, of which more later. It is also apparent in the way we react to the people we meet in our everyday lives: an encounter with someone who seems shy can feel awkward, strained and too much like hard work, whereas a conversation with a non-shy, chatty and confident person may run smoothly and pleasurably, with a more equal balance of responsibility for talking, listening and exchanging information. Given the choice, wouldn't we all prefer the company of

the non-shy person, and perhaps secretly wish that the shy would just 'pull themselves together'?

One of the main purposes of this book is to challenge some of these taken for granted assumptions we have about the nature of shyness. By presenting a *sociological* account of the condition (if I may call it that for the moment), I hope to shift the focus away from individualist theories of the mind towards the wider, social context in which 'shyness' is defined and managed. What is it about the culture of contemporary Western societies that makes shy behaviour stand out as something worthy of note, or indeed as problematic? Why are we so concerned to 'help' shy people overcome their terrible affliction and learn to be more like the rest of us, despite often struggling with feelings of shyness ourselves? And in what sense can shyness be seen as a *social* problem, as well as an individual one, from the micro level of routine interaction to the macro level of public order? These are all new questions to which a sociology of shyness can provide some answers, and they reflect dimensions of the condition that have as yet remained unexamined.

There are, then, a number of tacit assumptions that underlie conventional understandings of and social reactions to shyness. These will be unpacked and examined in more detail throughout the book, but can be summarised as follows. Firstly, shyness is assumed to be an inherent property of the mind, something that individuals carry around with them to every social situation they encounter. These essentialist beliefs may be informed by lay psychology, insofar as they encourage us to view shyness as a personality trait, a lack of behavioural social skills, a chain of faulty cognition and so on. By treating shyness as an individual pathology, however, we forget that this is also a *socially oriented* state of mind that is *socially* produced and managed. Secondly, we imagine that we can distinguish easily between 'shy' and 'non-shy' people, as if they were completely separate groups. This of course stems from the first assumption that shyness is a property of individual minds: we assume that some people have it and others do not, and that by finding an objective way of measuring shyness we can sort one from the other and identify those who need 'help'. However, empirical measures of shyness introduce us to a whole new set of conceptual problems, not least because they reveal how people experience shyness in various different ways and to different extents. The idea that anyone can drift in and out of situational shyness is one that psychologists have dabbled with but neglected to explore in more detail. Meanwhile as sociologists, we might see this as a welcome opportunity to study shyness in a different way. The dramaturgical approach that I adopt throughout the

book, for example, helps us to understand shyness as something more akin to a strategically managed performance, inviting us to question how and why we learn to play the 'shy role' and under what conditions of interaction it may be discarded. Thirdly, we tend to believe that shyness is a negative, undesirable thing to experience, a personal affliction to be fought against. While I do not mean to deny the more private, emotional experiences of anxiety, frustration and loneliness that extreme shyness involves, I do think it is important that we take a more critical look at the way that these feelings are problematised. Why is it seen as 'wrong' or 'irrational' to feel apprehensive about talking to people we do not know or about opening ourselves up to scrutiny under the spotlight of social occasions? More to the point, what is it about our culture that demands that we pretend to be poised, skilled and assertive in our dealings with others, and what happens to those who appear to deviate from this norm? Indeed, we might inquire as to what extent any of us are 'really' like this underneath, and why we have this need to maintain the illusion of competence.

2. All in the mind?

Perhaps not surprisingly, most of the existing research into shyness has been conducted by psychologists. Taking the beliefs outlined above to their logical conclusions, researchers in this discipline have conceptualised shyness as a property of the individual mind, and sought to find objective and empirical ways of measuring it. Much of this research is carried out by social and developmental psychologists working within the area of what they call 'individual differences': that is, those aspects of personality or cognition that allow us to differentiate between individual people on the basis of quantifiable measures. Shyness, in this view, becomes a dimension of character on which people can be assessed and ranked; those who appear at the higher end of a distribution of test scores can be identified as 'shy' while those at the lower end become the 'non-shy' (or whatever antonym we decide to use). There is no single, unified psychological theory of shyness, and the researchers in this field differ widely in their views about what the condition is and which variables should be used to measure it. However, what they do all seem to agree on is the idea that shyness exists within the human mind as a driving force for behaviour: the social world is implicitly present as a source of 'stimuli' for the mind, but it is ultimately the individual's cognitive and behavioural 'responses' that psychologists want to study.

The pioneer of this approach was Philip Zimbardo, a social psychologist famed for his experiment about role performance and deindividuation in a simulated prison (Haney, Banks & Zimbardo 1973). Zimbardo's (1977) work on shyness was genuinely groundbreaking, seeking as it did to draw psychologists' attention to a new object of study while acknowledging that this was a multifaceted and conceptually 'fuzzy' condition. Arguing that '*you are shy if you* think *you are, regardless of how you act in public*' (1977, p. 30), Zimbardo devised a self-report questionnaire that he used to find out about the features and prevalence of shyness. Having administered this Stanford Shyness Survey to a succession of American college students, he reported that the most commonly cited examples of shyness-inducing situations were being with strangers, large groups and people in a position of authority, and that this was often manifest in physical symptoms such as blushing, shaking, a dry mouth and a pounding heartbeat. Furthermore, Zimbardo claimed that shyness was an almost universal experience, with over 80 per cent of his sample saying that they had experienced these feelings at some point in their lives and more than 40 per cent describing themselves as presently 'shy' people. While only 4 per cent of Zimbardo's original sample said that they were 'true blue shys' – shy at all times in all situations – 25 per cent felt that they were 'chronically shy' as a recurrent, habitual state. A further one-third of people confessed to feeling shy in about half of the situations they encountered, while around 20 per cent described themselves as non-shy people who had occasional shy responses to certain situations. While we must of course be wary of generalising from a rather biased sample, this study is of great value in pointing out that those we recognise as 'shy' may represent only the tip of the iceberg: if shyness is such a widespread social experience, why do we treat it as an individual problem and not as a variant of normal social behaviour?

Since Zimbardo's work was first published, there has been a growth of psychological research into shyness. Within this wide range of studies, we can broadly distinguish between theories that emphasise either 'nature' (genetics, personality and affect) or 'nurture' (environmental factors such as parenting styles) in explaining the underlying causes of shyness, but there are also a number of approaches that focus more on the 'here and now' patterns of thought that characterise the condition; these models of social cognition reflect a more general shift in psychological research since the 1950s that has been termed the 'cognitive revolution'. I shall provide only an overview of these theories here, since we are primarily concerned with the sociological aspects of shyness, but for a more detailed and extensive review of the psychological literature

on shyness, readers are encouraged to see Crozier's (2001a) informative account.

The idea that shyness is an innate, predetermined aspect of character has been presented by many psychologists in a number of ways. Some have focused on the physiological processes that accompany 'shy' thoughts and feelings (see, for example, Le Doux's (1998) hormonal theory and Gray's (1987) model of the Behavioural Inhibition System), suggesting that the higher levels of emotional reactivity found in some individuals make them more susceptible to shyness than others. Other psychologists have suggested that shyness is one of a range of innate and universal emotional responses that have evolved as part of human nature: these 'affect theories' suggest that shyness can be identified by physical symptoms and facial expressions (Ekman, Friesen & Ancoli 1969, 2001; Izard 1972, 1991) and is triggered by a different rate of neural firing (Tomkins 1962, 1963). Such theories might help us to see why the emotional components of shyness – anxiety, inhibition and anticipatory embarrassment – are experienced by so many people at some point in their lives, but they cannot explain why some people come to identify particularly with this label while others do not, and spend more time in a 'shy' emotional state. They also neglect to speculate on the way in which these emotional states are evaluated in relation to cultural norms and values: a display of quietness, blushing and bashful gaze aversion may be appreciated as a sign of deferential modesty in Japanese society, for example, whereas in Britain, Australia or the USA, the same display might be met with amusement, bemusement or annoyance.

Many psychologists have argued that shyness is not just a single emotional state but rather a whole dimension of personality, and so individuals can be located at any point along a continuum from extreme shyness to extreme non-shyness. This is reflected in the psychometric scales used to measure related personality traits, such as introversion and extroversion (Eysenck 1970) or openness, conscientiousness and neuroticism (Costa & McCrae 1995). When shyness is seen as a personality trait in this way, it is assumed that it can be measured using tests and inventories such as the Shyness Scale (Leary 1983), the McCroskey Shyness Scale (McCroskey & Richmond 1982) and the Social Reticence Scale (Jones & Russell 1982). On the basis of people's scores on these supposedly objective, empirical measures, psychologists claim to be able to identify more or less shy individuals and infer the relations between this and other traits of personality. Cheek & Briggs (1990), for example, suggest that shyness is a stable personality trait that has affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions; this relates to an earlier

study by Cheek & Buss (1981) which showed that shyness scores were correlated with scores for sociability, or the motivation to be with people. However, this does not tell us very much about the origins of such personality traits: are they innate or learned, and if the latter, when do they emerge? It also raises the problem of inferring from test scores to actual mental processes: it may be that the apparent individual differences found in test scores are simply an artefact of the measuring process rather than an indication of any 'real' differences in personality.

One solution to this dilemma is to argue that these individual differences are 'hardwired' from birth and therefore unchangeable. For example, Kagan and his colleagues (see Kagan et al. 1987; Kagan 1994) have suggested that shyness is an innate *temperament*, or distinctive set of responses that emerges early in life and creates stable, enduring patterns of behaviour (Crozier 2001a). Kagan's longitudinal research, following children from 21 months to age four, five and seven, revealed consistently high correlations between ratings of certain observable behaviours (such as latency in approaching unfamiliar adults and a reluctance to make vocalisations) at each age, which led him to differentiate between 'behaviourally inhibited' (shy) and 'behaviourally uninhibited' (bold or outgoing) individuals. Another approach that is becoming increasingly powerful is to explain shyness as a genetic predisposition, usually on the basis of twin studies (see, for example, Goldsmith et al. 1997), although with heritability estimates ranging from 20 per cent to 50 per cent, it remains widely accepted that there may be an interaction between 'nature' and 'nurture' (Plomin 1990). Any studies that make more dramatic claims to have discovered the 'shyness gene', meanwhile, seem to be based on more ambiguous evidence that remains open to interpretation. Hamer & Copeland (1998) identified a mutation in gene DRD4 that apparently caused a reluctance to seek out novel stimuli and high scores on a scale of neuroticism: variables correlated with shyness, perhaps, but certainly not states of mind that are synonymous with it.

In contrast to these theories of shyness as an innate predisposition, some psychologists have argued that it is a learned response that can be attributed to environmental factors. Mills & Rubin (1993) refer to styles of parenting that appear to make 4–6-year-old children 'socially withdrawn': their mothers are said to be overly concerned with teaching the children socially acceptable ways of behaving in public and anticipate great embarrassment at the thought of being seen to 'fail' in this respect. Stevenson-Hinde & Glover (1996) add that these parenting styles may be gendered, in that parents might be more inclined to indulge their

daughters in displays of shyness than their sons, who are expected to be more active and sociable. Meanwhile Pye (1989) points to the educational environments in which mild feelings of shyness might be exacerbated: quieter children tend to be invisible to their teachers, whose attention is constantly distracted by the noisier, more demanding pupils. Consequently, Crozier (2001b) argues, shy children may suffer low academic self-esteem and feel disengaged from classroom activities.

Theories of social cognition are currently very popular within psychology and have been applied effectively to the study of shyness. This approach does recognise the presence of others as a key feature in the evocation of a shy response, in that it is argued that we need to have developed a 'theory of minds' before we can take the perspective of other people towards ourselves and feel shy: this involves a shift into the state of 'objective self-awareness' (Duval & Wicklund 1972; see also Yuill & Banerjee 2001). However, as we shall see in Chapter 3, sociological theories of the self take this idea further by considering the way in which face-to-face interaction helps to shape our sense of identity in relation to the social world. Nevertheless, psychological theories are helpful in identifying certain cognitive processes at play within the shy mind: Snyder (1974) points to the importance of 'self-monitoring' as an important factor affecting behaviour in social settings, while Tangney & Fischer (1995) identify shyness as one of the 'self-conscious emotions' (others being pride, shame and embarrassment) that imply the presence of an imaginary audience scrutinising one's behaviour.

In psychological theories of social cognition, the focus remains very firmly on the individual mind as the primary site from which shyness originates: shy people are those who have distinctly 'biased' or 'faulty' cognitive styles that they bring to social situations, while non-shy others do not respond in the same way. Thus Bruch (2001) talks of social skills deficits and attributional styles that shape the shy person's approach to interaction, while Van der Molen (1990) refers to the '*closed loop of self-centred meta-cognition*' (drawing on Hartman & Cleland 1990, p. 341) that creates a vicious circle of clumsy behaviour, embarrassment, social avoidance and an impoverished repertoire of social skills. Similarly, Clark (2001) provides an account of the way shy people perceive and cognitively process social situations, for example by critically reviewing their past or anticipated performance from the perspective of others and combining unconditional negative beliefs about the self with unrealistic beliefs about the consequences of making a social blunder. He also suggests that shy people may adopt 'safety behaviours' such as wearing dark clothes and make up to disguise themselves, and indeed, there

are various psychological theories of self-presentation that can be related to shyness. Jones & Berglas (1978), for example, refer to the strategy of 'self-handicapping' that shy people might use: citing or even imposing external impediments to success to excuse an anticipated poor performance. Arkin (1981) differentiates between those who use 'acquisitive' styles of self-presentation to enhance their reputation and those who aim simply to avoid social disapproval by using 'protective' strategies such as shyness. Leary (1996) is one of the few social psychologists to explore these questions in more depth, using Goffmanesque ideas to inform his account of how and why we engage in impression management. Nevertheless, the self-presentational dimension of shyness is one that remains under theorised, particularly in relation to sociological theories of interaction.

3. The social constitution of the 'shy' mind

By taking an interpretivist sociological approach rather than a psychological one, we can understand shyness as a form of meaningful social action. One of the main arguments of this book is that shy identities are socially made, not born. This is not to deny that there are cognitive, emotional and behavioural components of shyness that give it a psychological reality, but rather to emphasise that these 'private' mental processes are shaped by social conditions and consequences. Insofar as shyness is a socially oriented state of mind, we can only understand and interpret the meaning of these thoughts and feelings in relation to our perceptions of others and our awareness of the social rules governing interaction.

Shyness can be understood as a consciously enacted identity performance, delivered with an audience in mind; it involves impressions that are knowingly *given* as well as those that are *given off* unintentionally (cf. Goffman 1959). This is not to suggest that people who appear shy are cynically putting on an act that they see as removed from their real selves, but simply that they are aware that when they behave in shy ways, they are giving a performance that will evoke a social reaction. The task of the interpretivist sociologist, therefore, is to try to understand the subjective meanings and motivations that lie behind this socially oriented action (cf. Weber 1949), in order to see the world from the shy actor's perspective. What kinds of beliefs and assumptions do such people have about the nature of social interaction, and how have these developed through their actual encounters with others? How might shy actors devise strategies to help them 'pass' in social situations,

and what happens when these techniques are not performed convincingly? Furthermore, how do *other* people react to a display of shyness when it is severe enough to break unspoken rules and disturb the flow of interaction?

If we consider the shy identity to be one that has been formed over time through patterns of interaction, it becomes imperative to study the social processes in which whole teams of actors are implicated. Following the dramaturgical approach that was developed by Goffman (1959, 1967a, 1971) and others in the Symbolic Interactionist tradition (Thomas 1923; Blumer 1969; Strauss 1978), we shall see how shyness emerges in response to dilemmas about performing in public and managing the impressions one gives off to others. Throughout the book, I examine self-defined 'shy' people's accounts of how they feel in various social situations, how they perceive others to perceive them, and how these others have actually responded to their behaviour. The shy person is extremely concerned about the risk of making a *faux pas* and exposing what they see as secret flaws in their character, most notably their perceived lack of social skills. At the same time, shy people report feeling as if everybody else seems to know the unspoken rules of interaction and thus are able to provide a more poised, socially competent performance. This feeling of relative incompetence is central to the experience of shyness, and indicates the roles played by team-mates, audiences and supporting actors.

We shall also see how shy people are intensely aware that this is a *negotiated* social order (Strauss 1978) and that by being withdrawn and reticent they might be seen as failing to 'pull their weight'. And yet these actors feel powerless to change, because the frustrated desire to demonstrate their sociability must be balanced against dramaturgical concerns about losing face through an inept performance. In Chapter 6, we shall see how the reactions of others can either help or hinder the shy person's attempts to participate in social life, as their behaviour can variously be normalised, sanctioned as social deviance, or pathologised as a mental disorder. Whatever the outcome of these patterns of interaction, it is clear that the 'shy' role is one that we learn to inhabit, and one that involves socially shaped processes of identity work.

4. Whose problem is it anyway?

However, this is only one part of a more complex process: the social constitution of the shy self takes place at various levels, from the private, internal processes of the mind, through the medium of face-to-face

interaction, to the larger scale public management of thoughts and feelings. As well as listening to the accounts that self-defined shy people give of interaction, therefore, it is also important that we take a more critical look at the way in which shy identities are culturally defined and managed. This shifts the focus away from 'individual differences' at the psychological level to the wider context of social norms and values that inform our responses to shy behaviour. Rather than just being a problem for shy individuals, shyness is also a *social* problem, in that it breaks what Hochschild (1983) calls the 'feeling rules' of our culture.

Shyness has not always been seen as a social problem, however. In Chapter 2, we shall see how the idea that this is an undesirable characteristic about which 'something must be done' is culturally and historically specific. If we begin to break the concept of shyness down into its component parts – feelings of inhibition in social situations, concern about being scrutinised and judged, carefully withholding private information about the self, and so on – we can immediately see how these social behaviours might be interpreted in various ways. The study by McDaniel (2003), which I discuss in the next chapter, demonstrates beautifully how the social meaning of being shy has changed over time, as shifting cultural values about gender appropriate behaviour, emotional intimacy and self-disclosure have given shyness different connotations. It is only since the late twentieth century that shyness has been defined as a *failure* to assert oneself, to be in touch with one's feelings and to 'be all that you can be'. As we enter the new millennium, there are no signs that these values are abating; indeed, there seems to be more pressure than ever to find ways of 'overcoming' our shyness and honing our 'social skills' to the level of a mythical non-shy ideal. The arrival of Internet-based websites and forums, online support groups and a growing industry of self-help books have all contributed to an idea that we are witnessing a cultural epidemic of shyness, while paradoxically asserting that this is an affliction of the individual mind.

At the level of interaction, meanwhile, we can see how these changing cultural values have trickled down to inform lay social reactions to shyness in everyday life. The misperception of shyness as rudeness or aloofness is one that plagues 'shy' people, but their accounts suggest that they actually feel the complete opposite way about social life. Wanting desperately to participate but feeling ill-equipped to do so, the shy recount feelings of frustrated sociability, alienation and exclusion. One of the aims of this book, therefore, is to redress the myth that shy people are simply anti-social, self-absorbed introverts who eschew the company of others; instead I want to argue that 'shy' people share in

common with their 'non-shy' team-mates a great sense of social responsibility and a commitment to the norms and values of everyday life. It is their lack of belief in their own dramaturgical competence, as well as their perception of interactional poise in others, that combine to make some individuals wary of performing in public.

5. Listening to shy voices

The arguments in this book are supported by evidence from a range of primary and secondary sources. I collected these data for an ESRC-funded project on 'the sociology of shyness', which I carried out at Cardiff University between 2000 and 2003. One of the sources I consulted was a range of self-help books and online resources written for 'shy' people, gathered both systematically, through a series of literature searches over the three years, and on a more *ad hoc* basis, as and when interesting texts appeared in the mass media. I also used the latter to explore cultural representations of 'shy' characters in television programmes, films and novels, the analysis of which can be found in Chapter 2. These secondary sources provided a fascinating insight into the way in which 'shyness' is conceptualised and understood within our culture, and the social meanings that are ascribed to it. Meanwhile, I also collected a large volume of primary data in the form of 40 self-defined 'shy' people's narrative accounts of experiencing shyness in contemporary Western society. These data came from three sources. Firstly, I conducted a series of in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 16 individuals in South Wales; these 12 women and four men were mostly students who were white, middle class and aged between 19 and 55. Secondly, I recruited a more demographically and geographically dispersed sample of participants online: 44 people from the USA, the UK and Australia, whom I had found through existing shyness forums and virtual communities, subscribed to an email distribution list that I set up via my own website. Twenty of these people (two of whom had also been interviewees) posted messages in response to open-ended questions that I asked of them and they asked of each other. Finally, a further six individuals corresponded with me privately by email and provided personal accounts of shyness, prompted by similar open-ended questions to those that were asked on the mailing list. Overall, this created a sample of 40 individuals who saw themselves as generally 'shy people', and their long and detailed accounts of managing this identity provided a rich source of primary data. All names used in the book are pseudonyms. The shyness narratives were analysed using the qualitative software program ATLAS/ti, and

I used a grounded theory approach to try to understand the subjective meanings self-defined 'shy' people gave to this condition. Further details of the study's methodology can be found in Scott (2004b).

In this sociological account of shyness, then, I present some of the data from each of these sources to illustrate what I think are the main points we need to learn about the condition. Throughout the book I use the term 'shy' to refer to people who define themselves as such: for the sake of readability, I have avoided putting inverted commas around each use of the term, but am implicitly bracketing out the assumption that there are distinct, essential groups of 'shy' and 'non-shy' people. I have tried to quote from every one of my participants and to represent their views fairly, but in any case, the stories they provided seemed to revolve around a number of recurrent themes, most notably the complex relationship between mind, self and society (cf. Mead 1934). Consequently, my analysis of the data is informed largely by the work of Goffman, Thomas, Becker and others in the Symbolic Interactionist tradition, but where appropriate, I also draw upon phenomenology and ethnomethodology, medical sociology, the sociology of emotions and the sociology of the body.

In the pages that follow, we shall see how self-defined shy people make sense of their experiences in terms of performances, identity work and self-presentation: shyness emerges from these accounts not as a psychological affliction that passively leaks out of the mind, but as a meaningful form of social action. We shall see how being shy is an ongoing process of managing the boundaries between private and public, backstage and frontstage, and self and others. Without wanting to glamourise what for many is a painful and distressing experience, I do want to suggest that shyness is a performative identity that is actively accomplished by social actors in their everyday lives. It embodies dramaturgical concerns about losing face, disrupting the interaction order and being rejected by one's team-mates, all of which demonstrate a remarkable commitment to social solidarity and collective identity. Perhaps, therefore, it is time to stop berating shy people for their presumed misanthropy, and instead to give them some credit for managing what we shall see is a socially intelligible, meaningful and in some ways rational, response to the dramaturgical dilemmas of everyday life.

6. Outline of the book

In the remainder of the book, I set out my argument for why we need a sociology of shyness and how this might be achieved. Chapter 2

discusses the cultural and historical relativity of shyness as a social problem, considering the way in which shifting cultural values enable various interpretations of the same basic 'symptoms' to be made. In particular, I consider those features of contemporary Western society that have led us to treat shyness as a deviation from normative standards of behaviour: the cultural climate of (late) modernity and its effects upon the self, the increasing pressures of a work ethic centred on individualistic achievement and assertiveness, and our obsession with public, confessional talk or 'stories of the self'. Using illustrations from various self-help books, online resources and mass media text, I demonstrate how shyness is negatively defined in contrast to the values of gregariousness, vocality and self-expression that characterise the 'ideal', non-shy self. In Chapter 3, I look in more detail at the shy self as a social product that emerges from contexts of everyday interaction and is shaped by these cultural values. Drawing on Mead (1934), I suggest that shyness involves an internal dialogue between two parts of the self: the Shy 'I' and the Shy 'Me'. The accounts of my participants reveal how they scrutinise their own social performances from the perspective of 'the Competent Other', a generalised image of other people as being relatively skilled and poised for interaction. Social situations then become a minefield of potential blunders and embarrassing *faux pas*, and the shy actor must take precautionary steps to avoid exposing Goffmanesque 'blemishes of character'. Chapter 4 examines the consequences of this for the shy as they withdraw from the social spotlight: retreating into what many call their 'shell', these actors feel deeply ambivalent about their exclusion from collective activities. On the one hand, shyness is a protective device that prevents the actor from losing face, but on the other hand it leaves them feeling lonely, misunderstood and frustrated in their sociability.

We then shift our focus from the shy self to the contexts of interaction in which it is defined. Chapter 5 challenges the assumption that there are distinct, separate groups of essentially shy or non-shy people, arguing instead that these identities are assumed over time through repeated patterns of interaction. If shyness is a role into which we may all drift from time to time (even if most people drift out of it again), then there must be some common dramaturgical factors that evoke shy reactions. Drawing on Goffman (1959, 1967a, 1971), this chapter examines the strategies used by shy people to manage self-presentation, control the impressions they create and maintain a rigid division between front and back regions of the self. It is argued that shy and non-shy actors alike share these dramaturgical concerns, the main difference being that shy people have learned not to trust 'Competent Others' to

keep them in face should a faux pas occur. Meanwhile I question how and why the apparently non-shy manage to give off the impression of interactional competence, referring to the work of Elias, Strauss and other theoretical models of micro-social order. I suggest that such displays of competence may be illusory, insofar as we all secretly feel as if we are 'faking it'.

Chapter 6 looks at what happens to those whose shyness is regarded as deviant and duly sanctioned. While some episodes of situational shyness may be normalised or tolerated, in many cases such behaviour breaks the unspoken, tacitly assumed 'residual rules' (Scheff 1966) of interaction. Using labelling theories of deviance from the Symbolic Interactionist tradition, I suggest that shyness is in part defined by *social reactions* to certain forms of norm-breaking, seemingly irrational behaviour – that is, we are not shy until others define us as such. When a person appears unwilling to uphold the negotiated order (Strauss, 1978) of a situation by smiling, talking, reciprocating eye contact and so on, they are breaking some of the basic unspoken rules that govern social interaction. This means that shy people are seen to be committing a *moral* offence of not showing sufficient 'involvement' (Goffman 1963b) in a social situation, and in ethnomethodological terms, they breach the taken for granted assumptions about how the interaction ought to unfold (cf. Garfinkel 1967). Over time, a person may drift into a deviant career (Becker 1963) of shyness, coming to see themselves as a 'shy person' and therefore as different, an outsider to mainstream social life. Becoming progressively committed to the shy role can leave the individual feeling powerless to change, and we shall see how in some cases, extreme forms of shyness are regarded as psychiatric disorders. The medicalisation of shyness is a growing trend, indicated by a new industry of self-help books, shyness clinics and therapeutic programmes.

Finally, in Chapter 7 I make some concluding remarks that serve to summarise my arguments about the sociological aspects of shyness: this is a socially oriented condition of selfhood that emerges from sustained patterns of interaction and involves an embodied, intelligible and communicatively rational response to dramaturgical stress. Yet within the cultural climate of contemporary Western society, this state of being is regarded as a deviation from normal and desirable behaviour, and shy people are often (mis)perceived as rude, ill or anti-social. The reader is then invited to think about the implications of a sociological theory of shyness that takes each of these factors into account and relocates a problem of individual minds within a wider cultural context.

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