

## Origin of Shyness III

Suppose a new highway penetrated into one of the world's last regions of full wilderness, and on it one day a naked human child was found wandering alone. Suppose the child was found to be mute and acutely shy. And suppose the expedition sent to locate the parents found a small hunter-gather band who communicated with each other without words, using only hand signals and limited vocal sounds.

Wouldn't scientists conclude that these people were remnants from humanity's long lost past, from the time before complex spoken language began? And if they did, wouldn't the scientific community rush to study them and get their territory protected? Despite our poor record in the past, you would hope we would do it right this time and protect this remnant of early stone-age man.

Yet when we find people among us who are shy and have difficulty with verbal language, lack social skills, and sometimes appear to lack even a social instinct, we say they have disorders that must be cured. We've been doing this for a long time, but we haven't found any cures, or even discovered the causes for conditions like autism, social phobia, Asperger's syndrome, selective mutism or simple introversion. Still, without knowing why these conditions exist, we go on funding efforts to eliminate them.

Throughout modern western culture shy children are exhorted not to be shy. Shyness is seen as a weakness incompatible with our aggressive society, but shy people remain stubbornly difficult to change.

Yes, I'll say it again - I think shyness has an ancient origin.

Shyness and a solitary disposition are common throughout nature. Tigers, leopards, deer, moose, bears, foxes, badgers and skunks, mink and weasels, cougars, gibbons and orangutans, are all shy and solitary. Though we attach no value to shyness, after 100 million years of mammalian evolution, twenty million years of primate evolution, and seven million years of hominid evolution, the shy instinct remains common in us too. According to

psychologists, one quarter of the human population – 1.7 billion people world-wide – are introverts.

Temple Grandin, the autistic animal behavior scientist, has proposed that autism is the original mind-set of mammals, that the social mind is something that developed afterward. For example, the only social cat, the African lion is also the most recently evolved cat, only a few hundreds of thousands of years old (like Homo Sapiens).

I don't deny that a human child can become shy or timid through physical and mental abuse, or for other reasons, but the evidence is clear that most shyness is genetic. Why are we so resistant to the idea that within the current 6.8 billion mass of humanity there should be people from the past without social instincts? Why is there such an aversion to accepting shyness as natural? What is this society so afraid of?

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