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Shyness and Gender. Physical, Emotional, Cognitive, Behavioural Consequences and Strategies of Coping with Shyness by Women and Men of Different Gender Identity

Abstract

This article presents research into shyness from the perspective of gender and gender identity. The research comprised a group of 240 Polish women and men (120 women and 120 men) in the period of early adulthood (20–25 years of age).

The Stanford Shyness Questionnaire (Zimbardo, 1994) and Bem Sex Role Inventory (Polish version, Kuczyńska, 1992) were used. Gender differences and differences between people of different gender identity in experiencing shyness were found, including: frequency, causes, consequences (physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioural) and strategies of coping with shyness.

Key words: shyness, gender, gender identity, early adulthood

Introduction

Shyness is a phenomenon that has been of great interest for a long time. The oldest documented use of the concept of shyness was noted as long ago as in the 10th century in the Anglo-Saxon language, where it meant “easy to frighten”. Shyness is a common and acute personal problem and nearly everybody has felt shy in a certain situation, trying to fight this unwanted emotion, usually not too effectively. It is a characteristic that makes satisfying social contact considerably difficult.

As Philip Zimbardo (1994) claims, nowadays shyness becomes a problem that reaches epidemic proportions and its increasing tendency in our society inclines one to draw the conclusion that the situation will get worse in the coming years as

our isolation, competition, and loneliness increase. If we do not do something soon, a lot of our children and grand-children will become “prisoners” of their own shyness.

The importance of the experiences of shyness, shame, or embarrassment is exceptionally great in the educational practice because many socializational interactions refer to them and use them in an intentional way, although usually negative (by means of putting to shame, derision, scoffing, etc.) At the same time, those emotions become significant barriers in the development and social functioning of an individual.

In psychology studies on shyness have a long tradition in many schools and research trends. In behaviourism shyness is defined in terms of not learning the proper social skills, negative experiences connected with certain social situations, and acquired self-underestimation. In psychoanalysis it is a manifestation of unconscious conflicts, and in social psychology its origin is the subject’s approval of the label “shy” received a priori from other people (1994; Harwas-Napierała, 1995).

Nowadays, shyness is understood as a complex syndrome of symptoms connected with changes in the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioural spheres. Public shyness becomes a basic cause and source of behaviour disturbance in the conditions of social exposure or evaluation, while private shyness includes experiencing psychological discomfort in the aspect of self-orientation consisting in undervaluation and a lack of self-confidence and haunting anxiety that one cannot cope with the situation (Tyszkowa, 1978, Zimbardo, 1994, Schroeder, 1995, Harwas-Napierała, 1995, Paulhus, Morgan, 1997). Shyness, like shame or embarrassment, belongs to a group of behaviours whose basis is social fear as a basic emotion. It is a peculiar mixture of a strong fear, sometimes adopting the form of a social phobia, and a behaviour resulting from a low self-evaluation, a lack of self-confidence, a conviction of low social skills and a habit of pessimistic thinking (Miller, 1995, 1999).

Among numerous predictors of shyness the central ones prove to be the characteristics connected with the low self-evaluation of interpersonal competences and fear of social rejection (Schmidt, Robinson, 1992). Contemporary research (Jackson, Towson, Narduzzi, 1997) does not confirm the previous thesis that shy people are too perfectionist and have unrealistic, high standards, aspirations, expectations towards themselves, and the dominance of “ideal self” over “real self.” (Tyszkowa, 1978). At the same time, Flett, Hewitt and DeRosa (1996) note that there are different dimensions of perfectionism, which can be self-oriented or other-oriented. It appears that not self-oriented perfectionism, but its social dimension becomes a source of numerous interpersonal problems, ill adjustment, loneliness, a fear of a negative evaluation, a low social self-evaluation, and shyness.

People of high other-oriented perfectionism are characterized by a lower level of social skills and a lower self-evaluation.

The latest models of the shyness syndrome emphasize not so much the importance of personality variables but the significance of the ability to regulate emotions experienced in social situations. Shy people cannot cope mainly with negative emotions, which they experience more intensively than non-shy people (Eisenberg, Fabes, Murphy, 1995, Miller, 1995). Shyness correlates with low social skills (Creed, Funder, 1998), with a tendency to keep negative emotions in, a lack of impulsiveness, evasive and passive coping strategies (Eisenberg et al., 1998). In shy people the indicators of neuroticism, introversion (Kamath, Kanekar, 1993, Kentle, 1995), general fear, interpersonal sensitivity, shame, social avoidance (Henderson, 1997), depression and a lack of life satisfaction (Romney, Bynner, 1997) are higher.

Nowadays, the cognitive basis of the shyness syndrome is also emphasized. The cognitive model assumes that shyness results mainly from negative attribution styles of problems connected with social interactions. Shy people make internal attributions of social failure, including situations in which they experience shyness, whereas non-shy people explain troublesome situations by external causes (Alfano, Joiner, Perry, 1994, Bruch, Pearl, 1995, Bruch et al., 1995, Romney, Brynner, 1997, Aim, Lindberg, 1999, Anderson, 1999). Among the conditions of shyness, also social factors are emphasized: parents' features (e.g. dependence, passivity, apprehensiveness) and socializing influences consisting in "modesty training" and "dependence training" and a lack of "training in being in the centre" (Harwas-Napierała, 1995).

Despite there being mainly differences in individual vulnerability to shyness, numerous data from the psychology of gender differences suggest that it is more frequently and intensively experienced by women. On the one hand, what indicates that are the differences in the image of "self" in women and men. This is women who are characterized by a lower self-evaluation, a lower sense of self-confidence, a stronger social fear, lower assertiveness, learnt helplessness, passive, evasive-emotional coping styles, external locus of control, and women's attribution styles are of a less egotistic character (Feingold, 1994, Cross, Madson, 1997). On the other hand, gender differences in experiencing emotions also show that women, as generally more emotional, experience more strongly not only shame and embarrassment (Miller, 1999), but also shyness. Similarly, the structure of social forces and socialization of women include "modesty training" more frequently than training in "being in the centre," and in the hierarchy of importance interpersonal relationships are more important for them than for men (Markus et al., 1982, Cross, Madson, 1997, Dabul et al., 1997). Thus, it is possible to assume that women, as more dependent on others and having "dependent self" ("connected self") are

more afraid of social disapproval and they are characterized by a stronger tendency towards social perfectionism.

Only the data concerning women's higher communication skills seem to suggest conversely that women may experience shyness less intensely. However, women's high skills in the accurate interpretation of other people's reactions may paradoxically increase their sensitivity to even slight, imperceptible for men, signs of threat and social disapproval, which increases their disposition to experience shyness.

Thus, the shyness syndrome is probably experienced in a different way by the representatives of different genders and presumably not only the certified gender but also its psychological duplicate – gender identity determine the different faces of shyness. Sparse, up till now, research shows that, e.g., mental masculinity, high physical attractiveness, and a positive evaluation of interpersonal competences prove to be important predictors decreasing the occurrence and intensity of the shyness syndrome in men (Bruch, Berko, Haase, 1998). In order to learn gender differences in experiencing shyness more closely, research was conducted.

Method

The study comprised 240 people: young adults at the age of 20-25, 120 women and 120 men, students of Silesian University. The choice of the research group was justified by the fact that young (early) adulthood is a developmental period when an individual has to make exceptionally important life decisions: the choice of a job and a partner, realizing adulthood tasks (professional work, starting a family, etc) and undertaking those tasks, as connected with social contact, is essentially impeded in the situation of the shyness syndrome. At the same time, research shows that developmentally shyness increases just in early adulthood (as it increases in 6-7-year-olds starting their school activity) (Asendorpf, 1992).

The Stanford Questionnaire of Shyness (Zimbardo, 1994), which investigates the frequency, causes, consequences, and ways of coping with shyness, and the Bem Sex Role Inventory; Polish version: Psychological Gender Inventory (IPP) (Kuczyńska, 1992) were used. Barbara Siekierka conducted the research under my guidance.

Results

The statistical analyses did not find significant gender differences in the declared frequency of experiencing shyness. In the studied women (57%) and men (54.4%)

shyness occurred only sometimes, in certain situations, often – in 7.9% of the women and 6.0% of the men, and rarely – in 35.1% of the women and 39.6% of the men (cf. Table 1).

Whereas gender identity is a factor significantly differentiating the occurrence frequency of the shyness syndrome. The undifferentiated (14%) and feminine (7.7%) persons most numerously indicated that they often experienced shyness, whereas the androgynous (51.5%) and masculine (48%) persons most numerously claimed that they rarely experienced that emotion (Table1). Significant differences occurred in the comparisons of the androgynous persons with feminine (androgynous – feminine rarely: $U = 2.79$, $p < 0.01$, often: $U = 2.20$, $p < 0.05$) and undifferentiated (androgynous – undifferentiated rarely: $U = 2.86$, $p < 0.01$, often: $U = 2.28$, $p < 0.05$) (cf. Table 1).

Table 1. Frequency of the occurrence of shyness, gender and gender identity

Frequency	Gender		Gender identity			
	Men	Women	Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous	Undifferentiated
Often	6.0	7.9	2.5	7.7	2.9	14.0
Sometimes	54.4	57.0	52.5	64.6	45.6	59.7
Rarely	39.6	35.1	48.0	27.7	51.5	26.3

Data in %

The most frequently mentioned emotional cause of shyness was a fear of a negative social evaluation (men 60.3%, women 55.3%, p irrelevant). Gender differences concerned a lack of self-confidence, more often indicated by the women (55.3%) than the men (38.8%) ($U = 2.50$, $p < 0.01$), a fear of rejection, also more frequent in the women (36,0%) than in the men (12.9%) ($U = 4.03$, $p < 0.01$), and a sense of lack of concrete social skills, conversely, more often declared by the men (23.3%) than the women (12.3%) ($U = 2.20$, $p < 0.05$) (cf. Table 2).

Gender identity also proved to be a factor differentiating the perception of the emotional causes of shyness. A fear of rejection and lack of self-confidence were significantly more often indicated by the feminine persons (36.9% – fear of rejection, 64.6% – lack of self-confidence) and undifferentiated ones (35.1% – fear of rejection, 52.6% – lack of self-confidence) (masculine-feminine $U = 2.71$, $p < 0.01$, undifferentiated-androgynous $U = 2.02$, $p < 0.05$, androgynous-feminine $U = 2.29$, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, the undifferentiated persons (35.1%) significantly more often than the masculine ones (12.5%) ($U = 2.50$, $p < 0.01$) and androgynous ones (17.6%) ($U = 2.22$, $p < 0.05$) indicated a fear of intimacy as a cause of their own shyness (cf. Table 2).

Table 2. Emotional causes of shyness, gender, and gender identity

Cause	Gender		Gender identity			
	Men	Women	Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous	Undifferentiated
Fear of negative social evaluation	60.3	55.3	50.0	60.0	60.3	57.9
Fear of rejection	12.9	36.0	20.0	36.9	19.1	35.1
Lack of self-confidence	38.8	55.3	37.5	64.6	30.9	52.0
Lack of social skills	23.3	12.3	15.0	13.8	8.8	17.s
Fear of intimacy	20.7	22.8	12.5	20.0	17.6	35.1

Data in %. The majority of studied men and women indicated a few causes.

Gender differences connected with the kind of situations triggering off shyness were not found, whereas there occurred differences between the persons of different gender identity. The feminine (90.8%) and undifferentiated persons (84.2%) emphasized significantly more often than others that the situation triggering off shyness is being in the centre of attention (masculine-feminine $U = 3.52$, masculine- undifferentiated $U = 2.44$, undifferentiated -androgynous $U = 3.25$, androgynous-feminine $U = 4.37$, $p < 0.01$). The feminine persons (46.2%) indicated situations requiring assertiveness significantly more often than the masculine ones (25.0%) ($U = 2.17$, $p < 0.05$) and they also indicated erotic situations significantly more often (33.8%) than the androgynous persons (17.6%) ($U = 2.14$, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, the undifferentiated (49.1%) and feminine persons (41.5%) indicated situations of being in a small group significantly more often than others (masculine-feminine $U = 2.56$, masculine- undifferentiated $U = 3.19$, undifferentiated - androgynous $U = 3.17$, $p < 0.01$) and social situations in general as causes of shyness: undifferentiated - 42.1%, feminine - 40.0% (M-I $U = 3.22$, A-F $U = 3.06$, $p < 0.01$, M-F $U = 2.13$, M-I $U = 2.28$, $p < 0.05$) (cf. Table 3).

Table 3. Situations triggering off shyness, gender and gender identity

Situation	Gender		Gender identity			
	Men	Women	Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous	Undifferentiated
Social situations in general	27.6	32.5	20.0	40.0	16.2	42.1
Being in big groups	30.2	28.1	20.0	36.9	25.0	31.6

Situation	Gender		Gender identity			
	Men	Women	Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous	Undifferentiated
Being in small groups	37.1	29.8	17.5	41.5	22.1	49.1
Contact with a person of the same sex	3.4	5.3	2.5	4.6	4.4	5.3
Contact with a person of the opposite sex	36.2	25.4	30.0	27.7	26.5	40.4
Situations of asking for help	31.9	37.7	42.5	35.4	33.8	28.1
Situations requiring assertiveness	38.8	35.1	25.0	46.2	35.3	36.8
Situations of being in the centre of attention	74.1	78.1	62.5	90.8	57.4	84.2
Situations of evaluation	37.1	48.2	35.0	52.3	38.2	42.1
Erotic situations	19.8	27.2	20.0	33.8	17.6	21.1

Data in %. The majority of the studied men and women indicated a few situations.

Gender differences were found concerning persons in contact with whom the studied group experienced shyness. The women (93.0%) felt shy in the presence of people having power or prestige significantly more often than the men (82.8%) ($U = 2.35, p < 0.01$), whereas the men (28.4%) were shy towards members of their family more often than the women (16.7%) ($U = 2.13, p < 0.05$) (cf. Table 4).

Table 4. Persons in the presence of whom the shyness syndrome occurs, gender, and gender identity

Person evoking shyness	Gender		Gender identity			
	Men	Women	Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous	Undifferentiated
Family members	28.4	16.7	35.0	15.4	19.1	26.3
Friends	9.5	5.3	12.5	9.2	4.4	5.3
Strangers	46.6	56.1	35.0	70.8	33.8	61.4
Persons having power or prestige	82.8	93.0	87.5	87.7	85.3	91.2
Elderly people	4.3	7.0	10.0	4.6	4.4	5.3
Persons of the opposite sex	39.7	37.7	27.5	44.6	30.9	49.1

Person evoking shyness	Gender		Gender identity			
	Men	Women	Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous	Undifferentiated
Persons of the same sex	11.0	7.0	0.0	12.3	8.8	12.3

Data in %. The majority of studied men and women indicated a few persons.

Differences between persons of different gender identity were also found. The feminine (87.7%) and undifferentiated persons (91.2%) felt shy significantly more often in the company of strangers (masculine-feminine $U = 3.59$, masculine-undifferentiated $U = 2.56$, undifferentiated-androgynous $U = 3.08$, androgynous-feminine $U = 4.26$, $p < 0.01$). The undifferentiated persons (49.1%) experienced shyness towards people of the opposite sex significantly more often than the masculine ones (27.5%) ($U = 2.14$, $p < 0.05$) and androgynous ones (30.9%) ($U = 2.32$, $p < 0.05$), whereas the masculine persons felt shy in the presence of family members (35.0%) significantly more often than the feminine ones (15.4%) ($U = 2.32$, $p < 0.05$) (Table 4).

Gender differences were revealed also in physical reactions and the ways of experiencing shyness. The women (49.1%) blushed more often than the men (36.2%) ($U = 1.89$, $p < 0.05$). The women (30.7%) trembled as a physical reaction to a situation of shyness more often than the men (17.2%) ($U = 2.41$, $p < 0.01$) (Table 5).

Table 5. Physical reactions accompanying shyness, gender and gender identity

Physical reaction	Gender		Gender identity			
	Men	Women	Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous	Undifferentiated
Blush	36.2	49.1	40.0	50.8	41.2	36.8
Increased pulse	56.0	49.1	52.5	56.9	52.9	47.4
Butterflies in the stomach	22.4	30.7	12.5	33.8	33.8	19.3
Trembling	17.2	30.7	12.5	32.3	27.9	17.5
Violent heartbeat	50.0	50.9	47.5	58.5	41.2	54.4
Dry mouth	19.0	17.5	22.5	16.9	14.7	21.1
Sweating	30.2	23.7	40.0	20.0	23.5	29.8
Tiredness	4.3	7.0	2.5	10.8	2.9	s.3

Data in %. The majority of the studied men and women indicated a few physical reactions.

Significant differences comprised also persons of different identity. In the feminine persons (58.5%) a violent heartbeat occurred more often than in the androgynous ones (41.2%) ($U = 1.99, p < 0.05$) and trembling of muscles occurred in them more often (32.3%) than in the masculine ones (12.5%) ($U = 2.28, p < 0.05$). The masculine persons (40.0%) reacted by increased sweating more often than the feminine ones (20.0%) ($U = 2.23, p < 0.05$). The feminine (33.8%) and androgynous persons (33.8%) had butterflies in their stomachs significantly more often than the masculine ones (12.5%) (Table 5).

While experiencing shyness, the women and men had different emotional and cognitive reactions. The women (50.9%) had negative thoughts about themselves significantly more often than the men (31.9%) ($U = 2.92, p < 0.01$) and they (46.5%) thought about how they were evaluated by others more often than the men (33.6%) ($U = 1.98, p < 0.05$). Whereas the men (19.0%) thought generally about the situation and shyness significantly more often than the women (8.8%) ($U = 2.19, p < 0.05$) (cf. Table 6).

Table 6. Cognitive reactions accompanying shyness, gender and gender identity

Cognitive reaction	Gender		Gender identity			
	Men	Women	Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous	Undifferentiated
Embarrassment	32.8	41.2	22.5	46.2	32.4	40.0
Thoughts about negative aspects of situation	30.2	42.2	15.0	47.7	33.8	40.4
Thoughts diverting attention from shyness	19.8	15.8	15.0	20.0	17.6	15.8
Negative thoughts about oneself	31.9	50.9	27.5	53.8	36.8	42.1
Thoughts about evaluation by others	33.6	46.5	27.5	47.7	36.8	43.9
Thoughts about impression made on others	36.2	43.0	35.0	43.1	44.1	33.3
General thoughts about situation and shyness	19.0	8.8	15.0	15.4	13.2	12.3
Positive thoughts and feelings	9.5	7.0	12.5	6.2	8.8	7.0

Data in %. The majority of the studied men and women indicated a few cognitive reactions.

Similarly, persons of different gender identity had different thoughts and feelings while experiencing shyness. The feminine persons (53.8%) had negative thoughts about themselves significantly more often than the masculine ones (27.5%) ($U = 2.64, p < 0.01$) and the androgynous ones (36.8%) ($U = 1.98, p < 0.05$), and they thought about the evaluations made by others ($U = 2.05, p < 0.05$) more often (47.7%) than the masculine ones (27.5%), and they felt embarrassed more often (46.2%) than the masculine ones (22.5%) ($U = 2.44, p < 0.01$). Similarly, the undifferentiated persons (42.1%) felt embarrassed while experiencing shyness more often than the masculine ones (22.5%) ($U = 2.01, p < 0.05$). The masculine persons (15%) thought about the unpleasant aspects of shyness significantly more rarely than the feminine (47.7%), undifferentiated (40.4%), and androgynous ones (33.8%) (masculine-feminine $U = 3.41$, masculine-undifferentiated $U = 2.68, p < 0.01$, masculine-androgynous $U = 2.13, p < 0.05$) (Table 6).

The women and men had slightly different behavioural reactions while experiencing the shyness syndrome. The women (64.9%) fell silent while experiencing shyness significantly more often than the men (37.1%) ($U = 4.21, p < 0.01$) (cf. Table 7). The differences between persons of different identity concerned the masculine persons (27.5%) in whom incongruous speech occurred significantly more often ($U = 2.21, p < 0.01$) than in the feminine ones (10.8%), and in the undifferentiated ones who used the strategy of avoiding people, were silent (63.2%) (undifferentiated -androgynous $U = 1.96, p < 0.05$) or spoke in a low voice (26.3%) (masculine-undifferentiated $U = 1.99, p < 0.05$) more often (29.8%) than the masculine ones (12.5) and the androgynous ones (13.2%).

Table 7. Behavioural reactions accompanying shyness, gender and gender identity

Behavioural reaction	Gender		Gender identity			
	Men	Women	Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous	Undifferentiated
Speaking in low voice	22.4	18.4	10.0	24.6	17.6	26.3
Avoiding people	18.1	18.4	12.5	16.9	13.2	29.8
Inability to make eye contact	31.9	34.2	32.5	35.4	38.2	24.6
Silence	37.1	64.9	50.0	51.5	45.6	63.2
Stammering	9.5	7.0	12.5	9.2	5.9	7.0
Incongruous speech	19.0	16.7	27.5	10.8	17.6	19.3
Hunched posture	17.2	9.6	20.0	12.3	13.2	10.3

Behavioural reaction	Gender		Gender identity			
	Men	Women	Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous	Undifferentiated
Avoidance of action	21.6	21.1	25.0	24.6	17.6	19.3
Escape from the situation	13.8	15.8	12.5	12.3	19.1	14.0

Data in %. The majority of the studied men and women indicated a few behavioural reactions.

The most frequent strategies of coping with shyness are: convincing oneself that there are no reasons for feeling shy (women 63.2%, men 66.4%, p irrelevant) and continuing the activity despite shyness (women 50%, men 45.7%, p irrelevant). The gender differences consisted in posing as a non-shy person more frequently by the women (39.5%) than by the men (25.0%) (cf. Table 8).

Gender identity proved to be a factor differentiating the strategies of coping with shyness. The feminine persons (73.8%) tried to make themselves believe that there were no reasons for feeling shy significantly more often than the masculine ones (55.0%) ($U = 2.05, p < 0.05$) and they continued acting more often (60.0%) than the undifferentiated ones (31.6%) ($U = 3.14, p < 0.01$) (Table 8).

Table 8. Strategies of coping with shyness, gender and gender identity

Coping strategy	Gender		Gender identity			
	Men	Women	Masculine	Feminine	Androgynous	Undifferentiated
Diverting attention from causes of shyness	19.8	13.2	20.0	13.8	19.1	14.0
Convincing oneself that there are no reasons for being shy	66.4	63.2	55.0	73.8	69.1	56.1
Posing as a non-shy person	25.0	39.5	37.5	32.3	32.4	28.1
Seeking help in others	7.8	9.6	10.0	6.2	7.4	12.3
Withdrawing from situation	16.4	8.8	15.0	13.8	13.2	8.8
Continuing the action despite shyness	45.7	50.0	50.0	60.0	48.5	31.6
Using stimulants or pharmaceuticals	6.0	6.1	2.5	0.0	2.9	3.5

Data in %. The majority of the studied men and women indicated a few coping strategies.

Conclusions

The conducted research shows that the frequency of experiencing the shyness syndrome is similar in young women and men. Thus, contemporary women are not stereotypically very shy and men, in turn, more often admit to experiencing shyness, which is contradictory to the traditional image of masculinity. Therefore, it is possible to suppose that the emancipation and customary changes have resulted in the uniformization of the behaviours of both sexes. However, a thorough analysis of the manifestation of the shyness syndrome shows that women's and men's behaviour still remains under a strong influence of gender stereotypes.

The fear of social rejection and a lack of self-confidence prove to be emotional causes of shyness in women much more frequently, whereas in men it is a sense of lack of necessary skills in a given situation. Hence, "masculine" shyness seems to be of a more pragmatic character and more justified by circumstances, whereas "feminine" shyness results from great sensitivity and emotionality in experiencing some social situations.

According to the stereotypical division of social competences, women feel shy in the presence of people having power and prestige more often, and men in some family life situations. More noticeable physical reactions connected with shyness, like blushing and trembling, more often occur in women (which may be the cause of the popular opinion about women's greater shyness).

Women and men have different emotional, cognitive, and behavioural reactions connected with shyness. Women concentrate on their own feelings more often, they think negatively about themselves and about how they are evaluated by others. In contrast, men do not concentrate on themselves but on the external aspects of the situation more often. According to gender stereotypes, they realize the dictate of masculine concreteness and instrumentality. The gender differences in behavioural reactions concern being silent and in the coping strategies they concern attempts at concealing one's state by posing as a non-shy person, which occurs in women more often. Those "feminine" strategies have a passive character and are less effective than the "masculine" ones concentrated on the task and situation in the coping styles.

Gender identity proved to be a characteristic differentiating the shyness syndrome to a greater extent than gender (biological sex). The research showed that persons of feminine and undifferentiated identity experienced shyness in a more "painful" way. As the reason for their shyness, they indicate the fear of rejection and lack of self-confidence more often, and indeterminate persons – even the fear of intimacy. The conditions of social exposure, being in the centre of attention, situations requiring assertiveness, and also erotic situations or, especially for undif-

ferentiated persons, being in a small social group are especially difficult for them. Feminine and undifferentiated persons feel shy in the company of people of the opposite sex and strangers. They experience more intense physical reactions: violent heartbeat and trembling. They think negatively about themselves, concentrate on the opinions of others, and feel embarrassed more often. While coping with shyness, undifferentiated persons use the strategy of avoiding people, they speak in a low voice, they are silent and try to convince themselves that there are no reasons for being shy.

Whereas high intensity of the features of mental masculinity is a factor decreasing the negative consequences of shyness. Masculine and androgynous persons experience shyness more rarely. They feel shy in situations of social exposure, the threat of a negative evaluation, and in the presence of people having power and prestige, and masculine persons – in the presence of important members of their family. In situations of shyness, the physical reaction of increased sweating occurs in masculine persons. Masculine persons think positively about themselves more often and about the unpleasant aspects of shyness more rarely.

In the context of the obtained empirical data it appears that in the analysis of the phenomenon of shyness it is impossible to omit the regulatory effect of biological and psychological gender. At the same time, the knowledge concerning different ways of experiencing shyness by women and men, as well as persons of different gender identity, broadens the general area of the knowledge about the faces of shyness giving a basis for parents, educators and therapists to create more penetrating, individual methods of proceeding and ensuring adequate support to shy persons.

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