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## Excessive Maleness

### Social Intensity Syndrome (SIS)

**S**hyness plays a key role in the complex causal cycle between the self-imposed social isolation of many young men and their excessive time spent on watching porn and gaming.

Traditionally shyness implied a fear of rejection by being socially unacceptable to certain social groups or individuals, such as authorities, or those a person wished to impress, such as members of the opposite sex. In the 1970s and 1980s when I (Phil) pioneered the scientific study of shyness among adolescents and adults, about 40 percent of the US population rated themselves as currently shy people, or dispositionally shy. An equal percentage reported that they had been shy in the past but had overcome its negative impact. Fifteen percent more said that their shyness was situationally induced, such as on blind dates or having to perform in public. So only 5 percent or so were true-blue never-ever shy.

Over the past thirty years, however, that percentage has increased. In a 2007 survey of students by the Shyness Research Institute at Indiana University Southeast, 84 percent of participants said they were shy at some point in their life, 43 percent said they were presently shy, and just 1 percent said they had never been shy. Two-thirds of those who were currently shy said that their shyness was a personal problem.<sup>48</sup> The deep fear of social rejection has risen in part as a result of technology, which minimizes direct, face-to-face social interaction such as conversing with other people, seeking information, shopping, going to the bank, getting library books, and much more. The net does it all for us faster, more accurately and without any need for making social

connections. In one sense, online communication enables the very shy to make easier contact with others in the realm of asynchronistic communication. However, we believe it then makes it more difficult to make real-life connections. As one of the researchers, Bernardo Carducci, noted:

... changes in technology are affecting the nature of interpersonal communication so that we are experiencing more structured electronic interactions and less spontaneous social interactions where there is the opportunity to develop and practice interpersonal skills, such as negotiating, making conversation, reading body language and facial cues, which are important for making new friends and fostering more intimate relationships.<sup>49</sup>

The new breed of shyness then arises not from wanting to reach out but fearing social rejection from making a poor impression, but, rather, *not* wanting to make social contact because of not knowing how to, and then further distancing oneself from others the more out of practice one gets. Thus, this new shyness gets continually reinforced, internalized, and, worse, not even recognized when it leads to the absence of contact with most other people. Thus, many shy people behave awkwardly or inappropriately with peers, superiors, in unfamiliar situations, and in one-on-one opposite-sex interactions.

Aside from the steady increase in shyness, what is different today is that shyness among young men is less about a fear of rejection and more about fundamental social awkwardness—not knowing what to do, when, where or how. Most young men used to know how to dance. Now they don't even know where to look for common ground, and they wander about the social landscape like tourists in a foreign land unable and unwilling to ask for directions. Many of them don't know the language of face contact, the non-verbal and verbal set of rules that enable a person to comfortably talk with and listen to somebody else and get them to respond back in kind. This lack of social skills surfaces most especially when around desirable females.

The absence of such critical social skills, essential to navigating intimate social situations, encourages a strategy of retreat, going fail-safe.