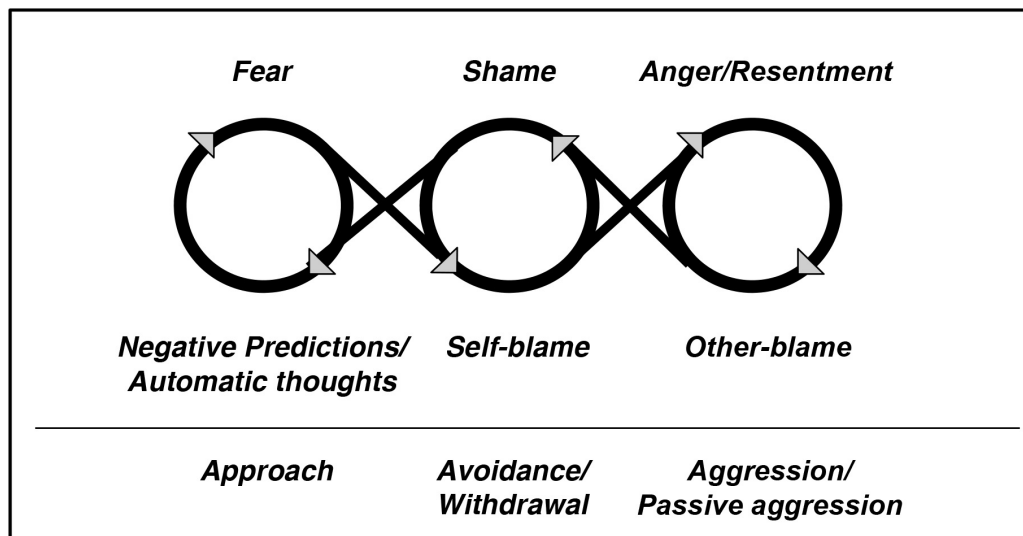


THE THREE VICIOUS CYCLES OF SHYNESS AND SOCIAL ANXIETY



• Vicious Cycle 1: Fight or Flight (Fear, Negative Predictions/Automatic Thoughts)

Subjective anxiety (SUDS, subjective units of distress, from 0 to 100) leads to negative automatic thoughts, which lead to increased SUDS, which lead to behavioral avoidance, which leads to increased anxiety in the same situation the next time it is encountered.

• Vicious Cycle 2: Shame, Self-Blame (Avoidance/Withdrawal)

Self-blame for social failure produces shame or guilt. Shame and guilt, in turn, produce more self-blame.

Self-blame and shame lead to increased vulnerability when the person enters the situation the next time.

• Vicious Cycle 3: Anger, Resentment (Aggression/Passive Aggression)

Shame is a painful affective state; the pain may be reduced by blaming others, who are seen as more powerful and untrustworthy. People may be seen as behaving harshly toward the shy person, and individuals feeling shame may not expect others to care for them.

Other-blaming attributions lead to negative beliefs about others and interfere with open-minded hypothesis testing and the forming and sustaining of relationships. This cycle can lead to resentment and passive aggression, and ultimately to more-devastating alienation and withdrawal.

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

All-or-Nothing Thinking: You see things in black-and-white categories. If your performance falls short of perfect, you see yourself as a total failure.

Overgeneralization: You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern.

Mental Filter: You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that discolors the entire beaker of water.

Disqualifying the Positive: You reject positive experiences by insisting that they “don’t count” for some reason or another. In this way you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences.

Jumping to Conclusions: You make a negative interpretation, even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion.

Mind Reading: You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you, and you don’t bother to check this out.

The Fortune-Teller Error: You anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already established fact.

Catastrophizing: If you think you have committed some social error, you expect extreme and horrible consequences for yourself. A turndown for a date is evidence that you will have a lifetime of isolation. Making a mistake at work means that you will be fired and will never get another job.

Magnification or Minimization: You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your goof-up or someone else’s achievement) or inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or the other person’s imperfections). This is also called the “binocular trick.”

Emotional Reasoning: You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are—I feel it; therefore it must be true.

“Should” Statements: You try to motivate yourself with “shoulds” and “shouldn’ts,” as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. “Musts” and “oughts” are similar offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct “should” statements toward others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.

Labeling and Mislabeled: This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself, such as I’m a loser.

When someone else's behavior rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label onto him: He's a stupid louse. Mislabeling involves describing an event with language that is highly colored and emotionally loaded.

Personalization: You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event for which, in fact, you were not primarily responsible.

Maladaptive Thought: This is any thought that is not useful to you in a given situation and does not help you reach your goal.

Compensatory Misconception: You believe that you need to inflate your achievements or impress others to be socially successful. You may think only the most aggressive and the most dominant succeed. This may be a compensation for a belief in your own inadequacy, and it may promote suspicion and hostility toward others.