

# SOCIAL INHIBITION: THEORETICAL REVIEW AND IMPLICATIONS FOR A DUAL SOCIAL INHIBITION MODEL WITHIN THE CIRCUMPLEX OF PERSONALITY METATRAITS

MARIA M. KWIATKOWSKA \* 

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

WŁODZIMIERZ STRUS 

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present a new model of social inhibition conceptualised as a dual structured construct including shyness and modesty. The complexity and diversity of these two social inhibition forms are shown across various domains of psychosocial functioning (i.e., self-image, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural). Locating shyness and modesty within the space of the Circumplex of Personality Metatraits enabled us to identify conceptually adjacent constructs to social inhibition (i.e., humiliation and humility) and put the latter into a broad personality context. Through supplementary meta-analyses of the relationships of shyness and modesty with the Big Five personality traits, we confront our theoretical proposition with existing empirical findings. Our paper indicates that social inhibition can be treated as a psychosocial disposition with two related and sharing core elements, but distinct and differentially targeted forms—more neurotic and dysfunctional shyness and more agreeable and adaptive modesty.

SOCIAL INHIBITION  
SHYNESS  
MODESTY  
HUMILIATION  
HUMILITY  
PERSONALITY METATRAITS

**KEYWORDS**

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What would happen if you were able to take a step back and view people's social lives from a distance? Most noticeably, you would be able to see that there are some individuals who confidently and easily enter into social interactions or even initiate them themselves. Conversely, you would see individuals who find it difficult to initiate and fully participate in social situations or even restrict their interpersonal relations. In everyday language, but also in clinical observations, such inhibited individuals are on the one hand labelled as shy, fearful, or self-conscious, while on the other as quiet, mild, or modest (Gough & Thorne, 1986; Gregg, Hart, Sedikides, & Kumashiro, 2008; Maslow, 1939).

The aim of the current paper is to present new theoretical framework for social inhibition. We begin with a literature review in which we analyse former approaches on defining this phenomenon. We particularly focus on personality interpretation wherein social inhibition is often treated interchangeably with shyness (e.g., Grande, Romppel, Michal, & Brähler, 2014; Poole, Tang, & Schmidt, 2018), which in turn is often treated in the literature as possessing two theoretically and empirically distinguishable subtypes (cf. Schmidt & Poole, 2019). The first subtype of shyness reflects a rather common understanding of this construct, that is, inhibited and anxious behaviour in the presence of others and novel situations. The second one, in turn, is less obvious as it refers to self-regulatory abilities and firmly internalised socio-cultural norms. We have found conceptual relationships between this second subtype of shyness and literature consideration regarding modesty. On that basis we postulate that social inhibition should be treated as a dual-structured construct with two related but distinct forms, i.e., more neurotic and dysfunctional shyness or more agreeable and adaptive modesty. These two forms of social inhibition were analysed across various domains of psychosocial functioning including self-image, cognitions, emotions, and behaviours. In order to support our theoretical proposition we refer to the Circumplex of Personality Metatraits (CPM; Strus & Cieciuch, 2017) theoretical perspective, as well as to the meta-analytical relations of shyness and modesty with Big Five personality traits. Lastly, we used the CPM to identify and describe conceptual borders of social inhibition—which are designated by constructs of humiliation/harm-proneness and humility—as well as to place social inhibition into a broad theoretical context of personality.

## 1. SOCIAL INHIBITION: CURRENT STATE ACROSS DIFFERENT RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

Social inhibition is a phenomenon that has been analysed from multiple different perspectives. On the one hand, (a) it is viewed more externally as reactions observed in a social setting, while on the other, (b) it is captured as an internal psychosocial disposition which is rather (b1) temperamentally and biologically conditioned or (b2) acquired in a socialisation process. In this vein, there is no single coherent view of this phenomenon in the literature, which leads to certain difficulties in consistent recognition of its nature (McCarty & Karau, 2017). Depending on the perspective, social inhibition is defined more specifically as (a) the social effect caused by a specific mechanism under social stimuli (e.g., Guerin, 1989, cf. McCarty & Karau, 2017), or (b) a psychosocial disposition responsible for individual differences that is either (b1) a biologically conditioned trait of temperament (e.g., Gray & McNaughton, 2003; Kagan, 2018; Kagan, Reznick, Clarke, Snidman, & Garcia-Coll, 1984), or (b2) a complex personality trait (e.g., Denollet, 2000; Denollet & Duijndam, 2019). The most concise proposition for defining social inhibition was developed under social-experimental psychology—social inhibition is captured as one of the effects

of social influence that boils down to minimising or completely eliminating behaviour in the presence of others (McCarty & Karau, 2017). In this way, the presence of others is of key importance as it precedes the inhibition of behaviour when the inhibition mechanism is evoked (Karau & Williams, 1993; Latané & Darley, 1968). Thus, social inhibition can be experienced by every human being (McCarty & Karau, 2017). It is primarily an outcome of a social situation and might be merely supported by other variables such as specific situational factors or certain individual differences (McCarty & Karau, 2017). However, it must be acknowledged that currently the most popular are the trait approaches that postulate recognising social inhibition as a set of specific features within the individual, which condition the tendency for inhibiting behaviours in the presence of others and explain individual difference in relevant reactions and behaviours. In this vein, according to the perspective of temperamental psychology—with a strong tradition of research on genetically conditioned behavioural inhibition in children established by scholars under the wing of Jerome Kagan—social inhibition reflects a stable tendency to be wary and an inability to act in a relaxed and natural way in the face of social stimuli (e.g., Garcia-Coll, Kagan, & Reznick, 1984; Kagan et al., 1984; Kagan, Reznick, & Snidman, 1987; Kagan, Reznick, & Snidman, 1988; Reznick et al., 1986; cf. Kagan, 2018). This is a biologically conditioned tendency which—at its source—is rather independent of social experiences, culture, or environment (Fox, Henderson, Marshall, Nichols, & Ghera, 2005). Social inhibition is demonstrated via a wide range of withdrawn and passive behaviours in infants and young children; inhibited reactions are especially aimed at seeking safety with a parent (such as a child burying their head in their mother's lap), retreating from a stranger (“freezing,” no response to a stranger's overtures), or expressing wariness (avoiding eye contact and interacting with a stranger in a timid fashion; Kochanska, 1991). Certainly, the temperamental approach offered a broad and precise view of biologically and genetically rooted emotional and behavioural reactions in infants and children. However, recognising social inhibition as a trait of temperament hinders the recognition of alternative, not biologically grounded reasons for developing this tendency, i.e., socio-cultural factors. Meanwhile, along with the development and confrontation with the social milieu, the human personality is hypothesised to acquire new qualities which also might contribute to inhibiting behaviour when with others.

Behavioural Inhibition System (BIS) developed under Gray's (1991) Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory (RST), which is a model of anxiety, could serve as a bridge between the temperamental and more general personality approach in recognising social inhibition in adults. Indeed, Gray (1991) used the terms temperament and personality interchangeably (see Strelau, 2012). The revised RST (Gray & McNaughton, 2003) is based on three separate, inborn, and neurobiologically-based systems that control behaviour: (1) Fight Flight and Freezing System (FFFS) which (as a punishment system) mediates responses to aversive stimuli and promotes avoidance behaviour, (2) Behavioural Approach System (BAS), which (as a reward system) mediates responses to appetitive stimuli and promotes approach behaviour, and (3) BIS which serves as a “conflict detection and resolution device” (Smillie, Pickering, & Jackson, 2006, p. 323) when BAS and BAS (conflict between two desired gratifications), FFFS and FFFS (conflict between two dangers or threats), or most often BAS and FFFS are co-activated (Britannica, 2014). Simultaneous activation of BAS and FFFS happens especially within highly unknown or unpredictable contexts, and an example of such an approach-avoidance conflict is trying to get highly coveted food in dangerous conditions, i.e., when a predator is nearby (Barker, Buzzell, & Fox, 2019; Corr, 2009; Corr, DeYoung, & McNaughton, 2013; Gray & McNaughton, 2003; Smillie et al., 2006). When the BIS is activated, the organism inhibits the ongoing behaviour and is cautious regarding the surrounding environment, focusing all its attention on the source of conflicting stimuli and assessing the risk. Such a state is highly related with anxiety and ruminations in the context of a potential threat (Corr, 2009). Depending on the evaluation, BIS leads to

conflict resolution through continued approach (promoted by BAS) or escape (promoted by the FFFS), but always with a certain tendency in favour of the latter due to enhancing the negative valence of perceived stimuli (Barker et al., 2019; Corr, 2009; Corr et al., 2013; Gray & McNaughton, 2003; Smillie et al., 2006). The RST grew out of basic animal learning research (Gray, 1987), which aimed to find the fundamental properties of brain-behavioural systems, but is now treated as a neuropsychological theory of emotion, motivation, and learning, which is crucial in developing human personality (Corr, 2004, 2009; Gray & McNaughton, 2003; Smillie et al., 2006). This means that long-term changes and consistency within systems shape the reactivity of the whole organism, which allows stable individual differences to be found in personality (Corr, 2004, 2009; Corr & McNaughton, 2008; Corr et al., 2013). The increased activity of BIS therefore favours the tendency to very easily generate motivational conflicts, and as a result, the formation of motivation-related personality traits such as anxiousness, withdrawal, depressiveness, vulnerability, and self-consciousness (DeYoung, 2010; DeYoung, Quilty, & Peterson, 2007) or psychopathology such as anxiety and mood disorders (cf. Corr et al., 2013), which have a strong impact on human social functioning.

Within the research on adult personality, Denollet (2000) described social inhibition together with another construct, i.e., negative emotionality, under the model of type D (i.e., distressed) personality as key psychological determinants of morbidity and mortality from coronary heart diseases. This psychosomatic perspective allowed to thinking about social inhibition to be extended, especially in terms of concurrent cognitions and underlying motivations. In this theoretical proposition, social inhibition is captured as a complex underlying trait which evolves on the basis of both temperamental underpinnings and lifespan experiences (Denollet & Duijndam, 2019). As a temperamental legacy it involves processes related to the perception of social threat, and possesses inhibitory potential (Denollet, 2000, 2013; Denollet & Duijndam, 2019). In turn, during development it enlarges into a prototypical pattern of characteristics. As a multi-faceted disposition, social inhibition includes: (1) a behavioural component – reflected in inhibiting one's behaviour within social interactions, (2) a cognitive component – reflected in social evaluation sensitivity and related concerns, and (3) an affective component – reflected in anxiety, withdrawal, and suppressing emotions during social events (Denollet & Duijndam, 2019). Compared to the previously presented perspectives, here the picture of social inhibition as such appears to be much more substantial and complex.

As mentioned above, the type D personality – of which social inhibition is one of the constituent elements – is deemed a key determinant of psychosomatic diseases (Denollet, 2000). To go deeper, while social inhibition understood as a personality trait alone does not seem to be a construct inherently related to psychopathology, it is often a criterion or in some way accompanies some personality disorders, more specifically, avoidant personality disorder (APD) and dependent personality disorder (DPD). The APD and DPD substantially overlap, in particular in the negative affect domain which includes such traits as anxiety, vulnerability, submissiveness, and low self-confidence (Bach & First, 2018; McClintock & McCarrick, 2017; World Health Organization, 2018), but also in terms of sensitivity to social evaluations and excessive fear of rejection and criticism (Simonelli & Parolin, 2020; World Health Organization, 1992), which are crucial in social inhibition as well. However, whereas a pervasive social inhibition and avoidance of interpersonal interactions are used as the APD criteria (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Lerner, Teitelbaum, & Meehan, 2020; World Health Organization, 1992, 2018), destructive overdependence captured by the DPD often rather leads to social inhibition and feelings of discomfort within close interpersonal relations (Bornstein, 2012; Simonelli & Parolin, 2020).

To conclude, regarding the dispositional approach, conceptualisations of social inhibition are very strongly associated with temperament and innate negative emotionality (Kagan et

al., 1984; cf. Kagan, 2018), and further attempts have been made to more accurately capture this phenomenon (e.g., Denollet, 2000; Denollet & Duijndam, 2019). Mostly, however, it is assumed that inhibition of behaviour in the presence of others is a result of emotional reactivity and cognitive sensitivity to social threat, which, in turn, leads to avoidant tendencies. This strongly coincides with another disposition thoroughly examined within the field of psychology, namely shyness, which—regardless of whether the research tradition is based on temperament or personality—is on a “conceptual par” with social inhibition and is sometimes even treated as a synonym.

## 2. SHYNESS AS A TYPICAL FACE OF SOCIAL INHIBITION AND ITS VARIETIES

Shyness is defined as a temperamentally conditioned personality trait which is disclosed by inhibition and a sense of discomfort within social, especially unfamiliar contexts (Asendorpf, 1990; Cheek & Buss, 1981). Either as traits of temperament or personality, social inhibition and shyness seem to be treated interchangeably or simply explicitly recognised as equivalent (Asendorpf, 1989; Grande et al., 2014; Poole et al., 2018; Kochanska & Radke-Yarrow, 1992; Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker, 2009)—they are defined as a “fear and inhibition in novel social situations and/or under conditions of perceived social evaluation” (Poole et al., 2018, p. 187) and rooted in temperamental inhibition. However, whereas social inhibition is mostly treated as a *temperamental trait* (cf. Kagan, 2018), shyness is rather defined in terms of a *personality trait that is conditioned by temperament* (e.g., Asendorpf, 1990; Cheek & Buss, 1981) and which might also appear or evolve along with social development. In this case, shyness is rather characterised by public self-consciousness and a wider spectrum of cognitive and affective states such as a sense of discomfort, awkwardness, embarrassment, and anxiety when interacting with others, especially in little-known social contexts and in interactions with strangers, or individuals with a higher status or the opposite sex (Asendorpf, 1990; Buss, 1980; Cheek & Briggs, 1990; Cheek & Buss, 1981; Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999).

Within a narrow temperamental interpretation, social inhibition adopts a label of “fearful/early-developing shyness” (so-called “pure” form of shyness) defined as a genetically conditioned derivative of early temperamental traits—fear and unsociability—which manifests itself by fear in social situations in the first years of the child’s life (Buss, 1980, 1986; Buss & Plomin, 1984). Consequently, both social inhibition and shyness are established as constructs very strongly linked to temperament and inherent emotional reactivity (e.g., Asendorpf, 1989; Kagan et al., 1988; Poole, Tang, & Schmidt, 2018; Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker, 2009). Likewise, in a more general personality interpretation, the conceptualisation of social inhibition leads to an unheard-of similarity with shyness—more precisely with “self-conscious/late-developing shyness”—appearing during the socialisation process (at the earliest about 4–5 years of age) and resulting from the awareness of being a social object at the centre of other people’s attention, especially when making serious mistakes in social situations (Buss, 1980, 1986; Buss & Plomin, 1984). Consequently, this translates into a strong empirical overlap between social inhibition and shyness (e.g., Grande et al., 2014) regardless of the taken theoretical approach.

However, fearful/early-developing vs self-conscious/late-developing is not the only distinction of shyness that have been established and that function within the current literature; years of research have allowed researchers to integrate or distinguish new forms or subtypes (e.g., Asendorpf, 1990; Beer, 2002; Buss, 1980, 1986; Buss & Plomin, 1984; Gough & Thorne, 1986; Litwinski, 1950; Schmidt & Poole, 2019; Xu, Farver, Yu, & Zhang, 2009). Each subtype of shyness is hypothesised to have multiple origins and different

characteristics – the content of which sometimes even goes beyond the classic definitional boundary designated for this construct. On that account, we have found this to be good inspiration for deliberations on different social inhibitions—currently treated equally with shyness—in order to show a potentially wider picture of this phenomenon.

In 1950, Litwinski noted that “shyness is an adaptation so complex and so multiform that the inconsistencies of the shy ought not to surprise us” (p. 305). Accordingly, from the very beginning of scientific considerations on the phenomenon of shyness, it was recognised as a construct so capacious in terms of content that researchers were often tempted to distinguish its various subtypes. It also raised the issue of whether these subtypes may have different backgrounds and, by extension, whether the diverse genesis of shyness (biologically vs. environmentally conditioned) has a significant impact on its final picture as an internally divided construct which captures similar (in overall view) but still different personality phenomena. Trying to capture the essence of this kind of typology, shyness can be divided into two general subtypes which are also the result of its earlier or later appearance in time (Buss, 1980, 1986; Schmidt & Poole, 2019).

Another premise for discovering different subtypes of shyness are certain nuances and differences in its understanding brought to light in the framework of research traditions other than strictly temperamental ones. A completely new view of shyness has been discovered, for example, within the psycho-lexical research and cultural studies, which allowed the recognition of shyness as a construct that is adaptive to some degree in certain cases (Beer, 2002; Gough & Thorne, 1986) or specific cultural backgrounds (e.g., Asian contexts; Xu et al., 2009; Xu, Farver, Chang, Zhang, & Yu, 2007). These new directions led some researchers to reach alternative, yet still not well-established differentiations of shyness.

## 2.1. CLASSIC BIPARTITE DIFFERENTIATIONS OF SHYNESS

The first premises for two subtypes were discovered in early evolutionary psychology since the deliberations on shyness began. Baldwin (1894; cf. Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999), for example, pointed to the existence of “primary/organic bashfulness” shared by infants and animals, and the “true bashfulness” observable only in humans after three years of age and associated with one’s own self-consciousness. Subsequently, temperamental and developmental research played a special role in distinguishing between the two best-established subtypes of shyness, attempting to answer the question of whether shyness is heritable or acquired on the path of development. The solution turned out to be quite compromising; it was recognised that shyness has two subtypes: fearful/early-developing and self-conscious/late-developing (Buss, 1980, 1986; Buss & Plomin, 1984). The self-conscious form of shyness might be an extension of the fearful one, and whereas both of these forms are present among older children and adults, only the fearful form of shyness occurs in infants (Buss & Plomin, 1984).

The other approaches that distinguished the two subtypes of shyness were perspectives locating shyness (or differentiating subgroups of shy individuals) within matrices in which the dimensions were constituted by two selected, more general constructs. Eysenck (1956), for instance, crossed personality traits of neuroticism and extraversion and pointed to the existence of “introverted shyness” (configuration of low extraversion and high neuroticism) characterised by a preference for solitude which is rather unlikely to interfere with effective participation in social life, and “neurotic/social shyness” (configuration of high extraversion and high neuroticism) characterised by deep self-consciousness and anxiety disclosed across social interactions (cf. Coplan & Weeks, 2010, Schmidt & Poole, 2019). Later on, Asendorpf (1990), when examining interindividual differences in social withdrawal in children, postulated crossing approach and avoidance social tendencies and, as a result, distinguished

three subtypes of socially withdrawn children, two of which concern shyness: (1) “shy” children trapped in approach-avoidance conflict and who desire peer interactions but simultaneously are too anxious and, as a consequence, inhibit social behaviour (also labelled as “conflicted shyness”; Coplan, Prakash, O’Neil, & Armer, 2004), and (2) “avoidant” children characterised by high avoidance and low approach motivation and who avoid their peers and reveal some signs of ambivalence in behaviour due to aggressiveness and relatively high shyness (also labelled as “avoidant shyness”; Poole, Van Lieshout, & Schmidt, 2017; Schmidt & Fox, 1999; Schmidt, Polak, & Spooner, 2005; cf. Schmidt & Poole, 2019). The third subtype of socially withdrawn children distinguished by Asendorpf (1990) does not concern shyness, as it included individuals with a low approach motive and no signs of avoidance or fear. Such children were more interested in solitary-constructive play with objects than in peer play (Asendorpf, 1990).

In this way, two types of shyness are well established within theoretical considerations. Although understanding of these two differs more or less across various theoretical proposals, this proposal seems to possess some common core components in respect to the two types of conceptualisation of shyness. Importantly, two types of shyness within this proposal, albeit having a different genesis (in temperamental fear vs. socio-emotional development), slightly different causes (novel social settings vs. awareness of social evaluation) and symptoms (e.g., on the emotional level – the primary emotions such as distress and fear vs. primary-secondary emotional blends such as embarrassment and shame), are strongly related and even merge during development, which makes them fully deserve a common label of shyness (Schmidt & Poole, 2019).

## 2.2. ALTERNATIVE DIFFERENTIATIONS OF SHYNESS AND NEW DIRECTIONS IN SHYNESS RESEARCH

A special inspiration for defining shyness—alternative to the temperamental branch of psychological research—was the results of psycho-lexical studies which followed a hypothesis that “the most important individual differences in human transactions will come to be encoded as single terms in some or all of the world’s languages” (Goldberg, 1990, p. 1216). According to this research perspective, detailed linguistic terms represent broader basic human characteristics. Gough and Thorne (1986) aimed to identify adjectives that would be diagnostic of shyness and revealed something that they expected only intuitively, based on their own experience gathered during their work in the personality assessment centre – namely, that the concept of shyness itself consists of both favourable and unfavourable qualities. This was in opposition to the current tendency of thinking about shyness as a trait that holds back the expression of one’s real self and constitutes a serious barrier to social functioning and that was treated, at least in American society, almost as a disability or disease to overcome (Leary, 1986; Zimbardo, 1977; Zimbardo, Pilkonis, & Norwood, 1974).

In conceptual analysis, when examining a single construct within psycho-lexical research there is a possibility of analytical navigation on a wide “map” of descriptors on which one might circumscribe the isomorph capturing all the strongest indicators of the construct of interest (Gough & Thorne, 1986). However, these indicators might occur jointly in a form of clusters representing different isomorphs and carrying rather different qualities. In this vein, Gough and Thorne (1986) found shyness to be constituted by two rather separate clusters: (1) “shy-positive” – characterised by modesty, attention to the needs of others, but also certain self-regulatory aspects (exemplary indicative items: “discreet,” “modest,” “reserved,” “self-controlled,” “sensitive”), and (2) “shy-negative” – reflecting most popular conceptions of shyness as characterised by anxiety, inhibition, and diffidence (“anxious,” “awkward,” “inhibited,” “timid,” “withdrawn”). A supplementary “shy-balanced” cluster was distinguished

in order to represent a blend of both favourable and unfavourable aspects of shyness, which taken together seemed to be a relatively non-pejorative assessment of shyness.

Traces of similar results, which amplify the stereotypical isomorph of shyness by also capturing its more “positive” aspects, can be found within the psycho-lexical research on personality structure. As opposed to the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality developed under a questionnaire approach, which underlines mostly anxious, inferior, and self-conscious aspects of shyness while ascribing it to the basic domain of Neuroticism (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992), models developed within a psycho-lexical approach, such as the (psycho-lexical) Big Five model (Goldberg, 1990), the Abridged Big Five Dimensional Circumplex (Hofstee, De Raad, & Goldberg, 1992; Goldberg, 1999) or the Big Six/HEX-ACO (Ashton & Lee, 2001, 2002), suggest placing shyness within the domain of Extraversion (and more precisely its negative pole, i.e., introversion). In this way, psycho-lexical models of personality structure more strongly underline motivational aspects of shyness, referring to a lack of social boldness, passiveness, reserve or even restraint, rather devoid of excess of negative emotionality. In some way, such a contribution allowed us to capture shyness alternatively – no longer as just a “socially maladaptive” trait which only disturbs one’s interactions with others, but rather as a construct that carries both an inhibitory and self-regulatory potential which results in very similar inhibited expressions.

A step further in recognising shyness was made within the cross-cultural research which aimed to compare the knowledge about shyness gained while studying Western societies to observations collected on the East. In Chinese Mandarin, for example, the concept of shyness has a broader meaning than in the languages of Western countries (especially Anglo-Saxon)—it captures both (1) passiveness grounded in social fearfulness/anxiety that impedes psychological functioning, and (2) social restraint resulting from self-control and the need to fit in with others which supports group functioning (Xu, Farver, Chang, Zhang, & Yu, 2007). In this way, Xu and collaborators (2007, 2009) distinguished two distinct subtypes of shyness within a Chinese setting – “anxious shyness” and “regulated shyness” – the key to this distinction was that they understood effortful control as the ability of an individual to refrain from reacting to stimuli coming directly from the environment while pursuing a goal whose cognitive representation was created by the individual (Rothbart, 1989). In contrast to the reactive inhibition resulting from fear or anxiety, this kind of self-control is recognised as an active inhibitory system (Kochanska, Coy, & Murray, 2001); therefore, while anxiously-shy individuals are characterised by relatively insufficient effortful control and have difficulty in taming their avoidant reactions, those representing the regulated-shy subtype are relatively high in effortful control and actively steer their personal expression in order to be socially unobtrusive and maintain group harmony (Xu et al., 2009). Both of these subtypes are hypothesised to have a common antecedent—“shyness toward strangers”—which emerges early in life and, depending on the regulatory capacity, may develop either into anxious or regulated shyness (Xu et al., 2009). Apart from effortful control, however, cultural factors are not without significance when it comes to distinguishing these two subtypes of shyness—the most prominent examples being behaviours that are socially valued and the parenting practices promoted in a given culture. In Confucian cultures, maintaining harmonious social relations is an important value, and the group-interest is often equal to the self-interest (Xu et al., 2007). Therefore, modest behaviours typical of regulated shyness, such as modesty, not boasting, not engaging in potential conflicts, but also politeness and attentiveness for the needs of others (Xu et al., 2007; Xu, Zhang, & Hee, 2014) are perceived as adaptive especially in Eastern cultures. In turn, within Western cultures, which highly promote individualistic behaviours, the distinction of regulated shyness is less apparent, though (due to the factor of effortful control) it is also possible to occur (e.g., Beer, 2002; Xu et al., 2009). Consequently, it is an anxious shyness that fully resembles the North American notion of self-conscious shyness as characterised by fear or anxiety in



social situations, avoiding social contact, and sensitivity to negative social evaluation (Xu et al., 2014) which in Eastern societies might lead to an increased risk of social exclusion (Xu et al., 2007, 2009).

In brief, distinguishing alternative shyness subtypes seems to be both an inspiring idea and a conceptual hurdle for researchers. Especially because it seems that shy behaviour is displayed not only by individuals who react in an inhibited way but also by individuals who “act in a reserved, modest, unassuming way in the presence of others, without signs of fear or anxiety” (Asendorpf, 2010, p. 161). Modesty (otherwise called “self-regulated inhibition,” “regulated shyness,” “positive shyness”; Asendorpf, 2010; Gough & Thorne, 1986; Poole & Schmidt, 2020; Xu et al., 2007, 2009) is, therefore, a psychological construct that is thought to very easily “impersonate” shyness in terms of social behaviour, even though both of these constructs do not share the same origin. Whereas shyness reflects a temperamental inhibition which is further confronted with the social milieu and impedes the development of effortful control, modesty is less determined by inherent reactivity and is rather sourced within strongly developed self-regulatory abilities and firmly internalised socio-cultural norms. In that spirit, we posit following Asendorpf’s (2010) thought that modesty is a construct which might finely complement the wider picture of social inhibition.

### 3. MODESTY AS A POTENTIAL SECOND FACE OF SOCIAL INHIBITION

Modesty in psychological science is defined either as a typical social behaviour or phenomenon, e.g., a self-presentation strategy, or as a psychosocial disposition, that is, a character or personality trait. Treated as a social phenomenon (Chen et al., 2009; Cialdini & de Nicholas, 1989; Gregg et al., 2008; Shi et al., 2017), the modesty mechanism entails “a moderate self-view—seeing oneself as intermediate, rather than as very positive or very negative, on key personal attributes such as personality traits, abilities and skills, physical appearance, and social behavior” (Sedikides, Gregg, & Hart, 2007, p. 165) and is used—more or less consciously—to support favourable social perception (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and a sense of social adjustment (Sedikides et al., 2007). It is especially valued in the East because it entails a certain prosocial orientation aimed at fostering relational harmony through minimising a focus on the self (Chiu, Wan, Cheng, Kim, & Yang, 2011; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Cai, 2015; Shi et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2007). Therefore, in a more processual perspective, modesty is a specific moderate self-view which engages a scope of attention-avoiding, non-boastful, and restrained behaviours that foster deflecting attention from the self, followed by social acceptance (Ashton et al., 2004; Gregg et al., 2008; Chen et al., 2009; Sedikides et al., 2007).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) proposed a slightly different, uplifting look at this phenomenon by including modesty (along with humility) in their catalogue of 24 character strengths defined as “traitlike” processes or mechanisms that lead to cultivating virtues recognised as core positive characteristics valued over the centuries by philosophers and religious thinkers or present in the ethos of societies (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). As a strength of temperance, modesty is more external and socially oriented—it arises from an inner sense of humility, but also from situational pressure and appropriateness, and manifests itself in the form of a moderate estimation of oneself and propriety in dress and social behaviour in order to present oneself accurately and divert attention from oneself (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Although modesty in this approach resembles a social strategy to a large extent, it manifests itself in a pervasive pattern of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, and is stable across time (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), which leads to treating it in terms of a personality trait or individual difference as well.

As a trait of personality, modesty is defined by viewing oneself as an ordinary person, and behaving in an unassuming and self-effacing manner. Most often, however, modesty is recognised through the prism of its opposites, such as vanity, bragging or feelings of superiority, grandiosity, and entitlement (Ashton et al., 2014; Costa et al., 1991; Costa & McCrae, 1992; Crowe, Lynam, & Miller, 2018; McCrae & Costa, 2003). While in this perspective there is some definitional consensus regarding the content of modesty (McCrae & Costa, 2008), there is no agreement about its position in the personality structure depending on the adopted model of basic personality domains (or simply factor solution). In a five-factor solution, postulated in a Big Five model and FFM (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 2003), modesty is assigned to the domain of Agreeableness, whereas in a six-factor solution, postulated in the HEXACO model, modesty is assigned to the domain of Honesty-Humility (Ashton & Lee, 2001, 2002; Ashton et al., 2014). Despite both of these domains seeming to reflect a cooperative tendency or reciprocal altruism (Ashton et al., 2014), and, moreover, according to proponents of the Big Five, seeming to be conceptually and empirically indistinguishable (Crowe et al., 2018; Lynam, Crowe, Vize, & Miller, 2020; McCrae & Costa, 2008), a subtle but key difference between them lies in the adaptive and socially desirable nature of Agreeableness versus the moral nature of Honesty-Humility which is rather peripheral to the former (Ashton et al., 2014) and somewhat closer to the area of virtues or values. To illustrate this difference, Ashton and Lee (2020) use a juxtaposition of tolerance for being exploited by others (present in Agreeableness factor) and the tendency to avoid exploitation of others and to treat them fairly (present in Honesty-Humility factor; see also Ashton et al., 2014; Hilbig, Zettler, Leist, & Heydasch, 2013). Even with this perspective, however, modesty is a tricky facet trait because—when considered conceptually and apart from domain deliberations—it is spread between Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness (as it virtually meets the “criteria” delineated by both of these factors), but also, as suggested by McCrae and Costa (2008) and as we point out and discuss further, exhibits more introverted aspects, which possibly opens a gateway to coupling modesty with other kindred constructs.

#### 4. MODESTY AND SHYNESS AS SISTER-CONSTRUCTS

Across the literature there are many traces of relating modesty and shyness, either theoretically or empirically (e.g., Asendorpf, 2010; Ben-Ze'ev, 1993; Gregg et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2019; Maslow, 1939; Timmerman, 2006; Xu et al., 2009; see Kwiatkowska & Rogoza, 2019a). According to McDougall (1963; cf. Cheek & Melchior, 1990), these two constructs share the common element of self-consciousness. Indeed, in the very first observations, both shyness and modesty, together with shame, were deemed as “emotions that excite a blush” (Gruenewald, Dickerson, & Kemeny, 2007, p. 70) and that occur due to intensified preoccupation with the social self, i.e., how others might perceive us in social situations (Darwin, 1872/1965; cf. Gruenewald et al., 2007). That relation is also reflected in psycho-lexical research; for example, in the Oriya language, modesty and shyness are covered by the same word encompassing a broad space of self-conscious emotions, which is also used as a label for two different emotional facial expressions – one related to praise (e.g., when hearing compliments) and another to punishment (e.g., when doing something wrong; Haidt & Keltner, 1999; Menon & Shweder, 1994, cf. Goetz & Keltner, 2007). This is in agreement with a view that modesty is treated as a positive, favourable connotation of shyness (Ben-Ze'ev, 1993; Gough & Thorne, 1986; Zimbardo, 1977; cf. Cheek, 2007; Cheek & Melchior, 1990).

Within theoretical considerations and more complex personality theories, modesty and shyness were also often close to each other (even somewhere at the initial stage of constructing a model, e.g., Goldberg, 1990). For example, Maslow (1939, 1954), in a clinical

examination, grouped together several attributes of personality under one syndrome of “dominance-feeling” within which, in turn, he observed the “tendency toward a natural clustering of the parts into groups that seem intrinsically to belong close together” (Maslow, 1954, p. 315). This resulted in two closely related groups referring to qualities focused around (1) modesty, conventionality, morality, and (2) shyness, timidity, low self-esteem, and lack of self-confidence.

#### 4.1. RELATION OF MODESTY AND SHYNESS IN A PERSPECTIVE OF GENERAL PERSONALITY STRUCTURE

Nowadays, within a perspective of personality structure, such a possible relation of modesty and shyness is rather contradicted due to categorically separating them into different personality domains. For example, in the FFM, modesty is a facet of Agreeableness while shyness is a facet of Neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 2003). Nevertheless, recent empirical research supports the hypothesis on the mutual relation between shyness and modesty—as they are both related through the (negative) relation with Extraversion and differentiated by the relations with Agreeableness (modesty) and Neuroticism (shyness, e.g., Kwiatkowska & Rogoza, 2019a). Moreover, these empirical results also call into question the adequacy of the location of the Modesty facet within the FFM measurement model (Herrmann & Pfister, 2013; Vassend & Skrandal, 2011). At first, Costa and McCrae (1985) attributed items related to modesty and unassuming behaviour to (low) Assertiveness, a facet of Extraversion (in the NEO Personality Inventory); only after they developed new scales to measure facets of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (in the NEO Personality Inventory – Revised) did they admit that these items were misplaced and, consequently, they attributed them to Modesty, a facet of Agreeableness (Costa & McCrae, 1992, 1995; Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991). Despite this refinement, the Modesty facet within the FFM shows the strongest factor loadings for Extraversion, just after Agreeableness (e.g., Costa et al., 1991; McCrae, Costa, Del Pilar, Rolland, & Parker, 1998); it is also often the case that Extraversion is the strongest correlating factor for Modesty (e.g., Hahn, Gottschling, & Spinath, 2012; Oshio, Abe, Cutrone, & Gosling, 2013; Kwiatkowska & Rogoza, 2019a) or that Modesty loads a latent factor which is a blend of the facet scales of Extraversion and Agreeableness (e.g., Le Corff & Busque-Carrier, 2016). From this perspective, modesty not only represents the moral aspects of high Agreeableness, but is also represented through the motivational-behavioural component of low Extraversion which encompasses limited behavioural activity in social interactions, and which places it close to shyness (Kwiatkowska & Rogoza, 2019a), especially when we take into account the above-mentioned psycho-lexical (e.g., Big Five or HEXACO) location of shyness in the negative pole of Extraversion.

#### 4.2. RELATION OF MODESTY AND SHYNESS IN THE INTERPERSONAL CIRCUMPLEX PERSPECTIVE

Similar relations of modesty and shyness might be observed in Wiggins’s (1995) Interpersonal Circumplex (IPC)—a model based on the two basic dimensions represented as independent axes, i.e., Dominance – alternatively labelled as Agency or Status, and Warmth – alternatively labelled as Communion or Love, which create a structure meant to cover all interpersonal behaviours and traits. The position of particular behaviours/traits in this matrix space is illustrated through an angular location, i.e., a shift in relation to the horizontal and vertical axis—in this way a 90° angle indicates the orthogonality of the dimensions

(i.e., no relation), an angle  $> 90^\circ$  indicates a negative relation, and an angle  $< 90^\circ$  indicates a positive relation (Wiggins, 1995; Wiggins, Trapnell, & Phillips, 1988). Wiggins (1995) presents interpersonal traits/behaviours within the circumplex model continuously in eight categories, called octants (see Figure 1). Two of these octants are to some extent a reflection of shyness and modesty. Namely, the Unassured-Submissive (HI) octant—characterised by fear and lack of self-confidence in interpersonal relations, reduced self-esteem, and avoidance of situations of being the centre of others' attention—reflects shyness, whereas the Unassuming-Ingenuous (JK) octant—characterised by respect and politeness towards others, willingness to provide help and support, and avoidance of conflicts—reflects modesty (Wiggins, 1995). The angle between HI and JK is exactly  $45^\circ$  which indicates a fairly close relation (Wiggins, 1995; Wiggins et al., 1988) —reflects proximity though not overlap between shyness and modesty. Moreover, the IPC framework allows not only the precise determination of the relationship between shyness and modesty, but also interpretation of the former only in terms of Dominance/Agency/Status deficiency, while the latter as additionally possessing the elements of Warmth/Communion/Love.

Studies on unifying hierarchical-structural personality models and the IPC have demonstrated that the dimensions of Extraversion and Agreeableness (but likewise the dimension of Honesty-Humility, whose location on the IPC was very similar to the location of Agreeableness, i.e., focused around the JK octant; Barford, Zhao, & Smillie, 2015) fully correspond to the constructs covered by the IPC (Barford et al., 2015; DeYoung, Weisberg, Quilty, & Peterson, 2013; McCrae & Costa, 1989) and are rotated relative to its two main dimensions (Dominance and Warmth) by  $22.5^\circ$  (in case of the Big Five/FFM; DeYoung et al., 2013) to about  $35^\circ$  (in case of HEXACO; Barford et al., 2015), as depicted in Figure 1. In this light, the IPC on the one hand seems to almost adequately cover modesty as a construct that is mostly a blend of low Extraversion and high Agreeableness (or/and Honesty-Humility). On the other hand, the IPC seems to be deficient in covering the whole content of shyness—especially its disadvantage features—due to the minimal coverage of the neurotic and self-conscious nature of some interpersonal traits/behaviours. In other words, the IPC seems to fail in capturing these aspects of shyness that are beyond low Extraversion and seem to be of key importance, which was expressed, e.g., in attributing shyness to the factor of Neuroticism within the FFM (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 2003). The IPC is therefore a matrix that depicts the mutual relations of shyness and modesty well, although in terms of the scope of the content it does not possess such a broad range as hierarchical-structural models of personality traits. However, due to some theoretical ambiguities within the latter, it seems that integrating shyness and modesty into one, more general phenomenon would be possible when reaching a consensus between the circumplex and hierarchical-structural approach to personality.

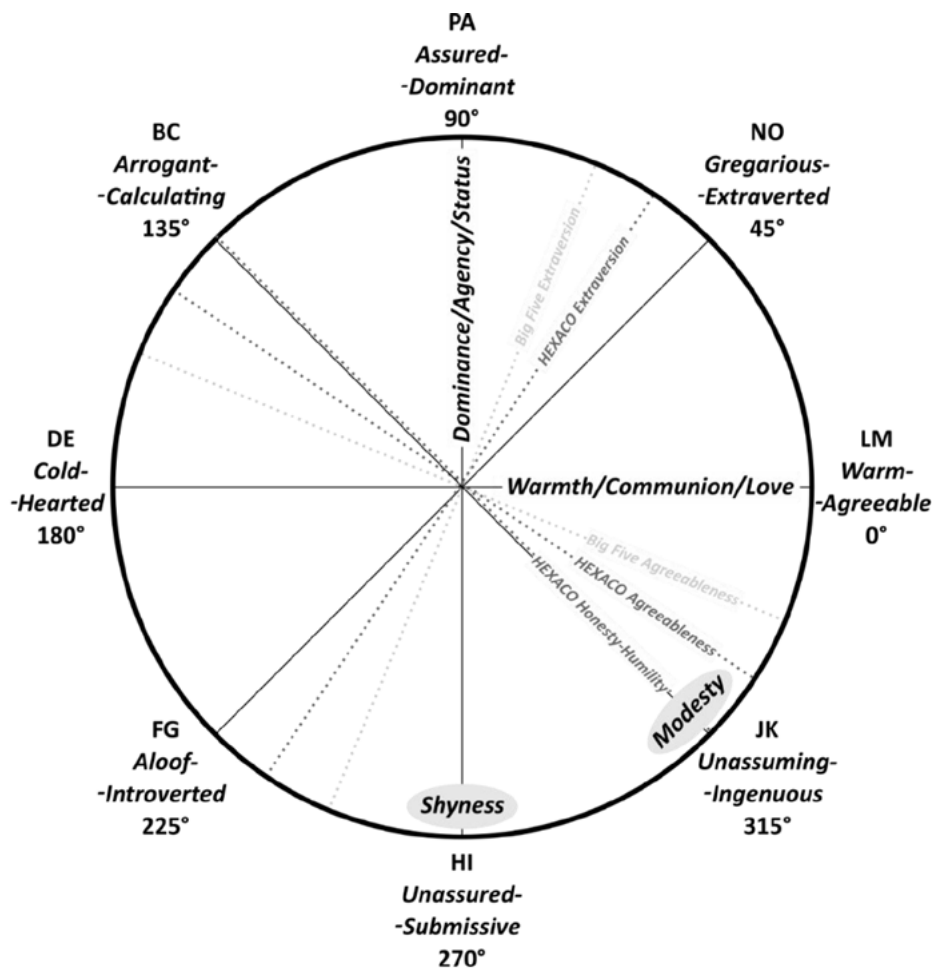


Figure 1. Shyness and Modesty Inscribed within the Interpersonal Circumplex as referring to Wiggins et al. (1988), DeYoung et al. (2013), and Barford et al. (2015)

Note. Adapted and modified from *Interpersonal Adjective Scales professional manual* (p. 4), by J.S. Wiggins, 1995, Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources. Copyright 1995 by the Psychological Assessment Resources.

## 5. PROPOSING A NEW THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL INHIBITION

Given the signalled difficulties and challenges within conceptualising social inhibition, we put forward for consideration construing this phenomenon as a complex psychosocial disposition of a twofold nature – containing both shyness and modesty – under the *Dual Social Inhibition Model* (DSIM). By defining social inhibition as a *psychosocial disposition* we would like to stress that it is a recurrent tendency of ambiguous origin—developed by virtue of certain temperamental predispositions (biologically-based basic behavioural response patterns; García-Coll, et al., 1984; Kagan, 2001; Kagan, et al., 1987; cf. Cavigelli, 2018; Kagan, 2018) and environmental, social, and cultural factors influencing the individual throughout the lifespan (Fox et al., 2005; Klein & Mumper, 2018; Poole et al., 2018; Schmidt & Poole, 2019; Xu et al., 2009).

Furthermore, we posit capturing social inhibition broadly enough so as not to dictate one specific path of development for this disposition. For many years it was considered the outcome of, above all, temperamentally conditioned reactivity or behavioural inhibition,

while the other factors, such as culture, social experiences, or parenting practices, were deemed to play a secondary role. Consequently, the latter were rather treated as intensity modifiers—for instance, social inhibition was supposed to increase after stressful social events or through overprotective parenting, and thus, contribute to its maladaptive nature (Klein & Mumper, 2018). The opposite views, however, suggested treating such environmental factors as mediators that accommodate a qualitative change within the individual. According to this perspective, specific settings, e.g., Eastern culture, where unassuming behaviour is beneficial for maintaining social harmony, might both (a) support the development of social inhibition within uninhibited children due to its socially desirable nature, and (b) add a certain adaptive quality to the inherent inhibition of temperamentally inhibited children, and thus, improve their social functioning (Rubin et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2009). Within the proposed framework we aim to acknowledge transactions between temperament and the environment as key determinants for inhibiting behaviour when interacting with others (Klein & Mumper, 2018; Poole et al., 2018; Poole & Schmidt, 2020; Schmidt & Poole, 2019); however, without giving special ranks to these factors when considering social inhibition at a general level (McCarty & Karau, 2017) which is in contrast to current temperamental and personality perspectives capturing social inhibition (e.g., Denollet & Duijndam, 2019; Kagan et al., 1984; Kagan, 2018).

In this way we would like to open the door to the hypothesis that social inhibition might have its qualitatively different “tinges” depending on its genesis and nature but also depending on the centrality of the factors located within temperament (e.g., high avoidant vs. low approach motivation) and within environment (e.g., overprotective and controlling vs. tolerant and supportive parenting styles, low agentic vs. high communal social motives, or negative vs. positive social events). Under that reasoning, the tenets and definitional structure of the proposed dual social inhibition model are explicated below.

### 5.1. SOCIAL INHIBITION IS REVEALED WITHIN SOCIAL CONTEXTS AND ON THE BASIS OF PERCEIVED SOCIAL EVALUATION

Social context is a prerequisite for activating the disposition of social inhibition. As the term itself implies, *social* inhibition appears in the presence of others and in social interactions (Asendorpf, 1994; Buss, 1980; Denollet, 2000, 2005; Fox et al., 2005; Kagan et al., 1987; Klein & Mumper, 2018; McCarty & Karau, 2017). However, not every class of social stimuli will trigger an inhibited reaction because some of them are natural and secure to the individual and, thus, do not disturb the state of being free from evaluations of others and do not pose a potential threat to the self. Exemplars of such familiar social stimuli are being in a mother’s arms (for children) or meeting close friends and relatives (for adolescents and adults; Asendorpf, 1994; Denollet, 2000, 2005). Therefore, the disposition of social inhibition can be disclosed only within the “social world” (Poole et al., 2018, p. 190), and more specifically, within both real and imaginary (anticipated or recalled) social interactions, as well as on the basis of focusing on oneself as a social object and the premonition of being evaluated by others (Buss, 1980; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1969). Moreover, another significant attribute of social situations that makes it threatening for the self is unfamiliarity in the sense of context or particularly (unfamiliar) people involved (Asendorpf, 1994; Buss, 1980; Fox et al., 2005; Kagan et al., 1987). Such elements enhance the unpredictability of situations and difficulties in identifying proper conduct, which together increase the probability of inappropriate behaviour and actual or alleged negative social evaluation made by others. Therefore, social evaluation and unfamiliarity with the social situation are core or crucial elements of social interactions which constitute a situational, triggering context of social inhibition. Although McCarty and Karau (2017) postulate focusing on social inhibition as

an outcome and not restricting it to an effect of a limited set of influential factors embedded within both an individual and situation, the dispositional approach allows us to look for certain processes leading to inhibiting behaviour in the presence of others. In turn, when analysing social inhibition at the dispositional level and following the synthesis for the person-situation debate (Fleeson & Nofhle, 2008), certain types of situations might serve as a specific trigger for displaying this complex disposition, and thus differentiate it from other, similar and often strongly related individual differences. What is more, some diversity within situational factors may also lead to the occurrence of specific forms of social inhibition and thus help to distinguish between them.

## 5.2. SOCIAL INHIBITION MANIFESTS IN VARIOUS DOMAINS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL FUNCTIONING AND HAS AN INTERNAL, COMPONENT-BASED STRUCTURE WITH SPECIFIC FUNCTIONAL ASPECTS

Agreeing with previous conceptions (e.g., Denollet, 2013; Denollet & Duijndam, 2019; Poole et al., 2018; Schmidt & Poole, 2019), we posit treating social inhibition as a multifaceted construct and describe it through the basic domains of psychosocial functioning which develop throughout the lifespan. These domains—which refer to one’s self-image, cognitions, emotions, and behaviours—together with the specific social context (as already mentioned above) outline the definitional components of social inhibition. Although our approach to social inhibition is rather structural, we believe that the chronology of components also has functional significance.

### 5.2.1. Social Inhibition in the Self-Image Domain

Self-esteem is a crucial parameter of the self-image domain which plays a central role in social inhibition. In a global sense, self-esteem refers to “the way people generally feel about themselves” (Brown & Marshall, 2006, p. 4) which is relatively stable across time as well as situations and is explicitly measured throughout involving conscious self-assessment (Buhrmester, Blanton, & Swann, 2010). However, in line with the body of previous research, self-esteem is a heterogeneous construct (Zeigler-Hill, Clark, & Beckman, 2011), and in order to fully understand this phenomenon researchers take into consideration several of its aspects such as stability (whether self-esteem is stable across long- or short-term periods of time), contingency (whether there are any particular domains of functioning in which self-esteem is threatened or boosted; Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003), and implicit self-esteem (whether self-esteem differs at conscious and unconscious levels; Buhrmester et al., 2010; cf. Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Zeigler-Hill et al., 2011). We find this approach extremely helpful in understanding the role of self-view in social inhibition and precisely defining the self-image component within this psychosocial disposition.

In our view, social inhibition possesses the qualities of uncertain low self-esteem as designated by Zeigler-Hill et al. (2011): It is generally lowered, unstable, and highly contingent on social reinforcements, and—due to the nature of social inhibition—it always concerns the social self (i.e., how an individual perceives oneself in relation to other people; Gruenewald et al., 2007; McDougall, 1963) and results in either a sense of inferiority or at most mediocrity. Low self-esteem, loneliness, social anxiety, and other internalising problems might be the long-term costs of withdrawn and avoidant social behaviours which in turn are to some extent the descendants of temperamental behavioural inhibition (Crozier, 1981b; Rubin et al., 2009; Schmidt & Poole, 2019). Nevertheless, lowered self-esteem is virtually formed during development and based on a broad range of social experiences,

especially those in which behaviourally inhibited individuals experience anxiety, failure, or rejection and, at the same time, do not receive adequate support from the surrounding social environment (Fox et al., 2005; Rubin et al., 2018). It is worth noting that the decrease affects mostly the explicit, social aspect of self-esteem (i.e., rather than self-esteem in a global sense; Buss, 1980; Cheek & Melchior, 1990; Crozier, 1981b, 1999, 2010; Henderson & Zimbardo, 1998; Miller, 1999; Mosher & White, 1981). This seems to be particularly important when also considering the implicit aspect of self-esteem which refers to its indirect measurement (Buhrmester et al., 2010) as well as to the view of object relation theorists that “the most fundamental source of self-esteem is the internalization of the evaluation of a person by significant others, particularly parental figures” (Epstein, 2006, p. 72). In that spirit, implicit self-esteem might be treated as a deeply rooted sense of self-worth which provides resilience in situations that are critical for the self and influence one’s feelings, behaviours, and interpretation of events during development (Epstein, 2006). Consequently, implicit self-esteem is rather orthogonal in relation to explicit self-esteem as both of these aspects are hypothesised to give rise to four configurations, two of which—i.e., low explicit/low implicit and low explicit/high implicit, are supposed to be covered by the self-image component of social inhibition. The reason for this is that socially inhibited individuals possess consciously (or explicitly) lowered levels of social self-esteem, not low level of self-worthiness “deep inside” (i.e., unconsciously or implicitly). As a result, at the global level, social inhibition manifests itself in a sense of inferiority in relation to other people or just in a conviction that one is not superior to them in any respect—in this regard, a socially inhibited individual may feel a sense of being worse or merely not better than others.

### 5.2.2. Social Inhibition in the Cognitive Domain

Thoughts of socially inhibited individuals are easily preoccupied with being evaluated by others (Denollet, 2013; Denollet & Duijndam, 2019). According to the previous research, social inhibition is cognitively biased toward social threats which unwittingly leads to concerns and anxious reactions, even during neutral events (Grynberg, Gidron, Denollet, & Luminet, 2012; Kagan, 2001). This is related to the activation of certain brain regions involved in perceiving the action goal of the observed other and, thus, increased vigilance (Kret, Denollet, Grèzes, & de Gelder, 2011).

Within the proposed framework, we posit that social evaluation concerns occur regardless of the content, valence (either positive or negative), and reality of these evaluations. A good example here seems to be the juxtaposition of situations of praise and punishment; a socially inhibited person might feel tense in both cases because he or she is a subject of evaluation and the attention of others which is always perceived as a potential threat to the self. People are generally aware of being an object of others’ perception and, subsequently, they engage in thinking about how they can be perceived by others; these imaginings are called meta-perceptions (Back & Kenny, 2010). Socially inhibited individuals are more (or more often) socially aware and their thoughts are centred not only on how they can be perceived but also how they can be evaluated by others. One could say that their meta-perceptions are supplemented by so called meta-evaluations, i.e., thinking about how others might judge them, which are activated on the basis of “meta-self-consciousness” (Cheek & Melchior, 1990, p. 51; McDougall, 1963). The latter is otherwise called public self-consciousness and is strongly acquired during development (Buss, 1980).

Self-consciousness refers to the “coding, processing, and integration of information about the self,” (Zaborowski, 1987, p. 52) and public self-consciousness is defined as the individual tendency to focus on the impression that the individual makes on other people, and on those aspects of self-image that are available to other people’s observations such



as appearance or social behaviour (Buss, 1980; Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). Consequently, the activation of public self-consciousness in socially inhibited individuals is more frequent and forces them to divide their attention in two directions—on one hand, they are absorbed in meta-perceptions and social (meta-)evaluations, while on the other they are intensively engaged in monitoring one's own actual social behaviour in order to avoid other people's attention and evaluation. However, once public self-consciousness is activated and social evaluation concerns are enhanced, they might differ depending on one's more or less socially-oriented goals and motives, as well as the ability to voluntarily control attention and modulate reactive responses through, e.g., cognitive reframing of the possibly distressing stimuli or shifting attention away from this stimuli (Eisenberg, Shepard, Fabes, Murphy, & Guthrie, 1998; Rothbart & Derryberry, 1981; cf. Fox et al., 2005).

### 5.2.3. Social Inhibition in the Emotional Domain

Perceived social threats to the self—in a subsequent, emotional domain—activate a sense of tension and uncertainty related to social evaluation and awareness of being at the centre of others' attention (Buss, 1980, 1986; Buss & Plomin, 1984). More specifically, feeling uncertain refers to “not understanding what is happening, and feeling unsure about what will happen next” (Tiedens & Linton, 2001, p. 974) which further “prompts a discomforting, uneasy sensation that may be affected (reduced or escalated) through cognitive, emotive, or behavioural reactions” (Penrod, 2001, p. 241). In our view, in regard to social functioning, this kind of wariness covers a spectrum of anxiety-based and/or (public) self-conscious emotions which might occur as a descendant, on the one hand, of inherent emotional reactivity (Fox et al., 2005; Kagan et al., 1984; Kochanska et al., 2001; cf. Kagan, 2018) and, on the other, of intense preoccupation with the social self as coming forth during development (Asendorpf, 1990; Cheek & Briggs, 1990; Cheek & Buss, 1981; Cheek & Melchior, 1990; Gruenewald et al., 2007; McDougall, 1963; Schmidt & Poole, 2019). Furthermore, we posit that these emotional reactions—as nested within the concept of social inhibition—differ in terms of their intensity and durability (whether the emotional response goes beyond the situation that triggers the inhibited reaction) in relation to individuals' self-regulatory capacity (Asendorpf, 2010; Han, 2011; Hartman, 2015; Rothbart, 1989; Xu et al., 2007, 2009). In this way socially inhibited individuals may either experience rather temporary exposure embarrassment and abashment (Goetz & Keltner, 2007; Lewis, 2016; Miller, 1995) or shame and evaluative embarrassment which are much more prolonged over time and which possess the potential for a drop in one's social self-esteem (Crozier, 1999, 2010; Henderson & Zimbardo, 1998; Litwinsky, 1950; Lewis, 2016; Miller, 1995; Mosher & White, 1981).

### 5.2.4. Social Inhibition in the Behavioural Domain

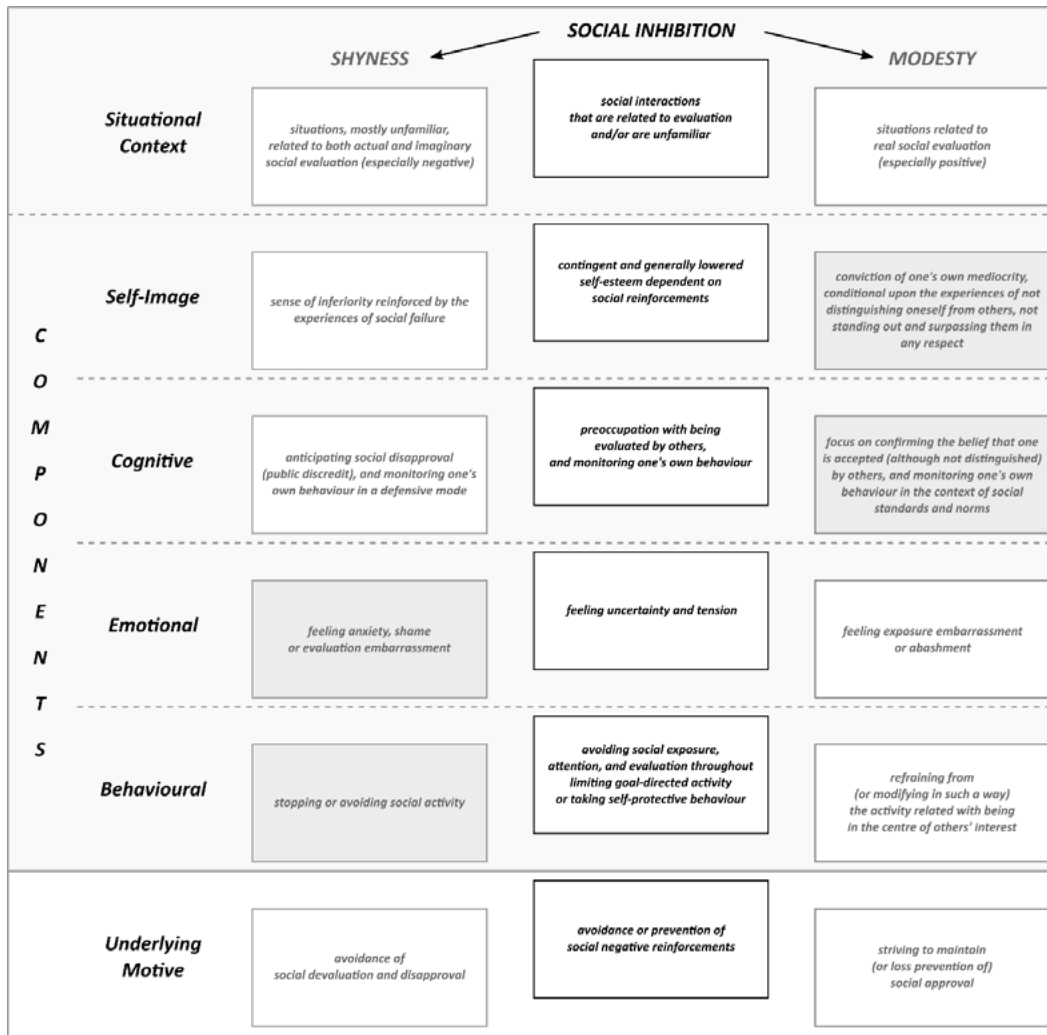
Social inhibition encompasses constraint of actual behaviour of a twofold nature as it covers both limiting or modifying goal-directed activity and taking “protective” avoidant behaviour. In this way it possibly integrates reactive and self-regulatory behavioural reactions which often result in similar inhibited expression (McCarty & Karau, 2017) but in fact have different genesis and causes (Asendorpf, 2010; Kochanska et al., 2001; Rothbart, 1989). Therefore, during highly-evaluative social interactions, socially inhibited individuals might either stop the actual behaviour when in the company of others or simply withdraw from such social situations (and, as a result, avoid such situations in the future; Denollet & Duijndam, 2019; Kagan et al., 1984; Kagan et al., 1987; cf. Kagan, 2018) or rather act in an unassuming, socially desirable (or even prosocial) manner according to socio-cultural norms

to avoid being at the centre of others' attention (Asendorpf, 2010; Gough & Thorne, 1986; Han, 2011; Hartman, 2015; Xu et al., 2007, 2009; Wiggins, 1995).

Accordingly, with all the elements described above, we posit defining social inhibition as *a psychosocial disposition that is revealed within (1) social interactions that are related to evaluation and/or are unfamiliar (situational context), on the basis of (2) contingent and generally lowered self-esteem, which is dependent on social reinforcements (self-image component). Consequently, it manifests in (3) a preoccupation with being evaluated by others, and monitoring one's own behaviour (cognitive component), (4) feeling uncertainty and tension (emotional component), and (5) avoiding social exposure, attention, and evaluation through limiting goal-directed activity or taking self-protective behaviour (behavioural component).*

### **5.3. SOCIAL INHIBITION IS ORGANISED IN A TWO-LEVEL HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE WITHIN WHICH IT HAS TWO DISTINCT BUT RELATED FORMS: SHYNESS AND MODESTY**

Our model allowed us to integrate the knowledge present in the literature concerning shyness and modesty, capturing these two precisely, with a clear distinction and determination of relations between them. Social inhibition may take two related, but distinct forms where in both share core elements of social inhibition, yet are differentially targeted in order to capture their divergences, such as a reactive vs. volitional inhibitory potential or more or less socially (mal)adaptive qualities. Within Figure 2 we present crucial definitional elements of social inhibition together with their different forms included in shyness and modesty. In further sections we characterise specific self-image, cognitions, emotions, and behaviours as elements of the shyness and modesty dispositions, together with social contexts conducive to activation of each of these two forms of social inhibition. The order of definitional elements in the description is ordered in this way to highlight the crucial role of certain components within a particular form of social inhibition. Namely, shyness seems to be dominated by emotional and behavioural aspects whereas the most essential attributes of modesty are supposed to appear in its specific self-image and cognitive aspects. However, this is not about the causal mechanism, which is assumed here, but about the foreground in the manifestation and functioning within the psychosocial domain.



**Figure 2. The Structure of Social Inhibition in the Dual Social Inhibition Model**

*Note.* Key definitional components for a given form of social inhibition are in grey boxes. The underlying motive is separated as it is not a definitional element per se although it manifests itself in each of the definitional elements.

### 5.3.1. Shyness as a Form of Social Inhibition

Shyness is defined as a form of dispositional social inhibition that is characterised by (1) feeling anxiety, shame or evaluation embarrassment (emotional component), and (2) stopping or avoiding social activity (behavioural component). These are revealed within (3) situations, particularly those that are unfamiliar, related to both actual and imaginary social evaluations (especially negative) (situational context) in conjunction with (4) anticipating social disapproval (public discredit), and monitoring one's own behaviour in a defensive mode (cognitive component), as well as (5) a sense of inferiority reinforced by experiences of social failure (self-image component).

These five components of shyness are displayed in Figure 2, and briefly discussed below.

**5.3.1.1. Emotional Component of Shyness.** Shyness is a form of social inhibition that highly involves emotional processes: both basic, strongly biologically conditioned processes (e.g., negative affect of fear, anxiety, discomfort; Asendorpf, 1986; Cheek & Buss, 1981)

and—above all—those related to strong public self-consciousness, activated in the wake of perception or anticipation of a specific threat, i.e., social disapproval (Buss, 1980; Miller, 1995). So at the neuronal level, shyness is characterised by a certain innate emotional sensitivity resulting from, among others, heightened (re)activity of the autonomic nervous system (Cattell, 1965; Poole et al., 2018); hence, physiological symptoms observable in the face of social interactions, such as increased pulse, pounding heart, blushing, sweating, or upset stomach, are considered to be the most common signs of shyness (Beer, 2002; Buss, 1984; Cheek & Buss, 1981; Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999). However, in contrast to biologically conditioned emotional reactivity, the key elements of shyness are secondary emotions that involve primary ones, but are also based on the individual's strong public self-consciousness (which seems to be both affective and cognitive; Crozier, 2010), i.e., the perception of self as a social object and the object of other people's assessments (Beaton, Schmidt, Schulkin, & Hall, 2010).

In this way, in addition to the sense of uncertainty as imposed by social inhibition in general, shyness also strongly engages such emotions as shame and evaluation embarrassment. These emotions are in turn associated with increased awareness of being assessed by the social environment (Buss, 1980, 1986; Buss & Plomin, 1984; Lewis, 2016; Poole et al., 2018), which secondarily contributes to an even more intense sense of worry (shame-related cognitions) and the whole range of anxiety-based feelings, as well as a decrease in social self-esteem (Buss, 1980; Cheek & Melchior, 1990; Crozier, 1999, 2010; Henderson & Zimbardo, 1998; Litwinsky, 1950; Miller, 1995; Mosher & White, 1981). Feelings of shame concern a broader spectrum of situations (it affects not only the social but also moral functioning of the individual) and, therefore, cannot be equivalent to shyness (Mosher & White, 1981); however, in a social context, both constructs elicit internal attributions and lead to behavioural inhibition, especially in situations of hypothetical interpersonal failure (Buss, 1980; Crozier, 1999, 2010). This close relation of shame and embarrassment with shyness can also be the result of existing social norms related to the perception of shyness itself—individuals who reveal shyness are often considered to be socially incompetent and their behaviour is treated as unacceptable or even disgraceful, especially in cultures that put a strong emphasis on developing self-confidence and self-worth (Harris, 1984a; Pines & Zimbardo, 1978; Zimbardo et al., 1974). Sensitivity to social evaluations and self-critical thinking that overrides the real picture, makes that within situations related to negative evaluation (e.g., criticism of others), shyness is activated in the form of shame and embarrassment, while in situations that give positive reinforcement (e.g., praise), shyness is activated in the form of an incredulous reaction, doubt about received feedback, and feeling ridiculous. It is worth noting that shyness-related emotions such as shame and evaluation embarrassment tend to persevere (after the triggering situation has ended) and/or ruminate (possibly because of its strong influence on self-esteem).

**5.3.1.2. Behavioural Component of Shyness.** Shyness is characterised by stopping or avoiding social activity (Asendorpf, 1990; Poole et al., 2017, 2018; Schmidt & Fox, 1999; Schmidt et al., 2005; Schmidt & Poole, 2019). In interpersonal relations, shyness manifests itself in the avoidance of eye contact, reticence in conversation, and awkward body language (Buss, 1981, 1984; Cheek, Buss, 1981). Due to their physiological ailments (such as sweating, pounding heart, blushing; e.g., Beer, 2002; Buss, 1984; Cheek & Buss, 1981; Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999; Cheek & Melchior, 1990; Zimbardo, 1977; Zimbardo et al., 1974) instead of the expected social responses, shy individuals respond in ways that are considered socially incompetent, less intelligent or less attractive (Buss, 1984; Cheek, Buss, 1981; Gough & Thorne, 1986; Jones et al., 1986; Paulhus & Morgan, 1997). Shy people are fully aware of their behaviour and often treat their shyness as a nuisance in everyday social life because they are unable to find a good way to control these ailments (Beer, 2002; Crozier, 1981a, 1981b; Henderson & Zimbardo, 1999; Jones, Briggs, & Smith, 1986; Zimbardo,

1977; Zimbardo et al., 1974). Lack of social competence results in avoidance behaviours (Zimbardo et al., 1974)—the dominant motive of shy people is, thus, to hide outside the group so as to reduce the fear of disapproval by others, which, with insufficient effortful control, contributes to a reduced overall level of socialisation (Xu et al., 2009; Kochanska et al., 2001).

**5.3.1.3. Situational Context of Shyness.** “The presence of strangers and the anticipation of social evaluation”—these two different kinds of situational antecedents were indicated by Asendorpf (1989, p. 482) for eliciting state shyness. Shyness is activated on the basis of public self-consciousness across social situations posing real or potential (also imaginary) threats to the self, i.e., negative evaluations, which subsequently cause wariness and caution. According to previous research, shyness is especially exhibited in unfamiliar contexts or when interacting with strangers, people with a higher social status or of the opposite sex (Asendorpf, 1989, 1990; Buss, 1980; Cheek & Briggs, 1990; Cheek & Buss, 1981; Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999)—such situations force social evaluations and are often unpredictable; therefore, they carry the risk of interpersonal failure or serious social mistakes (Buss, 1980, 1986; Buss & Plomin, 1984; Crozier, 1999, 2010). Importantly, shy individuals anticipate failure in social situations, whereby their perceptions are often cognitively biased by these imaginings regarding their own performance in the presence of other people and, as a consequence, induce inhibition of the behaviour (Nelson et al., 2005; Rubin et al., 2009; Schmidt & Robinson, 1992).

**5.3.1.4. Cognitive Component of Shyness.** Shyness is strongly related to anticipation of social disapproval or public failure through increased self-consciousness and apprehension about being negatively evaluated by others (Buss, 1980, 1986; Buss & Plomin, 1984; Asendorpf, 1993; Crozier, 1999, 2010; Miller, 1995; Zimbardo et al., 1974). The activation of public self-consciousness requires shy individuals to achieve a perspective-taking ability (adopting other people’s perspectives; Asendorpf, 1989; Crozier, 1999; Litwinsky, 1950), but also the ability to monitor one’s own emotional responses, physiological symptoms, and social behaviour in terms of how they could affect others’ perceptions. This serves as a defensive attitude which protects against negative outcomes of interpersonal interactions (Crozier, 2010), and the anticipation of these outcomes is the core cognitive component of shyness. Paraphrasing Fritz Perls (1969), the founder of Gestalt therapy, shy individuals anticipate the future because they do not want to be part of it. In addition, each social situation (embedded in present, past, or future) involving cognitive assessments (recurrent/persevered, exaggerated, or anticipated) potentially threaten the individual and trigger social evaluation concerns, i.e., fear of being negatively assessed by others (Asendorpf, 1989, 1993; Denollet & Duijndam, 2019). Public self-consciousness is highly related to another, defensive form of self-consciousness which induces anxiety-based (threat-seeking) processing of information about oneself, and thus strongly narrows the field of awareness, suppresses abstract thinking, and weakens the top-down voluntary attention responsible for taking goal-directed and volitional activity (Zaborowski, 1987, 2000; Zaborowski & Ślaski, 2004). Defensively self-conscious individuals seek to avoid focusing on the self, and each attempt of raising their self-awareness makes them lapse into negative emotions and aversive states (Zaborowski, 1987, 2000).

Therefore, one might hypothesise that the heightened avoidance motivation of shy individuals makes them highly sensitive to any signals of social fear or threat, frustration of needs, or conflicted motives—also within the domain of cognitions which are not accessible to others. That serves as a perfect “breeding ground” for developing a defensive form of self-consciousness and cognitive reactivity (rather than flexibility) which might further favour negatively biased thinking patterns, lower self-esteem, and depressive symptoms (Zaborowski, 1987, 2000; Zaborowski & Ślaski, 2004).

**5.3.1.5. Self-Image Component of Shyness.** In one of his many scientific papers on shyness, Jonathan Cheek emphasised that “shy people are their own worst critics” (Cheek & Melchior, 1990, p. 66); through cognitive preoccupation with negative social assessments (which are sometimes not real, but rather imagined and attributed by a shy person) and negative auto-evaluation, they “nurture” low self-regard on their own. Despite low self-esteem having never been directly inscribed in any concept of shyness (it was considered rather one of its further characteristics or correlates), these variables seem to tightly cling together across empirical studies; regardless of whether shyness is considered holistically or its specific subtype is analysed (e.g., fearful vs. self-conscious; Schmidt & Robinson, 1992), it is moderate-to-highly related to low self-esteem (Briggs, 1988; Cheek & Buss, 1981; Cheek & Melchior, 1990; Coplan et al., 2004, 2013; Crozier, 1981a, 1981b, 1995; Miller, 1995). As a result of ongoing debates regarding the ontogenesis of both constructs (whether shyness is a cause or a consequence of low self-esteem; Cheek & Melchior, 1990; Crozier, 1981a), it was considered that, in the developmental context, low self-esteem is fostered by social-evaluative concerns and recognised as an outcome of experiencing social failures (Asendorpf, 1989; Buss, 1980, 1986; Nelson, Rubin, & Fox, 2005; Rubin et al., 2009). Due to this strong dependence on the self-esteem of shy individuals from the context of social and interpersonal situations (i.e., the course of these situations, but also to what extent they are “biased” by social assessments), self-esteem within the construct of shyness is labile; i.e., the self-esteem of a shy individual can easily be lowered by his or her own negative self-evaluation, for which social failure is a strong stimulus (Nelson et al., 2005; Rubin et al., 2009; Schmidt & Robinson, 1992). In addition, in every interaction with other people, shy people are accompanied by so called strong self-perceptions of their own traits, i.e., they are aware of their shyness, social incompetence, or low personal qualities at the baseline (e.g., Crozier, 1981a, 1981b; Henderson & Zimbardo, 1999; Jones, Briggs, & Smith, 1986; Zimbardo, 1977; Zimbardo et al., 1974), and put themselves in a disadvantaged position in relation to others. In this way, through a sense of inferiority, shyness primarily affects the social aspect of self-esteem, not necessarily its global, holistic image (Cheek & Melchior, 1990; Costa & McCrae, 1992; Maslow, 1939; Zimbardo, 1977); this can be treated optimistically in some perspectives, e.g., in a therapeutic context.

### 5.3.2. Modesty as a Form of Social Inhibition

Modesty is defined as *a form of dispositional social inhibition that is characterised by (1) the conviction of one's own mediocrity, conditional upon the experiences of not distinguishing oneself from others, not standing out and surpassing them in any respect (self-image component), as well as (2) a focus on confirming the belief that one is accepted (although not distinguished) by others, and monitoring one's own behaviour in the context of social standards and norms (cognitive component). These are revealed within (3) situations related to real social evaluation (especially positive) (situational context) through (4) feeling exposure embarrassment or abashment (emotional component) along with (5) refraining from (or modifying in such a way) activity related to being at the centre of others' attention (behavioural component).*

These five components of modesty are displayed in Figure 2 and briefly discussed below.

**5.3.2.1. Self-Image Component of Modesty.** Modesty includes a specific, moderate self-view and this is its key element that stands out even above behaviour, emotions, and other visible aspects of functioning (Ben-Ze'ev, 1993; Chen et al., 2009; Sedikides et al., 2007; Zheng et al., 2017). When recognised as a form of social inhibition, modesty is characterised by a conviction of one's own mediocrity which is conditioned by experiences of not distinguishing oneself from others, not standing out and surpassing them in any respect. Prototypically, this moderate self-evaluation is present both publicly and privately, i.e., this sense

of ordinariness accompanies modest individuals both when thinking about themselves as a subject of observation and evaluation of others, as well as their own self-reflection and analysis of their own perceptions, feelings, and behaviours (Gregg et al., 2008; Szmajke, 1999). The self-esteem of modest individuals, however, is also unstable when it comes to public self-consciousness, because it is easily threatened when modest individuals are at the centre of attention of others, but also when they receive signals—paradoxically especially those that are positive—directly related to a given individual, and flowing from the social environment (Chen et al., 2009; Du & Jonas, 2015; Shi et al., 2017). Being praised is contrary to the moderate self-esteem of modest individuals and might arouse fear of losing social bonds and acceptance of others as a result of standing out from them. Therefore, any experience associated with “standing out from the crowd” or surpassing others compensatively induces a decrease in self-esteem. Ultimately though, this drop affects explicit self-esteem, the so-called self-declared self-image, while maintaining the same level of implicit self-esteem or even strengthening it (e.g., in the case of Eastern cultures; Cai et al., 2011; Du & Jonas, 2015; Zheng et al., 2017). In the definitions of modesty, it is emphasised that modest individuals stay off the beaten track and avoid publicity, but do not lack self-worth, thus modesty cannot be directly associated with low self-esteem (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Gregg et al., 2008; Sedikides et al., 2007). Such an explicitly reduced attitude to oneself in response to positive social stimuli is often socially expected, especially in collective and Confucian cultures (e.g., the social norm in China is that the complimenter does not expect an agreement from the complimentee, nor does it mean that the individual does not think positively of oneself; Chen, 1993). Modesty, through the tempering of cognitive self-evaluations, is often recognised as a kind of culturally conditioned tactic or strategy for self-enhancement, but also other-enhancement and fostering group harmony (Bond, Kwan, & Li, 2000; Cai et al., 2011; Chen, 1993; Chen et al., 2009; Cialdini & De Nicolas, 1989). Although historically in Western cultures modesty was considered as a virtue, and its image was very close to the Far Eastern sense, nowadays it seems that it has not survived the test of time, because it is strongly obscured by the omnipresent cult of personality and the idea of individualism (Exline & Geyer, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This kind of cultural mentality in the West makes modesty less desirable and socially appreciated, which can directly contribute to cross-cultural differences (especially when compared with Eastern cultures) in terms of its relation with both explicit and implicit self-esteem (Cai et al., 2011).

In conclusion, despite modesty carrying a moderate self-image, the instability of explicit self-esteem is in some way inscribed in this construct. Although modest individuals often are and thus present themselves as insecure in social situations—i.e., they explicitly often feel and show lowered self-esteem—this sensitive self-image is compensated by a securely rooted, positive implicit self-esteem (Gregg et al., 2008).

**5.3.2.2. Cognitive Component of Modesty.** Modesty encompasses a focus on confirming the belief that one is accepted by others, as well as monitoring one’s own behaviour in the context of social standards and norms. Modest people care about maintaining their positive image in the eyes of others—the image of a prosocial person who complies with socio-cultural norms; Asendorpf, 2010; Barbey, Krueger, & Grafman, 2009; Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1993; Crocker & Park, 2004; Sedikides et al., 2007; Spitzer, Fischbacher, Herrnberger, Grön, & Fehr 2007; Weissman, Perkins, & Woldorff, 2008; cf. Zheng et al., 2017)—as this is the basis for maintaining harmonious relationships and thinking about oneself as a member of the group (Xu et al., 2007, 2009). Through their attitude focused on good relations with others, modest individuals ensure self-protection because they regulate their behaviour, emotions, and thoughts so as not to pose any threat to others (Han, 2011; Hartman, 2015; Wood, 1989; cf. Sedikides et al., 2007), and unwittingly contribute to strengthening the self-esteem of others by providing them with a beneficial comparison (Vonk, 2002; cf. Sedikides et al., 2007). As one form of social inhibition, modesty draws from public

self-consciousness but also—as guided by the above-mentioned socio-adaptive motives—it alters it to the specific outer (or social) form of self-consciousness (Zaborowski, 1987, 2000; Zaborowski & Ślaski, 2004). This form enables awareness of social norms and standards that function in various situations along with relatively objective processing of information about oneself (Zaborowski, 1987, 2000; Zaborowski & Ślaski, 2004). It supports the individual in subordinating and internalising social norms and leads to a tendency to adapt and conform (Zaborowski & Ślaski, 2004). Therefore, social self-consciousness directly impacts individuals to modify their behaviour to meet certain standards (Zaborowski, 1987, 2000). Consequently, modest individuals are not only preoccupied with the need to be accepted by others but also tend to cognitively monitor their own emotional responses and behaviour in order to compare and adjust it to social standards. Although, in general, modesty leads to social adaptation, it may lead an individual to fall into a “trap” because it can also pose a risk to the development of traits of dependent personality disorder such as subordinating one’s own needs to the needs of others, excessive succumbing to the wishes of others, and difficulty in making independent decisions due to a lack of confidence in one’s own judgments (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Simonelli & Parolin, 2020; World Health Organization, 1992, 2018).

**5.3.2.3. Situational Context of Modesty.** Modesty is likely to arise only within interpersonal interactions, especially those requiring some element of self-presentation (Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995). Yet modesty is deemed as a fundamentally social phenomenon (Whetstone, Okun, & Cialdini, 1992). It exhibits itself in a certain class of situations which are related to real, especially positive, social evaluations. Experimental research indicates at least two main circumstances for eliciting modest behaviour. Firstly, the awareness of one’s own strengths or success in a given situation (Cialdini & De Nicolas, 1989; Whetstone et al., 1992). Secondly, being surrounded by “a properly informed audience” (Cialdini & De Nicolas, 1989, p. 626; Baumeister & Jones, 1978), i.e., individuals who publicly notice and appreciate one’s strength or success, but notably friends or acquaintances who—unlike strangers—already possess some knowledge about the individual’s positive qualities or achievements (Tice et al., 1995). In this vein, exemplary triggers for disclosing dispositional modesty within social interactions are receiving positive feedback or praise, attracting the excessive attention of others, or comparing oneself with others (Chen, 1993; Cialdini & De Nicolas, 1989; Du & Jonas, 2015; Kobayashi & Greenwald, 2003; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shi et al., 2017; Whetstone et al., 1992).

**5.3.2.4. Emotional Component of Modesty.** Similarly to shyness, modesty also engages emotions related to the public self-consciousness, however, not those resulting from temperamentally conditioned negative emotionality, but rather from the inconvenience of the situation and being at the centre of others’ attention. Attention by others, especially in the form of praise or compliments, makes modest individuals receive signals about the self-image that deviate from their own moderate self-esteem, which they wish to maintain. Such a situation causes a certain kind of discomfort and such self-conscious emotions as exposure embarrassment and abashment, which secondarily motivate modest actions and social behaviour control (Hartman, 2015; Lewis, 2016). Maslow (1939) observed a similar reaction in his patients during clinical practice: When the nature of the situation was such that being objective was impossible or there was some suspicion about the therapist-investigator motive (e.g., the conversation concerned embarrassing issues such as sexual topics), modest patients could not continue the session without experiencing discomfort and embarrassment, but also reacted with inhibiting behaviour, and careful, cautious choice of words. However, these emotions, as reported in Maslow’s (1939) study, were not strong and self-referent enough to affect inner self-esteem. One can say, by analogy with the Lewis’s (2016) concept of evaluation embarrassment, the emotional elements of modesty, i.e., embarrassment and abashment, do not devastate self-esteem and accompany the individual as long as he or she



is in this embarrassing social event or at the centre of others' attention. Additionally, within social interactions, modesty engages positively emotive attitudes towards others; modest people are prosocial through their respect and kindness in relation to others (Chen, 1993; Gu, 1990), and because their reactions are desirable or adequate to the situation, they make a positive impression in contrast to people who are excessively self-deprecating or self-exalting (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). On the other hand, these modest characteristics might coexist with features of a dependent personality mentioned above as excessive submissiveness or subordinating one's own needs to the needs of others.

**5.3.2.5. Behavioural Component of Modesty.** Modesty manifests itself in refraining from the activities related with being at the centre of others' attention or modifying own actions in such a way to achieve that. In a broader perspective, modesty is related with limiting or modifying activities attractive to public attention, and such processes are hypothesised to be underpinned by the activation of higher cortical functions and neuronal pathways that underlie self-evaluation, self-regulation, and social cognition (Zheng et al., 2017). The inhibited behavioural response of modest individuals is strongly grounded in the ability to regulate goal-oriented interpersonal behaviour in order to adapt to social norms (Barbey et al., 2009; Baumeister et al., 2003; Crocker & Park, 2004; Sedikides et al., 2007; Spitzer et al., 2007; Weissman et al., 2008). Despite the fact that modesty is associated with avoiding attracting others' attention, personal restraint, and establishing relations with others in a careful and reserved manner (Chen et al., 2009), this is the result of a constructive interpersonal and prosocial orientation, beneficial for both parties in the interaction (Sedikides et al., 2007). Modesty is, thus, called the mechanism of social control consisting of restraint of one's emotions, goals, and behaviours for a greater good (Han, 2011; Hartman, 2015). Therefore, modesty, as opposed to shyness, contributes to increased socialisation of the individual, but in its own specific way: Modest individuals desire to be with others but at the same time want to "hide" in a group, and do not want to attract attention in a way that sustains social approval. However, this also runs the risk that modest individuals will succumb to excessive compliance, conformist behaviours and that subordinating to the benefit of others may lead to negligence of the one's own needs, personal growth or self-actualisation.

#### 5.4. SOCIAL INHIBITION ENABLES THE AVOIDANCE OR PREVENTION OF SOCIAL NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENTS WHICH SERVES AS THE UNDERLYING MOTIVE OF THIS DISPOSITION

"Motives are the underlying wishes and desires that people possess" (Gable, 2006, p. 180) and form a reason for specific human behavioural, cognitive, and affective processes enabling their implementation (Gable & Gosnell, 2013). Social inhibition, when described in each domain of psychosocial functioning, is overcome or steeped by the underlying need to avoid or prevent negative social reinforcements either in the form of devaluation or loss of others' approval. Therefore, for example, according to Gable's (2006) approach, an avoidance model of social motivation, social inhibition is a kind of aversively oriented disposition which influences the individual in such a way that pleasing interactions are those that lack any sign of uncertainty or anxiety, whereas painful interactions are those that possess negative reinforcement such as rejection or negative social evaluation. However, avoidance and prevention of negative social reinforcements, as driven by social inhibition, can be seen in a twofold way, which is in line with our proposal of treating it as a construct of a dual nature. Namely, social inhibition in the form of shyness is motivated by *the avoidance of social devaluation and disapproval*, whereas in the form of modesty it is motivated by *a striving to maintain and prevent the loss of social approval* (see Figure 2). In both cases it protects an individual from experiencing social punishments—either more directly throughout receiving disapproval or more indirectly throughout losing approval.

### 5.5. TOWARDS SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS – COMPARING SHYNESS AND MODESTY WITHIN THE DUAL SOCIAL INHIBITION MODEL

To summarise and give a comprehensive picture of the dual nature of social inhibition, in this section we briefly stress the differences between shyness and modesty across definitional components reflecting the situational context, the domains of psychosocial functioning as well as the underlying motives which are concisely depicted in Figure 2.

1. **Situational context:** Both shyness and modesty are revealed within social interactions which include the element of social evaluation or that are particularly unfamiliar and unforeseen; however, they occupy opposite ends of the valence dimension of these evaluations. Shyness is activated mainly when being the object of (even conjectured) criticism or being frowned upon and stared at, especially in the presence of relevant figures such as authorities or potential romantic partners. In turn modesty is particularly activated within actual situations of being praised and complimented, or being a winner and the object of admiration. In addition, the key difference appears to be the reality of social evaluations—modesty relies upon actual on-site evaluations whereas shyness seems to be steeped in evaluations regardless of time (evaluations might be anticipated or recalled) and their factuality (evaluations might be actually experienced or only imagined by a shy person).
2. **Self-image component:** The self-esteem of socially inhibited individuals always relates to other people. It is highly contingent (i.e., prone to fluctuation) and generally lowered, being dependent on social exposure and interactions. However, shyness and modesty differ at a baseline level of self-esteem—shy individuals feel inferior to others whereas modest individuals instead feel no better than others. This is established and further supported by different kinds of social experiences such as social failures (to which shy individuals are particularly sensitive) or not distinguishing oneself from others and not surpassing them in any respect (which is what modest individuals strive for). Although in this way both dispositions share sensitive and rather low explicit self-esteem, the key underlying difference between them might be found within implicit self-esteem which is negative/insecure (for shyness) vs. positive/securely rooted (for modesty).
3. **Cognitive component:** Both shy and modest individuals are highly preoccupied with social evaluations and monitoring one's own behaviour on the basis of public self-consciousness. However, this preoccupation proceeds in clearly different way—shy individuals anticipate social failure or disapproval whereas modest individuals are instead focused on confirming a belief that one is accepted by others as a member of the group. This also translates into specific ways of monitoring oneself. Shy individuals process information about themselves in a defensive, threat-seeking mode and are particularly focused on body signals such as sweating, shivering, or blushing which relates to feeling unsafe and stressed. Modest individuals, in turn, compare their own behaviour and reactions to social standards, and are focused on regulating it in such a way so as not to violate these norms or arouse others' interest.
4. **Emotional component:** Social inhibition is characterised by feeling uncertain and tense in the presence of others. Because it is strongly affected by social evaluation, it covers a part of the spectrum of self-conscious emotions within which shyness causes more intense and sustained emotional responses as shame or evaluation embarrassment, and modesty causes more benign and transient responses closer to abashment or exposure embarrassment. Within shyness, the emotional response is stretched out over a longer period of time and related to negative evaluations which more globally “flood” the self (and thus lower self-esteem). Within modesty, the response is limited to the situation itself, and is rather ephemeral as well as less

- destructive and painful for the self. Moreover, shyness is a much more anxiety-based form of social inhibition due to its strong relationship with emotional reactivity.
5. Behavioural component: Social inhibition is behaviourally expressed in limiting goal-directed activity or self-protective behaviour aimed at avoiding social exposure, attention, and evaluation in a twofold way. On one hand shy individuals avoid social interactions ahead of the situation, stop social activity on-site or escape from it. On the other hand, modest individuals modify their behaviours to prevent or refrain from situations or activities that are related to being at the centre of social interest (such as being praised, awarded, distinguished).
  6. Underlying motive: Social inhibition is driven by avoiding and preventing negative social reinforcements. However, it can adopt the form of shy avoidance of social disapproval or the form of modest prevention of losing social approval. One could say that both shy and modest individuals do not want to attract the attention of others. However, the former realise this need outside the group and are aloof around others, whereas the latter realise it thorough hiding within a group and being its regular member.

In essence, shyness and modesty have a lot in common—they are both forms of social inhibition and contain elements that hinder functioning and pose a threat to psycho-social functioning (e.g., in terms of mental health or the quality of relationships with others). Nevertheless, the risks stemming from shyness is more severe as it is generally a less adaptive and socialised form of social inhibition (e.g., through less pro-social motivation and weaker internalisation of social norms, etc.). In modesty—although there is a risk of dependent personality features and “loss of self” for others—the threat is much smaller as modesty appears to be more adaptive and socialised, having some beneficial social potential. These latter aspects will become clear-cut as we move on to examine the outer borders of these two constructs, related to the extreme intensities of the negative elements of shyness and the positive elements of modesty.

## 6. BROADER THEORETICAL CONTEXT OF THE DUAL SOCIAL INHIBITION MODEL

To substantiate our approach to social inhibition, we decided to use an integrative and comprehensive personality model that can be treated as a matrix on which we could precisely locate reconceptualised shyness and modesty constructs and analyse their mutual relations in a broader theoretical perspective. Wiggins’s (1995) IPC could serve as one such integrative framework; however, it seems to be too narrow in terms of analysing social inhibition: The IPC mostly emphasises motivations and behaviours, unlike emotions and cognitions, and grasps the aspects of Extraversion and Agreeableness to the greatest degree while simultaneously undervaluing the role of Neuroticism in interpersonal relations, which is crucial especially in the context of shyness. A much more extensive model on which we decided to lean when considering social inhibition is the Circumplex of Personality Metraits (CPM; Strus, Ciecuch, & Rowiński, 2014; Strus & Ciecuch, 2017). Although the CPM is a theoretical model based on a trait-structural approach to personality, it possessed a specific synthetizing potential that makes it possible to integrate many personality, temperamental, emotional, motivational and mental health constructs and models (Strus et al., 2014). And indeed, to date, empirical findings have supported such a potential of the CPM model (Strus & Ciecuch, 2017), additionally proving its value in understanding the relations among personality disorder categories, Dark Triad traits, various forms of narcissism, and other maladaptive or antisocial tendencies (Brud, Rogoza, & Ciecuch, 2020; Rogoza, Ciecuch, Strus, & Baran, 2019; Rogoza, Kowalski, & Schermer, 2019; Zawadzki, 2018).

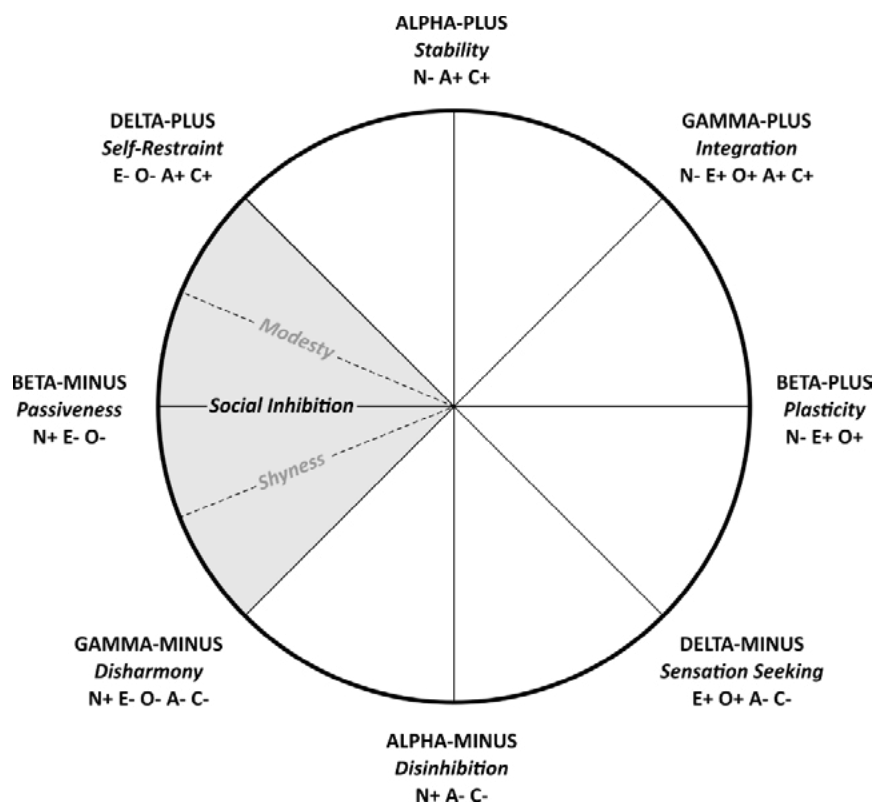
## 6.1. THE CIRCUMPLEX OF PERSONALITY METATRAITS

The CPM model (Strus et al., 2014; Strus & Ciecuch, 2017) is an outcome of searching for a complex, theoretically and empirically (i.e., both deductively and inductively; Ciecuch & Strus, 2017) justified framework that would allow for the comprehensive integration of narrower or more specific psychological constructs that capture personality and human functioning across various areas (emotional, motivational, interpersonal, etc.). Currently, such a prevailing taxonomy is the Big Five/FFM (McCrae & Costa, 2003) which is based on the assumption that human personality can be described and organised within five universal, broad, and orthogonal dimensions, i.e., Neuroticism (vs. Emotional stability), Extraversion, Openness to Experience (or Intellect), Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Despite promising assumptions and thriving applications within scientific research, there are objections against the Big Five/FFM's fundamental status in personality science, which primarily refer to its atheoretical nature (Block, 2001), limited integrative potential, and non-orthogonality of distinguished dimensions (e.g., Becker, 1999). Echoing these concerns, a body of research over recent years has provided the evidence for the existence of the two-factor higher-order structure established above the Big Five/FFM (e.g., Becker, 1999; Digman, 1997; DeYoung, Peterson, & Higgins, 2002). These two basic dimensions are labelled as metatraits (DeYoung, 2015; DeYoung et al., 2002; Digman, 1997)—as they appear to be at the top of the personality hierarchy without a more general factor above it (DeYoung, 2015; Revelle & Wilt, 2013)—and are more specifically defined as: (1) Alpha/Stability, interpreted as stability across emotional, motivational, and social domains (DeYoung, 2015; DeYoung et al., 2002) or general socialisation tendency (Becker, 1999; Digman, 1997), and (2) Beta/Plasticity, interpreted as behavioural and cognitive engagement in new experiences (DeYoung, 2015; DeYoung et al., 2002) or an orientation towards personal growth (Digman, 1997; Becker, 1999). Both Alpha/Stability and Beta/Plasticity—treated as orthogonal axes—constitute the core of the CPM. They form a matrix, within which two further metatraits are determined: (3) Gamma/Integration, treated as a reinterpretation of Musek's (2007) the general factor of personality, and (4) Delta/Self-Restraint. Each metaitrait in the CPM is a bipolar dimension, under which the opposite poles have their unique meaning and, thus, are defined separately as eight octants—four octants representing positive poles (Alpha-Plus/Stability, Beta-Plus/Plasticity, Gamma-Plus/Integration, Delta-Plus/Self-Restraint) and four negative albeit non-literal counterparts (Alpha-Minus/Disinhibition, Beta-Minus/Passiveness, Gamma-Minus/Dis-harmony, and Delta-Minus/Sensation-Seeking; Strus et al., 2014; Strus & Ciecuch, 2017). Such defined octants are organised within a circular structure in which—according to the logic of circumplex models—the predicted positive relation between adjacent octants (e.g., Alpha-Plus and Gamma-Plus) is depicted as an angle of 45° whereas the predicted null relation between orthogonal metatraits (e.g., Alpha and Beta) is depicted as an angle of 90° (see Wiggins, 1995; Wiggins et al. 1988).

Although Beta/Plasticity (as developed under a questionnaire approach to personality; see De Raad & Perugini, 2002) initially refers to the covariation of Extraversion and Openness to experience (Becker, 1999; DeYoung et al., 2002; Digman, 1997), studies on the psycho-lexical Big Two (i.e., Social Self-Regulation and Dynamism; e.g., Saucier, et al., 2014) as well as on integrating questionnaire and psycho-lexical Big Twos (Stability and Plasticity vs. Social Self-Regulation and Dynamism; Strus & Ciecuch, 2019; see Saucier et al., 2014) indicated that the central location of Neuroticism vs. Emotional stability in the CPM should be shifted from Alpha to Gamma. Therefore, Neuroticism—especially its internalising, self-conscious aspect—would be secondarily positively related to Beta-Minus/Passiveness (Strus & Ciecuch, 2019). The inspiration for such a reposition was found in the content of the psycho-lexical higher-order factor of Dynamism, which—through qualities

such as self-confidence and social competencies—reveals a consistent relation with Emotional Stability (Saucier & Srivastava, 2015; Saucier et al., 2014). To give an example, in the research by Saucier et al. (2014), adjectives such as “bold,” “timid,” and “shy” appeared as negative loadings of the Dynamism factor (i.e., the counterpart of Beta/Plasticity). All of these observations broadened the previous meaning of both poles of Beta and slightly changed the meaning of the poles of Delta (Rogoza, Ciecuch, & Strus, 2021; Strus & Ciecuch, 2017, 2019, 2021). It is likewise worth mentioning that recent research has supported the possibility of also integrating CPM with the HEXACO model—in this light the CPM is not indissolubly related to the Big Five/FFM, but integrates various personality taxonomies (Strus & Ciecuch, 2021). Of particular relevance, the factor of Honesty-Humility was located in Delta-Plus/Self-Restraint (Strus & Ciecuch, 2021), and that also has significant meaning for locating social inhibition (as a construct of a dual nature) within the CPM.

The refined version of the CPM model is presented in Figure 3 and definitions of each CPM metatrait are given in Table 1. With this background, the presence of the elements closely related to Neuroticism in the proposed conceptualisation of social inhibition—such as self-consciousness and social evaluation concerns, sense of insecurity built on threat sensitivity, and unstable self-esteem—serve as a premise for positioning social inhibition within Beta-Minus/Passiveness.



**Figure 3. The Circumplex of Personality Metatraits and the Dual Social Inhibition Model (in grey)**

*Note.* N = Neuroticism; E = Extraversion; O = Openness to Experience; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; + means positive pole of the trait; – means negative pole of the trait. Adapted and modified from “The Circumplex of Personality Metatraits and the HEXACO model: Toward refinement and integration,” by W. Strus and J. Ciecuch, 2021, *Journal of Personality*, 89, 803–818 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12616>). Copyright 2021 by the Wiley Periodicals LLC.

**Table 1. Meaning of the Eight Metatraits in the Circumplex of Personality Metatraits**

| Metatrait                       | Big Five configuration                        | Meaning   |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Delta-Plus (Self-Restraint)     | E-, O-, A+, C+ (N <sub>0</sub> )              | Low emotionality (both negative and positive), high behavioural and emotional control, meticulousness, and perfectionistic tendencies as well as modesty, conventionality and severe social adjustment.   |
| Alpha-Plus (Stability)          | N-, A+, C+ (E <sub>0</sub> , O <sub>0</sub> ) | Stability in the area of emotional, motivational, and social functioning, expressed as a general social adaptation tendency, an ethical attitude towards the world, benevolence, and calmness, as well as the ability to delay gratification, diligence and perseverance. |
| Gamma-Plus (Integration)        | N-, E+, O+, A+, C+                            | Well-being, a warm and prosocial attitude towards people, both intra- and interpersonal balance and harmony; serenity, openness to the world in all its richness, as well as endurance and effectiveness in attaining important goals.                                    |
| Beta-Plus (Plasticity)          | N-, E+, O+ (A <sub>0</sub> , C <sub>0</sub> ) | Cognitive and behavioural openness to change and engagement in new experiences, a tendency to explore, self-confidence, initiative and invention in social relations, as well as enthusiasm, and an orientation towards personal growth.                                  |
| Delta-Minus (Sensation-Seeking) | E+, O+, A-, C- (N <sub>0</sub> )              | Broadly defined impulsiveness, recklessness, emotional volatility, stimulation seeking and risk taking; self-enhancement and hedonistic tendencies as well as interpersonal dominance and expansiveness.  |
| Alpha-Minus (Disinhibition)     | N+, A-, C- (E <sub>0</sub> , O <sub>0</sub> ) | High level of antisocial tendencies underpinned by unsustainability, low frustration tolerance, and egotism, as well as aggression and antagonism towards people, social norms, and obligations.  |
| Gamma-Minus (Disharmony)        | N+, E-, O-, A-, C-                            | Inaccessibility, coldness and distrust in interpersonal relations; negative affectivity and low self-worthiness; depressiveness, pessimism, and proneness to suffer from psychological problems.  |
| Beta-Minus (Passiveness)        | N+, E-, O- (A <sub>0</sub> , C <sub>0</sub> ) | Social avoidance and timidity, together with submissiveness and dependency in close relationships; cognitive and behavioural passivity and inhibition; some type of stagnation, apathy and tendency for anhedonia.  |

*Note.* For abbreviations see Figure 3; 0 = medium level of trait intensity; - = low level of trait intensity; + = high level of trait intensity. Adapted from "Towards a model of Personality Competencies underlying social and emotional skills: Insight from the Circumplex of Personality Metatraits," by J. Ciecuch and W. Strus, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 711323. Copyright 2021 by the Frontiers Media SA.

## 6.2. LOCATING THE DUAL SOCIAL INHIBITION WITHIN THE CPM

When placing social inhibition in the CPM space (Strus et al., 2014; Strus & Ciecuch, 2017), we must bear in mind that this construct is a part of a certain universe of personality dispositions which manifest only in a social and interpersonal context (Asendorpf, 1994; Buss, 1980; Denollet, 2000, 2005; Fox et al., 2015; Kagan et al., 1987; Karau & Williams, 1993; Klein & Mumper, 2018; Latané & Darley, 1968; McCarty & Karau, 2017). For this reason, when locating social inhibition (likewise any other psychosocial disposition) within the CPM one must focus on the content of the metatraits in this respect, i.e., how they manifest in the context of relationships with other people, including both their quantity (to what extent they are stimulating for the individual, which determines the degree of involvement, e.g., in initiating new relationships) and quality (how these relationships develop and how they affect the well-being of the individual and his or her further attitude to people, the world, social norms, etc.). In this vein, we posit that the key location for social inhibition within the CPM is the pole Beta-Minus/Passiveness which encompasses submissiveness and dependency in interpersonal relations, but also self-consciousness which seems to be crucial for controlling and inhibiting behaviour in social situations (Becker, 1999; Strus et al., 2014; Strus & Ciecuch, 2017). Thus, Beta-Minus/Passiveness may include both limiting, modifying, or inhibiting the goal directed activity (Denollet, 2000, 2013; Denollet & Duijndam, 2019; McCarty & Karau, 2017) and taking protective, avoidance-oriented

behaviours (Kochanska, 1991; Kagan et al., 1984; cf. Kagan, 2018) as ascribed to the concept of social inhibition. Such a location of social inhibition—which is the opposite to the tendency to explore and voluntarily engage in new experiences, likewise self-confidence, initiative and invention in social relations (characteristic for Beta-Plus/Plasticity; DeYoung et al., 2002)—also corresponds with its notion of particular sensitivity to new, unfamiliar social stimuli (Asendorpf, 1990; Buss, 1980; Cheek & Briggs, 1990; Cheek & Buss, 1981; Cheek & Krasnoperova, 1999; Kochanska, 1991; Poole et al., 2018).

Correspondingly, we posit locating shyness halfway between Beta-Minus/Passiveness and Gamma-Minus/Disharmony, whereas modesty is located halfway between Beta-Minus/Passiveness and Delta-Plus/Self-Restraint. In this way we stick to the assumption that both constructs—as forms of social inhibition—are rooted within Beta-Minus/Passiveness, but simultaneously tend to deviate towards adjacent poles, i.e., shyness towards Gamma-Minus/Disharmony, as this metatrait refers to negative affectivity and low self-worth (also in respect to other people), whereas modesty deviates towards Delta-Plus/Self-Restraint, as this metatrait includes high control over spontaneous social reactions and feelings, but also propriety and severe social adjustment. What is more, these locations are also supported by the central position of Neuroticism within Gamma-Minus/Disharmony, and Honesty-Humility within Delta-Plus/Self-Restraint (Strus & Cieciuch, 2021). Therefore, we hypothetically locate shyness and modesty exactly at an angle of  $\pm 22.5^\circ$  to Beta-Minus/Passiveness. With this location, we also maintain the assumption of a mutual positive relation between these two constructs, which in the CPM space is expressed exactly as  $45^\circ$ . We present the hypothetical location of social inhibition and its two forms in Figure 3.

### 6.3. PRELIMINARY SUPPORT FROM A META-ANALYSIS ON THE RELATIONS OF SHYNESS AND MODESTY WITH BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS

To initially recognise the validity of our hypotheses regarding the location of dual social inhibition within the CPM (Strus et al., 2014; Strus & Cieciuch, 2017), we conducted two independent meta-analyses focused on the relationship of shyness and modesty with the Big Five personality traits. We did so because there is a lot of research communicating the relations between shyness and modesty with the Big Five (mainly as a side effect of the investigations on the Big Five/FFM structure), while there is relatively little research on the relations with metatraits (i.e., we found only individual articles about this relation – e.g., De Raad et al., 2018). In order to identify eligible studies, in November 2019 we searched the literature using two databases (PsycINFO and Google Scholar) for keywords “shyness” or “modesty,” and “Big Five” or “Five-Factor Model” or “Extraversion” or “Neuroticism” or “Agreeableness” or “Openness” or “Conscientiousness.” The final database for shyness included 218 effect sizes from 39 studies with 44 independent samples and a total of 23,369 participants, whereas the final database for modesty included 113 effect sizes from 20 studies with 25 independent samples and at total of 27,361 participants.<sup>1</sup> Detailed study characteristics are presented within Table 2.

<sup>1</sup> Databases and R code to reproduce our results, are available on the Open Science Framework: [https://osf.io/wqj8z/?view\\_only=02047ca508b24e609c24a16cef4e5b32](https://osf.io/wqj8z/?view_only=02047ca508b24e609c24a16cef4e5b32)

Table 2. Meta-Analytical Studies Characteristics

| Studied variable | Sample sizes |                | Age       |           | Proportion of men |              | Effect sizes |              |          |    |    |    |    |    |             |
|------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------|----|----|----|----|----|-------------|
|                  | <i>j</i>     | Total <i>n</i> | Min-Max   | <i>Md</i> | Min-Max           | <i>M(SD)</i> | % Min-Max    | <i>M(SD)</i> | <i>k</i> | E  | N  | A  | O  | C  | % published |
| Shyness          | 39           | 23,369         | 29–9,172  | 314       | 1.5–47            | 18.32(11.18) | 0–100%       | 41.99(22.43) | 218      | 48 | 46 | 44 | 41 | 39 | 91%         |
| Modesty          | 20           | 27,361         | 163–9,172 | 467       | 15–42             | 24.68(7.12)  | 22.77–62.87% | 38.67(10.81) | 113      | 22 | 25 | 23 | 21 | 22 | 96%         |

Note. *j* = number of studies, *k* = number of effect sizes, E = Extraversion, N = Neuroticism, A = Agreeableness, O = Openness to Experience, C = Conscientiousness.

Within the current study we applied a basic meta-analytic procedure elaborated by Buecker, Maes, Denissen, and Luhmann (2020) for the needs of investigating the relations of the Big Five personality traits and loneliness. Therefore, in order to calculate bivariate relations between the Big Five personality traits and shyness and modesty, we first converted effect sizes to Fisher's *Z* values to obtain unbiased estimates of the correlation coefficients (Shadish & Haddock, 2009; these values were then back-transformed in order to report *r* values for further interpretability and comparison purposes). Second, we corrected effect sizes for unreliability (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004), and third, we calculated meta-analytic estimates using robust variance estimation (Tanner-Smith & Tipton, 2014; Tanner-Smith, Tipton, & Polanin, 2016) and supplemented them with  $\tau^2$ , an estimate reflecting the magnitude of heterogeneity between study-average effects (Deeks, Higgins, & Altman, 2008) and *I*<sup>2</sup>, an estimate which informs about the proportion of variance which occurs due to variability in true effects rather than sampling errors (Borenstein, Higgins, Hedges, & Rothstein, 2017; Fisher, Tipton, & Zhipeng, 2017; Higgins & Thompson, 2002). Meta-analytical estimates of the bivariate relations (both corrected and uncorrected for measurement unreliability; Hunter & Schmidt, 2004) of shyness and modesty with the Big Five personality traits are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Meta-Analytical Estimates of the Bivariate Relations of Shyness and Modesty with Big Five Personality Traits

| Big Five trait    | Estimates corrected for measurement error |          |           |                       |              |                       |          | Uncorrected estimates |              |                       |          |  |
|-------------------|---|----------|-----------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------|--|
|                   | <i>j</i>                                  | <i>k</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>r</i> <sup>+</sup> | 95% CI       | <i>I</i> <sup>2</sup> | $\tau^2$ | <i>r</i>              | 95% CI       | <i>I</i> <sup>2</sup> | $\tau^2$ |  |
| Shyness           |   |          |           |                       |              |                       |          |                       |              |                       |          |  |
| Extraversion      | 35  | 48       | 33.64     | -.53                  | [-.61, -.45] | 99.10                 | 0.128    | -.50                  | [-.57, -.43] | 95.87                 | 0.053    |  |
| Neuroticism       | 33  | 46       | 31.64     | .34                   | [.26, .43]   | 94.04                 | 0.042    | .31                   | [.23, .38]   | 93.87                 | 0.034    |  |
| Agreeableness     | 30  | 44       | 27.98     | -.16                  | [-.22, -.09] | 88.38                 | 0.019    | -.14                  | [-.19, -.08] | 88.70                 | 0.016    |  |
| Openness          | 30  | 41       | 28.85     | -.25                  | [-.33, -.18] | 95.84                 | 0.064    | -.22                  | [-.28, -.15] | 96.24                 | 0.059    |  |
| Conscientiousness | 28  | 39       | 26.16     | -.19                  | [-.26, -.13] | 88.31                 | 0.020    | -.17                  | [-.22, -.11] | 89.11                 | 0.018    |  |
| Modesty           |   |          |           |                       |              |                       |          |                       |              |                       |          |  |
| Extraversion      | 17  | 22       | 15.78     | -.23                  | [-.32, -.13] | 94.82                 | 0.024    | -.19                  | [-.27, -.11] | 93.09                 | 0.012    |  |
| Neuroticism       | 17  | 25       | 15.88     | .02                   | [-.05, .09]  | 94.52                 | 0.023    | .02                   | [-.05, .08]  | 94.94                 | 0.017    |  |
| Agreeableness     | 17  | 23       | 15.89     | .26                   | [.17, .35]   | 93.54                 | 0.021    | .22                   | [.14, .30]   | 95.15                 | 0.018    |  |
| Openness          | 16  | 21       | 14.98     | -.14                  | [-.25, -.03] | 98.10                 | 0.067    | -.12                  | [-.21, -.02] | 98.24                 | 0.050    |  |
| Conscientiousness | 17  | 22       | 15.60     | .05                   | [-.02, .12]  | 88.92                 | 0.010    | .04                   | [-.02, .10]  | 90.00                 | 0.008    |  |

Note. *j* = number of studies, *k* = number of effect sizes, *df* = degrees of freedom, *r*<sup>+</sup> = meta-analytic correlation corrected for measurement error, 95% CI = 95% confidence interval,  $\tau^2$  = measure of heterogeneity, *I*<sup>2</sup> = proportion of variance due to variability in true effects rather than sampling error, *r* = meta-analytic correlation without correction.



The  $I^2$  estimate indicated substantial variance due to variability in true effects rather than sampling errors—for the uncorrected effect sizes it ranged from 88.70% to 96.24% for shyness and from 90% to 98.24% for modesty. When interpreting the magnitude of the effect sizes we used Gignac's and Szodorai's (2016) guidelines. Regarding shyness, the relations with extraversion ( $r = -.50$ , 95% CI  $[-.57, -.43]$ ) and neuroticism ( $r = .31$ , 95% CI  $[.23, .38]$ ) were the largest in magnitude, while the relations with openness ( $r = -.22$ , 95% CI  $[-.28, -.15]$ ), conscientiousness ( $r = -.17$ , 95% CI  $[-.22, -.11]$ ), and agreeableness ( $r = -.14$ , 95% CI  $[-.19, -.08]$ ) were visibly smaller. These results perfectly corresponded with the hypothesised location of shyness in the CPM space, i.e., halfway between Beta-Minus/Passiveness and Gamma-Minus/Disharmony. For modesty, the picture is slightly less clear as the relations with agreeableness ( $r = .22$ , 95% CI  $[.14, .30]$ ) and extraversion ( $r = -.19$ , 95% CI  $[-.27, -.11]$ ) were (almost – in terms of extraversion) medium in magnitude, and relation with openness ( $r = -.12$ , 95% CI  $[-.21, -.02]$ ) was low. Successively, the relation with neuroticism turned out to be null. This supports to a large extent, though not perfectly, the hypothesised location of modesty in the CPM space, i.e., halfway between Beta-Minus/Passiveness and Delta/Self-Restraint. The partial imperfection of these results, however, comes as no surprise due to controversies regarding lack of consistent conceptualisation of modesty within the literature—which seems to be especially disrupted by theoretical propositions that set modesty side by side with a construct of humility and treat modesty as a character strength (e.g., Ashton et al., 2014; Ashton & Lee, 2001, 2007; Davis et al., 2016; McElroy et al., 2014; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The lack of adequacy of popular measurement models of modesty within personality research is likewise not negligible (e.g., Herrmann & Pfister, 2013; Vassend & Skrandal, 2011).

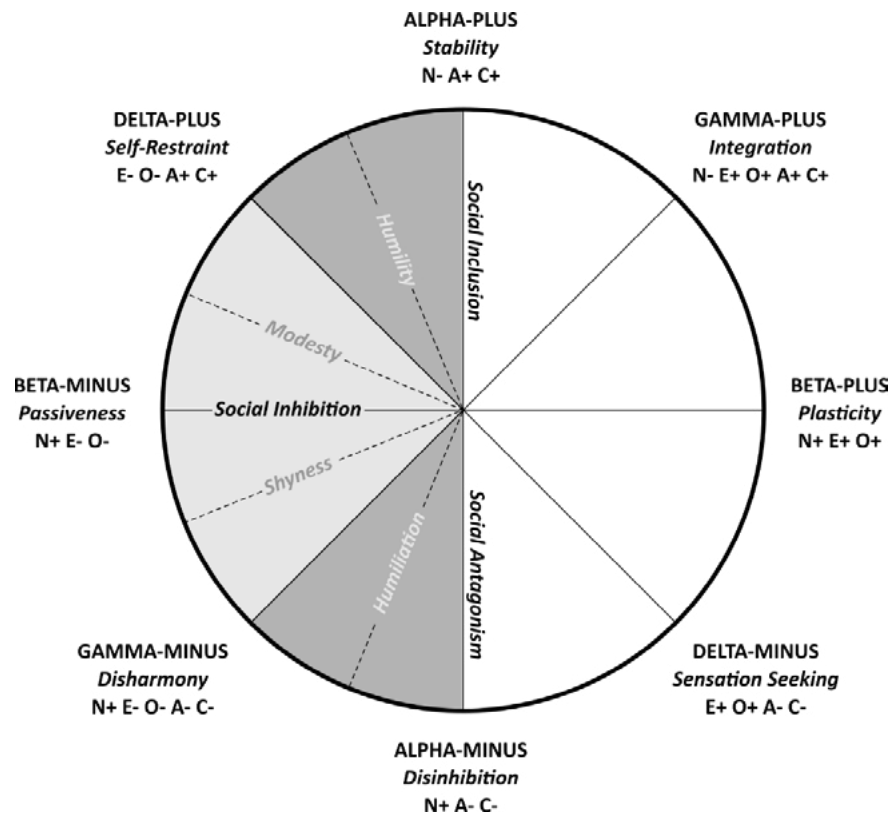
#### 6.4. SETTING CONCEPTUAL BOUNDARIES OF SOCIAL INHIBITION WITHIN THE CPM

To exclude potential bias due to unclear definitions “it is important to decide where to draw the conceptual line” (Tangney, 2000, p. 74; see also Harris, 1984b; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). This applies both to the relation between shyness and modesty—for which this conceptual line within the CPM (Strus et al., 2014; Strus & Ciecuch, 2017) is designated by the metatrait of Beta-Minus/Passiveness—and relations with so called “border constructs” for these two forms of social inhibition. Following the logic of the circumplex structure, potential borders of social inhibition should be hypothetically located at an angle of  $\pm 45^\circ$  to Beta-Minus/Passiveness and, therefore, designated by the poles Gamma-Minus/Disharmony from the side of shyness and Delta-Plus/Self-Restraint from the side of modesty (see Figure 4).

In this way we get two spaces—between Gamma-Minus/Disharmony and Alpha-Minus/Disinhibition and between Delta-Plus/Self-Restraint and Alpha-Plus/Stability—which can accommodate psychosocial dispositions that are in some peripheral way related to shyness and modesty, but are in themselves strongly related to (or manifestations of) another dimension, which is orthogonal in relation to social inhibition (see Figure 4). This dimension is characterised by qualities that occur across social and interpersonal relations and which—within the CPM (Strus et al., 2014; Strus & Ciecuch, 2017)—are determined by Alpha (i.e., Alpha-Plus/Stability vs. Alpha-Minus/Disinhibition). Hence, the positive pole of this dimension encompasses a general tendency towards social adaptation and a highly socially desirable, ethical, and communal attitude towards other people which could be more simply labelled as *social inclusion* (Becker, 1999; Digman, 1997; cf. Strus et al., 2014; Strus & Ciecuch, 2017), whereas the negative pole encloses more externalising (e.g., anger, aggression) and more internalising (e.g., spitefulness, vindictiveness, or envy) problems, anti-social tendencies, and disregard for social norms and other people which could be more

simply labelled as *social antagonism* (Becker, 1999; DeYoung, Peterson, Seguin, & Tremblay, 2008; Saucier et al., 2014; cf. Strus et al., 2014; Strus & Ciecuch, 2017).

Although both shyness and modesty (as forms of social inhibition) are related to the dimension of social inclusion vs. social antagonism in a rather peripheral way (the hypothetical angular distance between shyness/modesty and the ends of this dimension is 67.5°), this dimension still has the potential to differentiate between these two constructs. Shyness—through a sense of inferiority and being different from others, and preoccupation with one's own feelings (especially anxiety and shame) in interpersonal relations, as well as avoidance (which is very close to the transition to isolating oneself)—corresponds to the internalising aspects of social antagonism. One of the reasons for this relation is the deceptive similarity of shyness and narcissistic vulnerability reported empirically and considered theoretically across the literature and research (e.g., Cheek, Hendin, & Wink, 2013; Hendin & Cheek, 1997; Kwiatkowska, 2018; Rogoza, Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Kwiatkowska, & Kwiatkowska, 2018; Wink, 1991). According to the theorists of narcissism, narcissistic vulnerability “involves hypervigilance to insults, and excessive shyness or interpersonal avoidance in order to retreat from perceived threats to self-esteem” (Kealy, & Rasmussen, 2012, p. 358). That kind of self-absorption, mistrust, distance, and closeness avoidance in interpersonal relations (Kealy, & Rasmussen, 2012), which is to some extent ascribed to social antagonism, is, in turn, quite the opposite of modesty which is rather closer to the “constructive social orientation” (Sedikides et al., 2007, p. 171) full of affiliation, gratitude and understanding in social relationships, and without any signs of hostility toward others (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, Elliot, & Gregg, 2002; cf. Sedikides et al., 2007) as represented by social inclusion. It is not without reason that, in positive psychology, modesty is deemed to be a character strength rather than a weaknesses (Peterson & Seligman, 2004); it supports an individual in building a sense of social adjustment and feeling part of a community, but also leads to general social acceptance (Sedikides et al., 2007). In this vein, social inclusion vs. social antagonism serves as the axis which neatly, although generally to a small extent, differentiates shyness and modesty as two forms of social inhibition. However, this axis gives rise to and utterly differentiates another two psychosocial dispositions which should not be considered as forms of social inhibition, but which share some characteristics of modesty and shyness (as border constructs) and are sometimes confused with them. In this way, in terms of potential candidates that are derived from the dimension of social inclusion vs. social antagonism but are still peripherally related to social inhibition, we recognise humility and humiliation/harm-proneness (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Conceptual Boundaries of the Dual Social Inhibition Model (in dark grey) as Designated by the Circumplex of Personality Metatraits**

*Note.* N = Neuroticism; E = Extraversion; O = Openness to Experience; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness; + means positive pole of the trait; – means negative pole of the trait. Adapted and modified from “The Circumplex of Personality Metatraits and the HEXACO model: Toward refinement and integration,” by W. Strus and J. Ciecuch, 2021, *Journal of Personality*, 89, 803–818 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12616>). Copyright 2021 by the Wiley Periodicals LLC.

## 6.5. TOWARDS SOCIAL INCLUSION: MODESTY AND HUMILITY.

Humility is a phenomenon investigated in theological, philosophical, and finally also in psychological science (Davis & Hook, 2014; Davis, Hook, McAnnally-Linz, Choe, & Placeres, 2017; Tangney, 2000). However, the psychological perspective is not unequivocal; humility is recognised as a virtue (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and a value (Schwartz et al., 2012), but also as a personality trait (Davis, Worthington, & Hook, 2010; Lee & Ashton, 2004), or a state (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Kruse, Chancellor, & Lyubomirsky, 2017). Most of the conceptualisations grasp humility as a multifaceted construct; thus, to better facilitate the description of this phenomenon, researchers have made classifications and indicated its particular key elements, hallmarks, or attributes, such as accurate assessment of one’s abilities and achievements, ability to acknowledge one’s limitations, low self-focus, openness to advice, and appreciation of different world views (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Tangney, 2000). Also, Chancellor and Lyubomirsky (2013) shared markers for defining humility; they distinguished (1) personal hallmarks – including secure, accepting identity and freedom from distortion (i.e., “honest admission of weaknesses and imperfections”; p. 824; Lee & Ashton, 2004), and (2) relational hallmarks – including other-focus and egalitarian beliefs (“seeing others as having the same intrinsic value and importance as

oneself”; p. 827; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). A positive psychology perspective, however, slightly contrasts with the view of personality psychology which is much closer to the less attractive, “low self-esteem,” abasing—and definitely closer to modesty—conception of humility which is present in dictionaries, lexicons, and “ordinary people’s” minds (e.g., Gregg et al., 2008; Klein, 1992; Knight & Nadel, 1986; Langston & Cantor, 1988; Lee & Ashton, 2004; McElroy-Heltzel, Davis, DeBlaere, Worthington, & Hook, 2019; Weidman, Cheng, & Tracy, 2018; Weiss & Knight, 1980; cf. Tangney, 2000).

“Is it possible to create a measure that effectively differentiates between humility and modesty?” was one of the important questions concerning modesty and humility raised by Peterson and Seligman (2004, p. 475). Humility researchers already expressed their concerns about refining and consolidating definitions and measures of both constructs (Davis et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2016; McElroy et al., 2014), or even incorporating modesty into the definition of humility (McElroy-Heltzel et al., 2019). The reason for such exertions is twofold: Firstly, the content of a great deal of humility measures overlaps with modesty and its qualities (Davis & Hook, 2014; McElroy-Heltzel et al., 2019), and secondly, there are formerly introduced theoretical models of humility which include (interpersonal) modesty as one of their (central) subdomains (McElroy et al., 2014; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; cf. Davis et al., 2016). There have already been attempts to empirically verify the “unity” of both constructs via testing various structural models (Davis et al., 2016). However, these analyses were performed on the very imperfect measurement of modesty (i.e., based only on Modesty facet of the Honesty–Humility subscale of the HEXACO-PI; Lee & Ashton, 2004) which contains four items affected by the content characteristic not only for modesty but also for other constructs (e.g., two items directly fall into superiority which is also hypothesised to be a component of humility or narcissism; Davis et al., 2011).

Tangney (2000) devoted a small paragraph to the modesty–humility topic and crowned it by stating: “One might view modesty—in the sense of an accurate, unexaggerated estimation of one’s strengths—as a component of humility. However, this is not the whole story.” (p. 74). Despite the huge similarity, one can and should look for differences that could potentially distinguish between focal and other related but distinct concepts, at least for the sake of how this may impact the results of empirical research (Tangney, 2000). Firstly, the resemblance to a great degree relies on interpersonal aspects of modesty (McElroy-Heltzel et al., 2019); modesty is considered in terms of propriety related to specific social behaviours (Davis et al., 2016; Tangney, 2000). Humility and modesty are believed to share the same range of behaviours – a non-arrogant way of self-presentation which includes not showing off, boasting, bragging, or calling attention to the self (McElroy-Heltzel et al., 2019; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Worthington & Allison, 2017). However, while humility is represented by a wide range of internal qualities, which are hard to counterfeit (e.g., “forgetting of the self”; Tangney, 2000), modesty is probably much easier to pretend (i.e., one can easily act modestly, while acting humble is less likely) due to its simple behavioural and socially desirable character (Davis et al., 2013). Such an approach unjustifiably rejects the possible existence of intrapersonal reality related to modesty – the fact is that it is truly hard to unambiguously grasp and define it. Secondly, modesty is closely related to compliance with socio-cultural standards, rules, and traditions, and is dependent on what is well-seen and what is not, especially in one’s social milieu (e.g., showing off in front of others or wearing clothes that draw people’s attention; Chen et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2012). Humility requires a more generalised and cross-cultural view and it may even be in conflict with certain cultural norms. Thirdly, both humility and modesty are similar in expression and behaviour (even when it comes to test item responses, which makes the self-report measurement of humility very difficult, cf. Davis et al., 2010), although their motivational source seems to be different. While modesty seems to be based on norms, conventions, or adapting to the environment with some specific intention (through the prism of inhibition the motivation

could be an aversion to social exposure and “being in the spotlight”), humility seems to be separate from conventions, as it is based on something more internal. This may be related to adequate self-esteem with a simultaneous pursuit of internal development – though not the development of oneself as an independent self-focused individual, but rather oneself in relation to the world and community, as part of something bigger. A humble person behaves gently and modestly because he or she is self-aware and free from any appraisals and, therefore, can focus on others and on the relationships that bind them. A modest person behaves modestly and cautiously because his or her sense of self depends on other-appraisals and comparisons with others (examining if one does not stick out from others), so he or she is more self-focused; therefore, following social standards, not demanding attention, and seeing oneself as ordinary (no worse and no better) might be a remedy for feeling better within oneself and boosting one’s self-esteem which seem to be slightly reduced at the baseline.

### 6.6. TOWARDS SOCIAL ANTAGONISM: SHYNESS AND HUMILIATION/HARM-PRONENESS.

Humiliation in psychology is, in turn, generally considered in terms of emotion, feeling, state, or experience (Elison & Harter, 2007; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Klein, 1991; Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O’Connor, 1987; Walker & Knauer, 2011); however, it may be captured in terms of an emotional trait or disposition as well (i.e., humiliation- or harm-proneness; Tangney, 1990; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). Together with three akin emotions— (1) shame – “more ‘public’ emotion arising from public exposure and disapproval of some shortcoming or transgression” (Tangney et al., 2007, p. 348), (2) guilt – “a more ‘private’ experience arising from self-generated pangs of conscience” (Tangney et al., 2007, p. 348), and (3) embarrassment – “an aversive state of mortification, abashment, and chagrin that follows public social predicaments” (Miller, 1995, p. 322)—humiliation establish a “shame family,” a group of self-conscious emotions where shame takes the reins and overlaps with the other three (Elison & Harter, 2007).

Humiliation as an emotional state (the feeling of being humiliated, not to humiliate), however, also has its own qualities and requires specific conditions. First, there must be an antecedent in the form of being lowered and “being dragged through the mud” in the eyes of others by, e.g., attack, harassment, mocking, teasing, ridiculing, or bullying (Klein, 1991; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; cf. Elison & Harter, 2007). Secondly, humiliation typically involves more than a dyad: (1) the humiliated person who identifies himself or herself as a victim, (2) the perpetrator, and (3) the audience, which plays a key role because it brings whole situation into the public sphere (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Klein, 1991; Mann, Feddes, Leiser, Doosje, & Fischer, 2015; cf. Elison & Harter, 2007). Thirdly, it also requires a sense of unfairness (the feeling that being humiliated is not deserved) mixed with a simultaneously strong effect of self-concept congruence (i.e., the humiliated person sees oneself in a negative light at the baseline so the emotional response is more intense; Elison & Harter, 2007). It leads to high-intensity emotional reactions of embarrassment and anger toward others (Lewis, 1987) which reinforce the wide range of outward (retaliation or revenge labelled as humiliated fury; Klein, 1991; Thomaes, Stegge, Olthof, Bushman, & Nezlek, 2011) and inward behaviours (self-harm or suicide, desire to hide or escape), but also, in the long term, correlate in a similar way to sadness and depression (Elison & Harter, 2007; Harter, Low, & Whitesell, 2003; Klein, 1991). Although humiliation is mostly treated as a transient state or experience, it is defined in dispositional terms as well—one might distinguish individuals who are especially prone to feeling harmed and experience humiliation with the whole spectrum of related emotions and cognitions within social relations (e.g., sensitive delusions of reference).

Within the prototype approach (i.e., where it is assumed that features differ in their relatedness to the concept and there are no critical features of a concept; Rosch, 1975), humiliation is defined by “feeling powerless, small, and inferior in a situation in which one is brought down and in which an audience is present – which may contribute to these diminutive feelings – leading the person to appraise the situation as unfair and resulting in a mix of emotions, most notably disappointment, anger, and shame” (Elshout, Nelissen, & van Beest 2017, p. 1592). The content of this definition refers to central features; however, the authors pointed out several less important but still related constructs. Shyness is one such peripheral feature of humiliation; thus, there are certain reasons for a conceptual overlap between these two (Elshout et al., 2017). The strongest adhesive element of these two constructs is self-consciousness—the awareness of centrality of the social self and of exposure to social evaluation, which depend on one’s concern for what others may think of them (Miller, 1996, 2001, 2007). It elicits a feeling of being small, inferior, and decreases one’s self-esteem (Schmidt & Fox, 1995; Walker & Knauer, 2011). Shyness and humiliation/harm-proneness also share similar behavioural response in the form of withdrawal or avoidance (e.g., Asendorpf, 1990; Barstead et al., 2018; Elison & Harter, 2007; Elshout et al., 2017; Mann et al., 2015; Rodriguez Mosquera, Fischer, Manstead, & Zaalberg, 2008; Rubin et al., 2009; Rubin, Stewart, & Coplan, 1995). Particularly extreme shyness and humiliation are close to each other because both may serve as ascendants of mental disorders like depression or anxiety (Anderson & Harvey, 1988; Barstead et al., 2018; Collazzoni et al., 2015; Gilbert, 2000; Karevold, Ystrom, Coplan, Sanson, Mathiesen, 2012; Kendler, Hette- ma, Butera, Gardner, & Prescott, 2003; Klein, 1991; Poole et al., 2017; Rossetti et al., 2017).

Even though shyness and humiliation are peripherally related, one should also be aware of the following differences between them. Firstly, humiliation entails identification with the victim role and is related to the subjectively perceived harm done by the perpetrator in front of an audience (Elison & Harter, 2007; Elshout et al., 2017; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999; Klein, 1991; Mann et al., 2015), while shyness refers to a sense of discomfort in public or interpersonal situations in general, i.e., it motivates vigilance and avoidance of impending threat but does not require any kind of harm to appear (Schmidt & Poole, 2019). Secondly, they both elicit negative emotions but vary in emotional intensity and scope—humiliation/sense of harm is very intense and involves a blend of shame, guilt, anxiety, sadness, and anger (Elison & Harter, 2007; Elshout et al., 2017; Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). Shyness, in turn, is not as strong in expression and, to the greatest degree, it is related to anxiety, shame and embarrassment (Anderson & Harvey, 1988; Beer, 2002; Crozier, 2010; Miller, 1995; Otten & Jonas, 2014; Poole, et al., 2017; Poole et al., 2018; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2008; Thomaes et al., 2011). Thirdly, humiliation has a much broader clinical picture and much greater potential for the occurrence of psychopathological and antisocial phenomena; through acts of revenge and putting into practice a “tit for tat” rule, it is a trigger for outwardly directed violence but simultaneously it may elicit inwardly directed, auto-aggressive behaviours that are rather outside the scope of such a submissive and unassertive construct as shyness. To recap, both humiliation/harm-proneness and shyness are susceptible to activation of strong self-conscious and negative emotions, but whereas humiliation/harm-proneness leads to antisocial tendencies, hostility, antagonism, and disinhibition, shyness resorts to avoidance and inhibition.

## 6.7. COMPARING THE DUAL SOCIAL INHIBITION WITH HUMILIATION AND HUMILITY

To provide a brief although quite illustrative comparison between dual social inhibition and its hypothetical peripheral constructs, in Table 4 we outlined the similarities and differences across selected characteristics between the pairs of constructs: humiliation/harm-proneness

and shyness as well as modesty and humility. We included four comparison criteria: (1) social self-worth, (2) self-consciousness and cognitions, (3) dominant emotions as well as (4) social behaviour and interpersonal relations, as they reflect in some way the structure of definitional components (i.e., the domains of psychosocial functioning) distinguished in a proposed model of social inhibition. Such a parallel allows us to easily see the sinusoidal relations between the four psychosocial constructs according to their hypothetical locations within the CPM space. To illustrate how to interpret the table, two sample comparisons are demonstrated below.

**Table 4. Similarities and Differences across Selected Characteristics between the Pairs of Constructs: Humiliation and Shyness, and Modesty and Humility**

| Selected characteristics                            | Humiliation  | Shyness   | Modesty  | Humility   |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| <b>Social self-worth</b>                            |  |   |  |  |
| <i>Similarities</i>                                 | Low level of global self-esteem  |   | Moderate level of global self-esteem   |  |
| <i>Differences</i>                                  | Sense of abasement maintained both privately and publicly, independent of current social reinforcements although highly absorbing negative evaluations, deep-rooted in pain experienced in relations with others | Sense of inferiority maintained publicly, dependent on perceived negative evaluation, and easily reinforced by social failures              | Sense of mediocrity maintained publicly, dependent on perceived positive evaluation and easily threatened under praise, compliments, rewards   | Sense of equality maintained both privately and publicly, rather stable and imperturbable by social evaluations and reinforcements, based on one's self-awareness and resilience                             |
| <b>Self-consciousness and cognitions</b>            |  |   |  |  |
| <i>Similarities</i>                                 | Processing information about oneself on the basis of anxiety and threat, reduced openness to new information, perseverance of negative thoughts and perceptions, strong self-perception of a trait               |   | Objectified and socialised way of processing information about oneself, standards and social norms dominate the process of self-evaluation and appraisal of the environment, weak self-perception of a trait |  |
| <i>Differences</i>                                  | Focus on both external (unpleasant social experiences) and internal (pervasive negative thoughts and feelings about oneself and others) contents, self-absorption  | Focus on external content (appearance, social behaviour), pre-occupation with being negatively evaluated by others                          | Focus on external contents (compliance with social standards), bias against being distinguished by others  | Focus on both external (respecting others) and internal (considering one's own internal states and personal worldviews, discovering their meaning) content, a broader perspective without social comparisons |
| <b>Dominant emotions</b>                            |  |   |  |  |
| <i>Similarities</i>                                 | High negative affectivity, intense and sustained emotional response  |   | Low negative affectivity, benign and transient emotional response  |  |
| <i>Differences</i>                                  | Predominance of mortification, self-pity, sense of harm, vindictiveness, and anger   | Predominance of anxiety, evaluative embarrassment and shame   | Predominance of exposure embarrassment and abashment   | Predominance of acceptance and understanding toward oneself and others   |
| <b>Social behaviour and interpersonal relations</b> |  |   |  |  |
| <i>Similarities</i>                                 | Avoiding or withdrawing from social relations  |   | Maintaining affiliation and close social relations   |  |
| <i>Differences</i>                                  | Isolating from others in a hostile manner, mistrust; oscillation between avoidance and passive-aggressive behaviours   | Hiding outside the group, anxious avoidance and passiveness, intense physiological stress response, prompt withdrawal from social relations | Hiding inside the group, submissiveness and conformism, behaving in a socially desirable manner and being easily exploited by others   | Being an integral part of the community, fostering non-evaluative social relations, being moral and treating others fairly   |

With the first example, within the domain of social self-worth, shyness and humiliation/harm-proneness are similar due to the low level of self-esteem in a global sense (see e.g., Schmidt & Fox, 1995; Walker & Knauer, 2011). However, whereas low self-esteem of shy individuals—a sense of inferiority—mostly refers to the explicit/public aspects of their self-view and thus is highly dependent on any signs of negative social evaluation or failure, the low self-esteem of humiliation-prone individuals—a sense of abasement—affects both the implicit/private and explicit/public aspect of their self-view due to the pain or rejection previously experienced in social relations and failure in developing a secure bond with others and oneself. The baseline level of self-esteem of humiliation-prone individuals is so low that it is not affected by any kind of social reinforcements—negative reinforcements are absorbed and only confirm the individual’s feeling of worthlessness, and positive reinforcements tend to be rejected or misinterpreted as deceit or an attempt to ridicule. In turn, they find any insights about themselves (self-criticism or awareness of one’s own mistakes and flaws) acutely painful and insuppressible because “they lack an integrated realistic sense of themselves” (Greenberg, 1996, p. 114). Although the level of self-esteem of shy individuals is low as well, it is susceptible to change depending on the signals received from others (see, e.g., Nelson et al., 2005; Rubin et al., 2009; Schmidt & Robinson, 1992): On one hand it might be easily lowered under any subtle signs of negative evaluation, while on the other it might be gradually heightened by positive social experiences and constructive (i.e., not exuberant and embarrassing) support.

With the second example, within the domain of self-consciousness and cognitions, modesty and humility are similar due to the same, outer form of self-consciousness, i.e., an objectified and socialised way of processing information about oneself, which means that standards and social norms dominate the process of self-evaluation and appraisal of the environment (Zaborowski, 1987, 2000; Zaborowski & Ślaski, 2004). What additionally connects both of these dispositions is the weak self-perception of a trait—both a modest and a humble individual will not describe themselves in this way alone—which makes their direct measurement, e.g., through adjective scales, rather difficult (see e.g., Davis et al., 2010). The difference, however, lies in the type of content on which modest and humble individuals focus: Whereas modest individuals strongly focus on external content, e.g., by ensuring that their behaviour complies with social standards (see, e.g., Sedikides et al., 2007; Zheng et al., 2017), humble individuals focus on both external and internal content, e.g., by both respecting the opinions and feelings of others as well as considering one’s own internal states and personal worldviews as well as discovering their meaning (see e.g., Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Tangney, 2000). Modest individuals are too overwhelmed with what is happening around them and how they behave, which does not allow them to focus on their own inner feelings or answer the question of what they would really like for themselves. Humble individuals, in turn, can stop and maintain some kind of harmony between “listening” to others and oneself.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER DIRECTIONS

Within the current paper we aimed to review the literature of social inhibition, examine the diversity of its existing conceptualisations, and identify substantial overlaps across closely kindred personality constructs, i.e., shyness and modesty, which possess inhibitory qualities as well. Consequently, we attempted to integrate previous investigations and propose a new approach to conceptualise social inhibition, considering (a) the complexity of this construct through the prism of various domains of psychosocial functioning (i.e., self-image, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural) and (b) the dual structure of this construct—represented



by shyness and modesty as two potential forms of social inhibition—that reflects its internal diversity. Furthermore, by locating the newly proposed model within a space of the CPM model (Strus et al., 2014; Strus & Ciecuch, 2017), we justified its legitimacy and precisely determined the hypothetical degree of mutual relation between shyness and modesty as two forms of social inhibition. Through supplementary meta-analyses of the relations of shyness and modesty with the Big Five personality traits, we confronted our theoretical proposition with a broad body of already existing empirical findings. Finally, using the circumplex structure of the CPM, we theoretically set conceptual boundaries designated by constructs of humiliation/harm-proneness and humility which are only peripherally related to social inhibition and seem to be derivatives of different social phenomena, namely social antagonism vs. social inclusion.

There are three potential directions for further development of the proposed model. The direction that naturally arises, and therefore indicated as the first, is empirical verification of the model. The indispensable step for that seems to be a precise re-operationalisation of shyness and modesty as two forms of social inhibition (i.e., coherently with the proposed re-conceptualisation of both constructs) and the construction of a valid and reliable measurement tool. Once we hypothetically combine our theoretical proposition with existing conceptualisations of social inhibition, shyness, and modesty, they should be tested in a set of empirical studies and, at best, within the circumplex approach through which one could prominently see and test the congruence between theoretical predictions and empirically derived locations (see Rogoza et al., 2021). It would also be desirable to control humiliation and humility as constructs peripheral to social inhibition. Hence, it would be advisable to include their measurement in future research as well.

In agreement with Kurt Lewin (1951), a good theory should have practical implications. Thus, the second direction could concern development of social inhibition as captured by the proposed model and investigation of its dynamic aspects (i.e., mechanisms, outcomes and causes). On one hand, further research could include the prediction of outcomes, such as well-being, pathology, interpersonal relationships, etc., and this knowledge could be further implemented in therapeutic interventions. On the other hand, future research could focus on investigating possible developmental paths of social inhibition and make an attempt to integrate the proposed model with thriving theoretical propositions based on developmental and temperamental psychology rather than on the personality approach. The developmental model of adaptive shyness subtypes of Poole and Schmidt (2020), where positive/adaptive shyness could be the antecedent of modesty whereas negative/non-adaptive shyness could be the antecedent of shyness, could serve as an example. Another suitable example could be the attachment theory with its two major dimensions of attachment anxiety and avoidance as crucial for interpersonal relationships and behaviour (see Shaver & Mikulincer, 2011). The question which is crucial here concerns the main bio-temperamental and socio-environmental factors responsible for development of social inhibition as well as determinants of the emergence of its specific form, that is shyness or modesty.

The third direction, in turn, could concern a broad theoretical extension of the model, which—as we elaborated within this paper—occupies a quarter of a circumplex space focused around the pole of social inhibition that is orthogonal to the dimension of social antagonism vs. social inclusion. The latter dimension enabled us to additionally distinguish humiliation and humility which, together with shyness and modesty, determined half of the circumplex space. Such a perspective seems to be a promising complement to Wiggins's (1995) interpersonal model (IPC) and creates a possibility for developing a comprehensive *social circumplex model*. However, a complete and closed circumplex space of psychosocial dispositions is still a long way away and requires answers to questions about the opposite pole of social inhibition and the other half of the circumplex space that would accommodate the opposite of humiliation, shyness, modesty, and humility. On the other hand, this

would also provide an exhaustive rationale that all these four variables belong to the same level of personality organization.

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