

Shyness: A veil to be broken by music

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I've hid behind a veil of shyness my entire life.

In elementary school, I was often left out and picked last. I seemed invisible to others, and when I wasn't, they were making fun of me for my speech impediments or mocking my feminine appearance furthered by the fact that I was meek in voice and short. I had friends, but I wouldn't talk much, thinking I'd say something embarrassing or sound awkward.

These formative experiences squashed my self-esteem, which has made me fall silent in many classes and social situations. Talking or just being around people often resulted in sweaty palms, stomach aches, and a minor headache.

Throughout years of harassment and social anxiety, I found peace and solace through song. This may seem counterintuitive for someone who is shy, but being able to express myself through singing music was able to act as combat in my mind, trying to fight off my poor self-esteem causing my persistent fear of judgment from people, my social anxiety.

I started singing in the seventh grade. Being in a choir scared me, and at first, I couldn't project my voice clearly. However, my anxiety got better when I did something I thought impossible: I auditioned for a solo in the school holiday concert.

I got it.

With renewed self-confidence, I sang without fear in rehearsals.

But on the day of the show, my throat felt parched, and I shook. I didn't want to go on stage, but I waddled out to my mark. The stage lights felt like a warm, comforting embrace. As I sang, I was revealing part of myself. The audience's claps were validating my voice and the courage it took to stand there.

I continued choir throughout middle and high school, which fostered an inclusive, welcoming community of friends. I remained somewhat shy until I met theater in high school.

A choir friend encouraged me to audition for "Into the Woods" my sophomore year. I loved the song "Agony," so I auditioned for one of the prince roles. It was one of the best foolish moments of my life because I ended up getting Rapunzel's Prince, and with each rehearsal, I felt my shyness melt away.

Acting as an entirely different person let me explore facets of myself that I had previously suppressed. I could be funny, bold, assertive, and even vulnerable, all under the guise of a character. The theater offered me a safe space to experiment with emotions and interactions that had previously felt alien.

Knowing that other people were playing characters and, in general, shared a passion for theater, just like the friends I made in the choir, made me open up to them more, never thinking once of them being possible at being judgmental toward me.

The theater was also an excellent way for me to learn how to communicate more easily and effectively with people. I was taught a great deal about empathy through acting, which reflects real-life people and situations. The speaking exercises in theater also helped eliminate my speech impediments, which greatly boosted my self-esteem.

On the day of the first show, I felt — for a moment — my veil of shyness shroud me. But I would cast it aside as I opened up to express emotions and to entertain an audience, whom I knew love what my friends and I were doing.

Being a choir and theater kid did not fit the standards of a “man” where I lived. But I couldn't care less. Singing and acting helped me overcome my intense fear of people and talking which had kept me from experiencing life.

At Ball State University, I continue to perform in choir and also do opera as I pursue my major in journalism. It has made me a more empathetic writer and reporter, and I have made far more friends and professional connections than I thought possible.

Music helping people with emotional and mental problems is a common thing, and many jobs research the correlation, such as music therapist.

Amy Hourigan, an assistant professor of music education at Ball State, is certified through the Certification Board of Music Therapists and is the owner/operator of Music Therapy Connections, LLC in Muncie. She works with individuals who want to get treatment for tier disabilities, illnesses, or injuries through music-based practice.

“When people listen to music, neurotransmitters are sent off, ones responsible for lowering cortisol,” she said. “This can not only lead to lesser bouts of stress and anxiety but can be a factor in making one less shy because music releases emotion.”

Music therapy, Hourigan said, works to improve daily life, social life at work and school, and academics, making one feel more fulfilled in a sense.

“Lots of muscle relaxation techniques to help with stress and deep breathing, letting people make music on drums, and having people close their eyes and imagine a scene of a song in their head is my most used techniques, I think” Hourigan stated when tiring to get a feel of how she runs her LLC

According to the National Institutes of Health, 63% of people with any given mental illness can get better at controlling their issues. Out of these cases, 17% of the people are dealing with shyness or some other illness affecting communication.

The Stereotypes for Men:

Hourigan said most of her clients are women, and she encourages men to explore the benefits of music therapy. Men are often supposed to exert power and authority, she said. Shy men are sometimes labeled as defective and awkward. This can lead shy men to develop clinical mental illnesses, which some consider weak.

Research titled "Gender Matters: Workplace Bullying, Gender, and Mental Health" concluded that out of 36% of people bullied with mental illness in the workplace, 21% of the people are men while the rest are women. This is due to the mental illness affecting one's ability to work more properly or cause them to not one to apply for managerial positions that might be expected of them. This is seen as weak for men as in the workplace, specifically in business, men are looked upon more.

An article from *USA Today* mentions how 39% of men reported themselves as lonely or depressed, living an unfamiliar high. Men are least likely to get help from healthcare professionals.

If you are going through school or don't know what to do as of right now because shyness keeps getting in the way, let me remind you that there is always a hobby out there that can easily let you express yourself as well as a community of people who will get you and listen to you.

If you have an interest in theater find a community theater near your house, see if your school has a theater program you can try out for, etc. Get involved with a choir. Most middle, high, and university have choral ensembles requiring no audition. Recognize your existence.

Everyone in the world is loved by someone, and most people are not judgmental. Finding peace in something you enjoy, as I've experienced, can comfort you and make you feel good about yourself.

Let these many words echo through your head so that one day, your veil of shyness can be unveiled, and so you can lead the best life possible for yourself. Remember, try to find something in your life that gets your mind thinking creatively. Look around and try out things that interest you. It can change your life.