

A Supply of Serviettes

Everybody has something - whether it's attention deficit disorder, shyness, panic attacks or degrees of OCD. My social awkwardness manifests in an odd way. Those who know me know that I am far from shy. But in reality, I think most of us have a shy side, we just hide it in different ways. I hide mine with exuberance, which many mistake for confidence.

I remember many years ago meeting a devastatingly attractive man in a workshop in Belgium. He had startlingly blue eyes and dark hair, and was extremely intelligent and knowledgeable on the topic at hand. As a newbie to the field, this left me brimming with feelings of inadequacy, tongue tied whenever he so much as glanced at me.

Later that evening, three of us met up to sample some German brews; myself, the Intimidator and one other. From sheer nerves I began to prattle. Inside, my inner voice was screaming "Shut up you idiot. Just shut up!" but my subconscious was too busy trying to cover my social awkwardness to listen.

As we walked home, I gave myself a good mental kicking. We stopped to take some photos which sum up the event perfectly. Mr Intimidator looks perfect - impeccably groomed, his blue eyes sparkling. Right next to him, I look like I am in a wind tunnel. My hair has taken on a life of its own, my clothing is in disarray, and I am flushed with my own idiocy.

This is only the beginning.

As I've grown older, although perhaps not wiser, my social awkwardness has shifted to familiar situations. My inadequate moments now manifest themselves when I am with groups of close friends. Despite being somewhat of a social butterfly, the group of friends I used to be close

with here seem to now bring out my prattle-ability.

I noticed this a few months ago when I invited the gang for a catch up dinner at my apartment. It was lovely to see everyone - a group of six. We sat down to dinner and part way through I stepped out of my own body and heard myself "blah blah blah blah blah". I was stuck in the middle of a story, aware that I was now narrating instead of talking, but not knowing how to stop mid-flow. At the end, one of my friends snapped something to the effect of "All we've done is listen to you. It's time for other people to talk." They weren't his exact words, but close enough.

I was mortified.

I didn't talk much for the rest of the evening, trying to be an observer, rather than a participant, but more importantly, trying to avoid performing. Inside I was cringing at my own behaviour. I don't know if anyone else felt it, but my memory of the evening is tarred by my ineptitude.

These people are my friends, so in theory, they know me well. But they don't know that this is my social awkwardness cover. As my mouth is spouting, my inner self is awkwardly divorcing herself from the proceedings and plotting an escape, slapping her forehead in a Homer Simpson style 'doh' moment as she goes.

I need to learn to interrupt myself - to cut myself off as soon as I recognise that I have moved from chatting to story-telling. If I do, I wonder how my awkwardness will manifest. Perhaps I will start shredding napkins under the table. Let's see how that works out.

If you invite me for dinner and I talk too much, be kind. If I don't, check for serviette scraps under my chair when I leave.