

How To Change Your Shyness

Was I Born With It? Nature vs. Nurture

While it is possible that shyness is (partly) caused by your genetic make up, it is my belief that learned behavior (the Nurture part) is much more powerful. There are so many cases of happy, healthy, vibrant and outgoing children having their personalities ravaged by abusive parents or other traumatic situations. And, believe it or not, the opposite is also true. Quiet, timid, withdrawn people can become more sociable in the same way. Catatonics and autisms can be brought back to life, people with “learning disabilities” can become fully literate. It just takes the right tools.

Is This My “True Self”?

The truth is, virtually any aspect of your personality can change. If it doesn't seem that way sometimes it's because the methods you've been using just aren't powerful enough. Think about your own experiences for a moment. Have you ever believed in something strongly only to have somebody prove you wrong? What happened to you then? You changed - instantly. A rape or a car accident can change your personality - and not a long, slow change, but immediately and powerfully.

Really, your mind is very flexible, and I will prove that in a bit. It's just that we also have the tendency to do things in patterns, so we don't take advantage of our capacity for change. I think the belief in your “True Self” or “Core Personality” is a dangerous one because it is so limiting. We look at the negative aspects of ourselves and say, “That's just the way I am. I'm being true to myself by behaving this way”. We're denying ourselves whole realms of growth and improvement with this defeatist attitude. Our personalities are NOT like a balance; improving one thing won't sacrifice anything else. I'm positive that the strategies I'm going to talk about will work, but not if you're skeptical and do them half-heartedly.

How Your Mind Works

The first step to changing yourself is understanding why you're doing what you're doing now. I'm going to give you a model of your brain that I've constructed from all kinds of sources, and we will use it to make changes later.

- Our minds are constantly taking in all kinds of information from our senses and storing it, even the unimportant stuff. When ideas are repeated often enough and with consistency, we form Beliefs, or Generalizations, and these beliefs affect the way we perceive our reality and the way we behave. The inputs that support the belief are called “reference experiences”. For example, during the Cold War, Russians were always depicted as the “evil overlords” or whatever, so children growing up at that time no doubt believed that all Russians were that way, unless they were shown otherwise. If you grew up in a racist household, you always heard that blacks (or whites!) were inferior and all that, and you probably accepted it without question. What's more, once you have a belief, your brain will dismiss or disprove references that run contrary to it. The only way to change these beliefs once they're solidly entrenched is to either use powerful references that can't be ignored (such as a rape or car accident), or to use references consistently and with enough repetition, the same way the original belief was formed. That's why simply talking about things and getting advice tends to be so ineffective.
- Out of all the input you get, your brain pays particular attention to experiences that cause an emotional response. What happens is, your brain constructs a physical association, or “link”, between the stimuli and the response so that in the future, the same, or similar, set of stimuli will produce the same response. The stronger the emotion, the stronger the link. Also, future experiences reinforce the link or even strengthen it. This affect is called “conditioning” or “anchoring”. The classic example of this is Pavlov's famous experiment. Pavlov noticed that his dog salivated whenever it was fed. He started ringing a bell whenever he fed the dog, and soon he noticed that ringing the bell without providing food caused the dog to salivate. The bell became an “anchor” to the anticipation of food. Anchors can be changed or removed, however, by changing the emotional response linked to the anchor.
- Your brain will motivate you both to seek out experiences that give you pleasure, and avoid experiences that cause pain, though it will do more to avoid pain than to gain pleasure. That's why bad habits are so hard to break. And

sometimes, though a long-term goal will provide pleasure, if there is enough pain in the short-term, your brain will “sabotage” you.

- Your brain is always motivating you to do what it believes best for you based on your current beliefs and anchors, even though it might contradict your conscious goals. This sabotage is called “secondary gain”. For example, a happily married woman went to a hypnotist for help with being overweight. As it turns out, she was afraid of losing the weight because she would then be attractive to other men, and she was afraid that if she were propositioned she would have an affair, which would ruin her marriage. Once she became comfortable with her sexuality and confident enough to handle men, the weight went away almost without effort.
- Facts and information are the realm of your conscious mind. Your subconscious works on imagery, symbols, and metaphor, and knows no objective reality.

Now, going by that model, it’s easy to see what causes our shyness. We have dangerous generalizations about ourselves and about other people, like “I’m not attractive”, “Women/Men don’t like me”, “I’m not interesting”, “I never know what to say” etc., which taint our perceptions and our behaviour. These generalizations are subconscious and firmly entrenched. On top of that, we have such painful anchors to being evaluated, being embarrassed and being rejected that we avoid the short-term problem of meeting people and asking for dates, even though the long-term goal of intimate relationships is very enticing.

The problem is wired right into our nervous systems, which is the culmination of everything we’ve ever done. Our conscious motives are peanuts compared to that.

If I’ve painted a morbid picture here, I apologize. It’s easier to change than it sounds, but simply working with your consciousness WON’T work. You’ve got to work with your subconscious, and your nervous system. You’ve got to change your generalizations and your anchors, and the rest will come naturally.

I’ve omitted one vital piece of information till now. Remember how your brain is always taking in information and processing it?

YOUR OWN THOUGHTS ARE PART OF THIS INPUT.

This might sound silly at first, but it’s true. When you go over an experience in your mind, you get the same emotional response as when it actually happened. It’s a reinforcement. Consciously you can tell the difference, but your subconscious just processes and stores it along with everything else. Even if you don’t believe this, at least admit to yourself that it might be possible, because it’s central to many of the strategies I’m going to talk about. Remember, what we’re after is results, not understanding.

Your thoughts are powerful tools for change. It’s just that you’ve been using them poorly until now.

Your Own Worst Enemy

Now think of the implications of this. Every time you’ve relived your failures and rejections, every time you’ve beat yourself up with your self-talk, every time you’ve felt sorry for yourself, you’ve been reinforcing the problem, and possibly made it worse.

Now, I’m not saying you should never feel bad. It’s a natural thing and it’s bound to happen no matter what you do. But being excessively negative is unhealthy for you. Starting now, don’t allow yourself to dwell on painful events from your past. If you find yourself feeling down for more than five minutes, do something - anything - to snap yourself out of it and move on.

Also, if there are any situations or people that are consistently making you feel bad about yourself, either do something to improve them or remove yourself from them.

For example, half a year ago I was hanging around with a certain group of people. One or two of them were my friends, but several of the rest quite obviously didn’t like me, had no objections to showing me so, and nothing I could have done would have changed that. For a while I felt sorry for myself; I kept thinking “no one cares about me, no one likes me”, etc. Finally, I realized what I was doing. I said to myself, “Fuck ‘em all, what do I need them for anyway” and went and found a very accepting, caring and supportive group to hang around with instead. That one decision made a great difference in my life.

But, I digress. By now you must be nearly mad with anticipation - “What do I DO? Tell me what to DO!!!” :)

Part 2: Small Changes for your Everyday Life

Here are some helpful things that are fairly simple that you can incorporate into your everyday life immediately.

Empowering Questions

When you ask yourself a difficult question, your subconscious goes to work looking for an answer, and it will always come up with something - even if the question is a self-defeating one. For example, if you ask yourself, "Why aren't I dating?" you'll get something like, "I'm too shy." or "I'm a loser". If you ask yourself, "Why don't people like me?" you'll get "I must be too ugly or unattractive" or "I mustn't be interesting enough". Even worse, your subconscious may then go to work looking through your databank of references and finding ones that support this idea so that it becomes a belief!

Remember, everything that's ever happened to you is stored in your memory. You've got references to support virtually any belief, but once you've got a belief, your brain tends to filter out the references that run contrary to it. There are probably lots of times when you were outgoing, but since you believe in your shyness, you don't notice or remember them - but your brain is quick to point out the times you've failed in a social situation. So the trick, then, is to ask yourself empowering questions.

Yourself:

- What about me is interesting? Attractive?
- What do people like about me?
- What qualities and accomplishments am I most proud of?
- What should I change about myself? How would I go about changing that?

Conversation:

- What do we have in common that I could bring up?
- Is there anything interesting that happened to me lately that I could relate?
- Is there something interesting happening in our environment that I could mention?
- What aspects of his/her life could I ask questions about?

Shit On By The Opposite Sex:

- How was my approach poor? What could I do to improve it?
- What about my approach was good? Can I emphasize that next time?
- If I was him/her, what would I want me to do?

You get the idea.

Anchoring

Now that you know how anchors are formed, you can create your own! They can be really useful for changing your emotional state when you need it. I bet you feel really confident when you do something you're good at, like playing a sport, a musical instrument, or a game of chess. Wouldn't it be great if you could have that same feeling of confidence when you're at a social gathering or approaching someone for a date?

Here's how to create an anchor. Get yourself to feel the feeling you want to anchor, either by doing something physically or creating the experience in your head (trust me, it still works). At the same time, do something else, which will be your "trigger" for the feeling. The trigger can be a sight, a sound, a movement, or a touch. Once you've done it enough, it should become permanent. Keep in mind that if you'll be using anchors in social situations, you don't want your trigger to be anything embarrassing. It can be something simple like touching your finger to your forehead, tugging on your ear, scratching your nose, stroking your mustache or your chin, or a phrase... Now that you've created the anchor, whenever you want the emotional response just perform the trigger, and if you've done it right, your emotional state will change, as if by magic.

Pattern Interrupts

When we find a behaviour that works, we tend to get “locked” into it; we repeat it whenever that situation comes up. This is called a Strategy or Pattern. Avoiding people at social situations is a pattern, and so is not showing your feelings, and so is not asking for dates or doing it poorly, and so is feeling sorry for yourself afterwards. Remember, if your nervous system is geared toward shyness, your subconscious considers these things good, that’s why I said these behaviours “work”. But what you can do is, whenever you find yourself in an unproductive pattern, you do what’s called a Pattern Interrupt. A Pattern Interrupt is anything sudden and unexpected that totally defies the pattern and therefore breaks its hold on you. It can be physical, like suddenly screaming at the top of your lungs or dancing wildly about the room. These are great if you’re in the privacy of your own home or you don’t mind making a fool of yourself. If you need something more subtle, you can do the interrupt in your head, such as experiencing a series of bizarre and totally inappropriate images or sounds.

Here’s one way I used this successfully. I was trying to ask someone out and was doing a lot of “Ummm... Uhhhh...” and just generally feeling idiotic and screwing it up. All of a sudden I just said “FUCK!”, with feeling (She was the type that doesn’t mind swearing). Instantly my internal voice went from “Argh, what do I say, what do I do, what if she turns me down...” etc. to “Just quit your damn stalling and DO IT, dumb-ass!!” and I asked her out. I didn’t get the date, BTW, but I think that was because we came from VERY different worlds, and she just didn’t have a good impression of me. Actually, I was quite proud of myself for getting past the fear and taking the risk. Here’s another example. Supposing you really got a rise out of “Dead Poet’s Society”. A combination anchor/interrupt would be to declare “CARPE DIEM!!!” or “SIEZE THE DAY!!!” with gusto.

Leverage

For any decision you make, your brain weighs the pleasures and pains of taking action and not taking action, but it will motivate you more to avoid pain than to gain pleasure. If you’re not getting the results you want, it’s probably because you’ve linked too much pain to the action. There are two ways you can get around this - either find a way to lessen the pain associated with the action, or associate even more pain with not taking action. This changing of the rules is called Leverage.

For example, I would think all of us link pain to losing money. So what you do is, when you go into a social situation, bring a few buddies with you. Decide on a goal that you’re capable of meeting (“I will meet X new people” or “I will ask for X dates” or “I won’t leave without X phone numbers”), and make a bet with your friends that if you don’t meet your goal, you owe them, say, \$20 or \$50. Make sure these are people who will hold you to your word. Now, normally, you probably link quite a bit of pain to meeting people, but I would think the pain of losing \$50 would be even greater! If your goal was to meet five people, you’d probably introduce yourself to the first five people you ran into!

I think that really, we don’t link much pain to our shyness at all. If we did, we wouldn’t have this problem. There is the loneliness, but it’s what we’ve been feeling all our lives. We’re used to it, it’s nothing new. And by avoiding people, we feel safe. Change is perceived as the threat; it is dangerous because it would place demands on us we might not be able to meet. Reversing this imbalance can go a long way toward getting what we want.

Physiology

It’s common knowledge that the way you’re feeling is reflected in your body. If you’re depressed, you frown, your shoulders droop, your back is hunched, you tend to look down at the floor. If you’re happy, you smile, you stand straight, you look up.

What you might not know is that this works in reverse. By changing your body, you can change the way you feel. If you don’t believe this, try it out. Smile and laugh for no good reason. Dance around a bit. Feels good, doesn’t it? Now frown and hunch over. Bury your head in your hands. Sucks, eh?

A good example of this is when a friend confided in me that I had a “geeky walk”. It was true; I used to drag my feet and I would look down as I passed people. So what I did was figure out how to “walk confident” (And this took some practice...) and I made the effort to keep my gaze steady and make a little eye contact with people. Sure enough, not only did the physical change make me feel more confident, but the way people responded to me as well. I began to get smiles and glances from some of the women (or maybe I always had and just never noticed before), and that is a GREAT feeling!

Also, in case you're not doing this already, regular exercise does wonders for your self-confidence.

Transformational Vocabulary

Words can be amazingly powerful if you know how to use them. Read any book on the psychology of linguistics and influencing people and you'll see what I mean. I won't go into that in too much detail here, but I want to say one thing - Speed Seduction!!!! Kidding, kidding...

Words can be anchors, and quite effective ones at that. But different people respond to different words differently. For example, go up to a person who's very religious and go, "Jesus H. CHRIST that pisses me off!!!" and see what kind of response you get! Go up to street trash and say the same thing and they'll probably say "Yeah, right on, man!"

So if you consistently use words that make you feel bad, either in conversation or in your self-talk, replace that word with something that gives you a neutral response, or even a positive anchor. Examples:

- "I'm lonely" or "I'm depressed" -> "I'm a bit down on my luck" or "I'm in the process of finding someone"
- "I'm shy" -> "I'm reserved" or "I'm a little introverted"
- "I'm furious" or "I'm outraged" -> "I'm a little ticked off" or "I'm irritated"

Sure, this is a bit silly, but the silliness of it might even make you feel better. You can also create a positive response where there wasn't one before, or enhance a positive response the same way - use more powerful words.

Another thought...

Your language, and your behaviour in general, not only anchor yourself, but other people as well. There's no way around it. If you consistently create an emotional state in somebody, they eventually anchor that state to you, even if you weren't doing it on purpose. If you whine and complain, put yourself or others down, or just talk about shocking or inappropriate things consistently around somebody, they will definitely resent you on some level, even though they might not be aware of it.

So the theory behind SS is to use your language to put someone in a romantic or sexual state consistently and then anchor it to yourself. If this sounds devious and manipulative, remember that the people who are good at sex and relationships do this naturally anyway, without even being aware of it. "Chemistry" is a myth perpetrated by the outgoing to keep us shys down.

So next time you're with someone you want to get involved with, ask yourself "What kind of things would this person find romantic/sexual?" and then keep bringing those things up, just to see what happens :)

Metaphor

Metaphors are an especially powerful extension of Transformational Vocabulary. Remember how I said that your subconscious works on imagery, symbols, and metaphor? By using metaphor you can sometimes communicate directly with your subconscious and achieve surprising results.

For example, there was a man who was 170 pounds overweight. He was very spiritual; when asked he said "his body was just a vehicle; it's the soul that's important". He was persuaded to accept a new metaphor, "My body is a temple". Now for a religious person, a temple is something to be revered. You would never damage or deface it. What happened? He lost 130 pounds in the space of a few months, that's what.

What are your metaphors? Fill these out right now:

- Life is ...
- I am ...
- People are ...
- Women/Men are ...

Now, what *should* they be? For it to work, they have to be things that have powerful, personal meaning for you. You wouldn't choose a crucifix or a temple, for example, if you weren't very religious. Examples:

- Life is a game/dance/stage/garden of Eden

- I am a king/poet/warrior/prophet/jewel/rose
- Women are a gift/blessing/jewels/roses/dogs (Man's best friend, sorry had to throw that in)

Now just adopt these new metaphors and see what you get. Sometimes just making the change in your head is enough, but you might have to do a little anchoring and reinforcement to get it to stick.

Part 3: The Heavy Artillery

Okay, now the really good stuff. Here we're going to work on changing your beliefs, and your pain anchors, which should get rid of your shyness for good. But first, we need to know exactly what they are.

First, brainstorm your beliefs. Examine the thoughts that run through your head when you're in your shy-pattern. Also look at the way you talk about yourself to others and your self-talk. It's important that you be completely honest with yourself and be as thorough as possible. Examples:

- I am a nerd/geek/loser/inept
- I'm too shy
- I'm not compatible with him/her
- I'm not normal
- I don't know what to say/do
- I'm afraid of rejection/screwing up/being hurt/being embarrassed/what others think
- Men/Women don't like me
- People don't like me

Now, your anchors. Make two lists, pleasurable experiences that you move toward, and painful experiences that you avoid. Rank them in descending order starting with the experiences you take the most action to gain/avoid. Again, it's important that you're very honest with yourself. Don't list them in the order you'd like them to be in ideally, but examine your actual behaviour.

Sample pleasures

Love
Freedom
Security
Power
Comfort

Success
Intimacy
Adventure
Passion
Health

Sample pains

Rejection
Frustration
Depression
Humiliation

Anger
Loneliness
Failure
Guilt

When you're done, you should notice some definite conflicts that would cause your shyness. In my case, on my pleasures side Love and Intimacy were high up, but Safety, Security and Comfort were at the top. On my pains side, Evaluation, Rejection and Humiliation were at the top, while Loneliness and Depression were toward the bottom (remember, we're looking at the amount of action we take to *avoid* these feelings).

Here's something you can try that may help. Think about the way you *want* to be, your ideal self, and brainstorm what your pleasures/pains would have to be for you to be that way. Think about what anchors you'd need to add and remove, and then reorder the lists accordingly. This alone might cause some nifty changes...

Changing Your Beliefs

You've got three basic choices when it comes to beliefs. Remember, your brain tends to filter out references that run contrary to your beliefs, so one approach is to go over your beliefs and references consciously and sort them out. This is referred to in clinical psychology as Cognitive Therapy, and, in my opinion, is the *worst* way to go about it. I'll share the process with you anyway in case the other options don't work.

Go through the following questions with each of the beliefs you need to change:

1. What is your belief?
2. Why do you believe that? What references are you using to support this?

3. Is it possible that you've evaluated these experiences poorly? (This is especially true of childhood experiences, when your cognitive powers aren't at their best). If so, go back into them and re-evaluate. It probably seemed terrible at the time, but would it be so bad if it happened to you now?
4. How much pain is this belief causing you?
5. What are you afraid would happen if you didn't believe this?
6. What references do you have that run contrary to this? After reviewing these references, are you still sure you believe that?

Ugh. That hurt even writing it. But that might've at least weakened the beliefs and their hold on you, if nothing else.

Option two is probably the best but the hardest to achieve. Remember, "powerful experiences" such as a rape or car accident can smash through beliefs as if they were paper. Unfortunately, it's hard to come up with a power experience to cure shyness (short of a woman coming up to you, saying "you know, you drive us all WILD, baby!" and making love to you right there - I wish).

Instead, most of us progress in small steps - starting conversations, getting comfortable with conversations, getting a date, becoming comfortable with dating, starting a relationship, becoming comfortable with relationships, etc. which could take months, years, or a lifetime.

So we're left with option three - use positive references consistently and repeatedly.

Affirmations

Start a new list entitled "Affirmations". Go over your list of negative beliefs, and for each one, create a positive statement to counteract it. Include a reference from your life if possible. It's important that you follow these rules:

- make sure it's positive - "I am not shy" won't work too well
- make it first person - "I this, I that" rather than "People this, women that, men ..."
- make it present tense - "I am confident" rather than "I will be confident"
- make sure it's something *you* control - not "I date more often than Frank does"
- try to include rich sensory imagery, powerful emotional anchors, and references

Samples:

- I easily talk to anyone I have a desire to meet. I am clever and witty and relaxed.
- I have immense courage. I overcome any fears.
- I'm fit and attractive. I keep my body in great shape.
- I remember to compliment people and to show I appreciate them.
- I am happy with myself, regardless of what other people think.

Right now you're probably asking yourself, "So why am I telling myself all this stuff that obviously isn't true?" Remember, your own thoughts are part of the input your brain takes in, and it doesn't question anything, it just processes and stores everything. At first your beliefs will reject these statements, but with enough consistency, repetition and references, your beliefs will eventually change. Studies show it takes about a month of daily repetition, but that depends on how often you go over your affirmations. The best thing to do would be to print them out on a card and keep them with you during the day, and just read over them whenever you get the chance. As you read them, imagine how good it will feel to be that way; really get into it.

Within one month of implementing this technique, the author of the book I got this from went from hiding behind plants at parties to dating regularly. He is now in his second marriage and makes his living as an author and motivational speaker.

Hypnosis

Hypnotherapy is similar to the technique above, but it communicates with your subconscious much more directly, and you can get results within a few sessions if all goes well. The downside of it is that it is expensive (around \$100/hour) and if your therapist misses something important you've wasted a lot of money for nothing. The alternative is to learn

self-hypnosis. Probably the best thing to do is get a therapist to teach it to you, but there are lots of good books on the subject as well. I won't go into it in too much detail here because it's somewhat difficult to do and I'm not at all qualified to teach it, but here are the basics:

- make sure you are in a relaxed, open-minded mood.
- put yourself in a comfortable position, either lying down or sitting.
- give yourself relaxation suggestions until you are in a deeply relaxed state. Example: "The tension in my feet is draining away... my feet are relaxed... my legs are becoming more and more relaxed... my breathing is becoming deep and even... relax..relax...relax...", etc. Keep it up until there's no tension anywhere in your body, and you might feel a bit numb.
- What usually follows is a countdown (or countup...) in time with your breathing. Example: "As I count down from 10, as I breathe out I will sink deeper and deeper into a state of trance... 10... deeper and deeper... 9... deeper and deeper...", etc.
- At this point you should be in trance. Don't start to wonder if you're actually in trance or not, because that will definitely snap you out of it. Just start repeating your affirmation statements to yourself; even if you weren't actually in trance, it will still do you some good.
- Finish by suggesting something like "I will count to three and then awake feeling refreshing and alert" or "I will count to three and as I count I will drift off to sleep" (If you're doing this at bedtime).

These two techniques, affirmations and self-hypnosis, are effective ways of improving anything in your life, not just shyness. I'd suggest setting aside 15-30 minutes every day to work on these, it's well worth the effort.

Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP)

NLP is a fascinating concept that I'd like to share with you. It's probably vastly different than any psychology you're used to, and in fact it's rejected by many clinical psychologists for being "unscientific", but it has all kinds of applications in therapy and self-improvement, so I believe it's worth learning.

NLP was founded by Richard Bandler and John Grinder, a mathematician and linguist respectively. Needless to say their approach was quite unique. What they did was study with some of the world's best therapists (Milton Erickson, Virginia Satir, and Fritz Perls mainly). Whenever something happened to cause a change in the subject, rather than examining what the therapist *said* he did, and what the subject *said* happened (both conscious functions), they observed what the therapist was doing *unconsciously*, and what happened in the subject's *subconscious*. Then they modeled their therapeutic approach after these otherwise unnoticed processes that they had observed. They learned to produce changes in a person in minutes that would take conventional therapists months, or years to accomplish. For example, NLPers can cure a phobia in less than an hour, and often in less than 15 minutes. If you don't believe this, there are lots of NLP practitioners on the net that you can talk to who can share their own experiences with it.

I'm going to share some of the NLP I've picked up that I believe is relevant to shyness; for more information, check out books by: Richard Bandler, John Grinder, Robert Dilts, Tad James, and Steven and Connirae Andreas.

First, the assumption that your subconscious doesn't differentiate between real experiences and mental ones is extremely important in NLP. Very rarely, if ever, will they get you to physically **DO** anything; rather, they'll sit you down, get you to imagine some things, create some pictures and experiences in your mind, do some anchoring, and when you're done, you've changed. It's almost magical.

Anchoring, BTW, is a fundamental part of NLP. Being able to control your emotional states is a *very* powerful tool. Often what they'll do is get you to experience something unpleasant, then experience it again with an anchor, like confidence, happiness, or courage. This will totally change your evaluation of that experience!

Submodalities

Submodalities are the sensory qualities of the things you perceive in your mind. Changing these can change your emotional state to a certain extent. For example, images that have very bright, vivid colors, that are large, and that are close up tend to be more emotionally intense than dim, black and white, small, faraway images. Similarly, for sounds, there's volume, tonality, speed, duration, harmony/cacophony, and for kinesthetics there's temperature, texture, vibration, pressure, movement, weight, etc.

Fear

Of particular interest are the techniques for overcoming fear. All fear really is, is a warning signal that you're about to experience something that you've anchored to pain. A phobia is the same thing but with a much stronger anchor. So all you need to do to overcome fear is to break that anchor - change the feelings you've associated with that situation. This is called "dissociation".

So without further ado, here is the NLP Fast Phobia/Trauma Cure! This is a dissociation technique that relieves fears/phobias and removes unwanted emotional residue from a traumatic situation.

- find a place free of distractions where you can concentrate.
- relax.
- anchor yourself to something that gives you powerful feelings of confidence, power, safety, etc.
- imagine yourself sitting in a movie theatre. Take some time to experience this fully. Examine the decor, the screen, the people seated around you.
- pick an experience that you want to dissociate. For a fear/phobia, if you don't know the original trauma that caused your problem, just think of any time when you experienced the unwanted feelings.
- take a "snapshot" of that experience and place it on the screen.
- take some time to examine the submodalities of the image. Alter them so that the image is less intense (make it black and white, dim, small, far away, two-dimensional, and if it is from your own eyes, change it so that it is from the viewpoint of a passing stranger, or a bird, or God).
- now make the snapshot into a movie where all the frames have the same qualities as the first one. It's important that the movie not be about something you're afraid of, but about *you experiencing the thing you're afraid of*.
- imagine yourself floating up out of your body into the projection booth so that you're looking down at your body in the theatre.
- start the movie from up there in the projection booth. Remember, you're watching yourself sitting in the theatre, watching a movie.
- Once the movie is done, float back down into your body. Then, imagine yourself stepping back into the experience.
- The first time this experience happened, you were overcome by the feelings these stimuli caused and were unable to evaluate the situation properly. This time, as an observer, go back over the experience and re-evaluate it, seeing it as it really was.
- Now, imagine the movie "rewinding" in your mind. See all the events happen in reverse. When you're finished, jump back to the end and rewind it again, but faster. Keep rewinding the movie until you can do it in the space of about a second, then rewind it again at that same speed five more times.
- Take some time to enjoy not being afraid or upset any more :)

Now for some notes. It's essential that you remain impartial (emotionally detached) throughout the movie. If you find yourself still experiencing the fear, you're going to have to experiment with it a bit until you get it right, especially if you have a very vivid imagination. Remember to stay in your seat and don't become part of the movie till it's over. Some things you can try:

- play around with the submodalities; the ones I gave might be wrong for you.
- imagine that you're in your seat sideways and watching out of the corner of your eye.
- imagine that your best friend/loved one is there watching it with you.
- imagine that there are a bunch of clowns in the theatre with you, or in the background of the movie (don't do this if you're afraid of clowns)
- imagine that the person in the movie is you but the person in the theatre is a stranger, or vice-versa.
- imagine that the movie has subtitles and/or silly piano music playing at the same time.
- imagine you're driving along a highway and the movie is playing on a drive-in way off in the distance.
- imagine the screen is loose and flapping in the wind.

Be creative. This technique WILL work under the right conditions, but it's different for everybody.

The Belief-Change Technique

NLP has a very fast technique for changing beliefs. It's based on the observation that whenever a belief changes, there's a transition from state to state that looks like this:

Conviction -> Doubt -> Disbelief -> Open to a New Belief -> Uncertainty -> New Conviction

and the assumption that those states can be anchored just like anything else. Here's the pattern:

- The technique involves six "stations". When you're first starting this, you should write out the stations on pieces of paper and arrange them in a circle for added visual effect. The stations are,
 - o Current Belief
 - o Open to Doubt
 - o Museum of Old Beliefs
 - o New Belief
 - o Open to Believing
 - o Sacred Place
- When you're doing the imagining I'm going to talk about, make sure you feel the total experience - visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (feelings)
- Stand at station 1 and think about your current belief, how it feels.
- Move to station 2 and think about something that you doubt, and how that feels. Now think about your target belief and how it feels to doubt it.
- Move to station 3 and think about a belief that you used to have but no longer have, and how that feels. Now think about your target belief and how it feels to no longer believe it. As you leave station 3, imagine that you're leaving that belief behind in the museum.
- Move to station 4 and think about the new belief you want to have.
- Move to station 5 and think about something you don't believe but are open to believing, and how that feels. Now think of your target belief and how it feels to be open to it.
- Move to station 6 and think about one of your strongest and most sacred beliefs and how that feels. Now think about your target belief and how it feels to believe it with the same conviction.

The New Behavior Generator

Once you've gotten rid of your negative beliefs and anchors, you're ready to take on new behavior. You could just do this by practice, but you're bound to fail and embarrass yourself for a while that way. The New Behavior Generator can help with that.

- find a model, either your imagined "ideal self" or someone you know that already has this behavior mastered.
- ask yourself "what beliefs does this behavior need to maintain itself?" Go through the processes I've discussed to make your beliefs congruent if you need to.
- Mentally rehearse the model from the outside first, then step inside it, walk around in it, see from those eyes, hear with those ears, feel with that body. Experience the new positive intention of the behavior and the positive rewards both in what is gained and in what is avoided.
- Go back in your life to a time when you (could have) learned this behavior and imagine that it became a part of you, then project back through the present and into the future.
- Practice doing this several times a day until you forget to mentally rehearse it because you find you are already doing it!

I can personally vouch for the NBG, because I have some experience with acting, which is very similar. When I do a play I tend to model myself after my character backstage as well as onstage, and the last time I did a play I noticed several women gravitating toward me, and I had all kinds of dating opportunities. It's too bad that the effect didn't last, but it was because I still believed in my shyness deep down. Now I know better! :-)

I think the strategy of mental rehearsal is a very important one that we tend to overlook. We often fantasize about what it will be like once we have a significant other, but rarely do we imagine things like approaching people, starting conversations and asking for dates because these things are painful to us. Or if we do imagine those things, we tend to

see the worst case scenario, which just makes us feel worse. Starting now, make it a habit to use the NBG, or at least visualize yourself socializing successfully, and dealing with rejection and embarrassment effectively.

Conclusion

Well, that's everything. I think if you go back over all the strategies I talked about, you'll notice that most of them are quick and easy. That's because they attack the cause of the problem, not the symptoms. Now all you need is a little motivation to start using them regularly. I understand that you have reason to be skeptical about a lot of it (esp. NLP), but my advice is this: don't trust the scientific authorities or anybody else, or even your own beliefs, conditioning and common sense. TRY THEM OUT, and trust your own senses. Test them yourself. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Good luck!