

Avoidant Freeze Response

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Many times an Avoidant will respond to a threat by freezing. This will appear most commonly on the face. Although the entire face could appear frozen (similar to a still face), pay attention to the mid-facial muscles, particularly the malar fat pad (cheeks). (See figure 1) Stilling of these muscles may provide a "tell" that the partner is becoming hyperaroused and moving toward or is already in a threat response. This most often occurs with the emergence of shame. Since the face is an immediate representation of one's internal affective states the experience of shame and/or threat brings to one's awareness one's exposure to another, especially when that other person is in close physical proximity. The stilling of the face is a defensive attempt to provide a visual boundary to offset an exquisite vulnerability to intrusion. This is clearly an avoidance strategy. The stilling of the face also sends an implicit message to the other partner that there exists a threatening element within the

intersubjective field. The disruption of the attunement process (Beebe, 2003; Beebe & Lachmann, 1998) quickly raises each partner's arousal level. Facial and bodily stilling may be understood in these instances as driven by right hemisphere, implicit processes that precede or even preempt conscious awareness of the freezing partner (Adamson & Frick, 2003; Schore, 2005; Tronick, 2003). The Avoidant may feel he or she can lock the other person out and avoid exposure, intrusion, or attack. But the door not only shuts the other person out, it shuts the Avoidant inside where no one

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can help.

Still Face as Freeze Threat Response

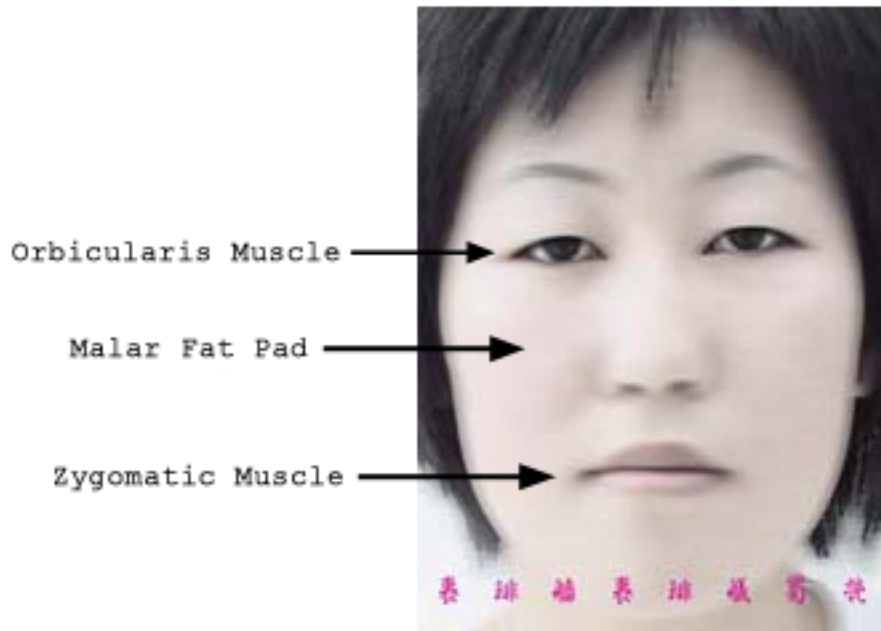


FIGURE 1

References

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