Shame's Unwelcome Interruption and Responsive Movements

Body, Religion, Morality – an Interdisciplinary Study

Jan-Olav Henriksen and Terje Mesel

NOASP NORDIC OPEN ACCESS SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

CAPPELEN DAMM AKADEMISK

Shame's Unwelcome Interruption and Responsive Movements

Jan-Olav Henriksen and Terje Mesel

Shame's Unwelcome Interruption and Responsive Movements

BODY, RELIGION, MORALITY – AN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY

CAPPELEN DAMM AKADEMISK

© 2021 Jan-Olav Henriksen and Terje Mesel.

This work is protected under the provisions of the Norwegian Copyright Act (Act No. 2 of May 12, 1961, relating to Copyright in Literary, Scientific and Artistic Works) and published Open Access under the terms of a Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0 License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). This license allows third parties to freely copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format as well as remix, transform or build upon the material for any purpose, including commercial purposes, provided the work is properly attributed to the author(s), including a link to the license, and any changes that may have been made are thoroughly indicated. The attribution can be provided in any reasonable manner, however, in no way that suggests the author(s) or the publisher endorses the third party or the third party's use of the work. Third parties are prohibited from applying legal terms or technological measures that restrict others from doing anything permitted under the terms of the license. Note that the license may not provide all of the permissions necessary for an intended reuse; other rights, for example publicity, privacy, or moral rights, may limit third party use of the material.

ISBN print edition: 978-82-02-71546-5
PDF: 978-82-02-69244-5
EPUB: 978-82-02-71543-4
HTML: 978-82-02-71544-1
XML: 978-82-02-71545-8
DOI: https://doi.org/10.23865/noasp.126

Cover design: Cappelen Damm AS
Cover image: Masaccio, "The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden" (c. 1425). Photo © Scala, Florence/Fondo Edifici di Culto - Min. dell'Interno.
Cappelen Damm Akademisk/NOASP
noasp@cappelendamm.no

Contents

Acknowledgments 9

Part I Shame: The Basics 11

Chapter 1 Introductory Remarks 13

- Our starting point 13
- Shame in the headlines 14
- A holistic interdisciplinary approach 16
- Shame has many faces and many places in human experience 17
- Shame must be accessed: the role of signs and symbols 18
- Shame and our inner world 20
- Shame and embodiment 22
- The way forward 24

Chapter 2 Circumscribing Shame 29

- Evolution: Core positions on the complexities of nature and culture 30
  - Between universalists and relativists 33
  - A phylogenic account: continuity 34
  - An ultimate account: the ability to think 35
- The ambiguity of shame: further lines of research on evolution and society 36
  - Evolution revisited 37
  - Shame and the social matrix 39
  - Social psychology and recent attempts at differentiating shame 41
- Preliminary circumscription: shame and the question of morality 47
  - Shame and guilt as emotions with a potential moral function 47
  - Shame and guilt are categorically different 49
  - Shame: a part of the human capabilities 51
  - Strategies for transporting or transforming shame 54
- Circumscribing shame as disruption: components of and types of shame 57
  - Shame as loss of positive self-experience 57
  - Gilbert's circumscription: five components 62
  - Types of shame: contextual demarcations 68
- Shame: attempting a comprehensive phenomenological description 78
  - Towards a preliminary comprehensive definition 78
  - Shame and intentional investment or engagement 79
  - Shame as disruption, rupture, or impediment of coherent agency 80
  - Shame as a mediator of self-experience 83

Shame as the result of lack of recognition or humiliation 85
A few illustrations of the above position... 86
Shame as an individual experience: why does it differ? 88

Chapter 3 Shame from a Psychological Point of View 91
Starting point: shame and the architecture of the Self 91
Heinz Kohut and the development of the self 92
Mirroring and idealization 92
Optimal frustration shapes a solid self... 95
Selfobjects 96
Shame, vulnerability, and narcissistic rage 98
Martha Nussbaum: Psychological considerations within a philosophical framework 103
Primitive shame 103
Shame, self-perception and agency 105
Shame and imperfection 108
Shame as a social and relational phenomenon.. 110
Shame and individuation: overcoming narcissism 113
Emerging features in the philosophical discussion of shame 115
Shame and vulnerability..115
Shame: self-esteem and self-respect 118
Deigh on conditions for agency and shame: shame is not necessarily the loss of self-esteem 121
Preliminary concluding reflections 132

Part II Contexts Where Shame Is at Work.. 135

Chapter 4 Shame and Embodiment 137
Introduction 137
A short look at historical change...138
Phenomenological characteristics 141
The movements of shame and the relational body 141
Preliminary position: body shame 143
Body shame and intersubjectivity 144
Body shame: bodies among bodies 149
The invisible flow of the lived body 152
Body visibility as dysfunction 154
Body visibility and body shame 156
Acute body shame as regulation 157
Chronic toxic body shame and the shamed body 161
Body shame: differentiations 164
First differentiation: the lacking body as an existential reminder.................165
Second differentiation: when the body reveals the weakness of the will....168
Third differentiation: in the eyes of the other in different contexts 169
Shame and the female body 176
Origin: evolution and existential threat 177

Female embodiment: historical lines ... 179
Objectification of the female body ... 180
Female self-objectification or self-derivatization ... 189
Niva Piran: The experience of female embodiment in context ... 193

Chapter 5 Shame and Religion ... 205
Shame within the porous parameters of religion and spirituality ... 206
Understanding religion to understand shame ... 212
Shame for being and doing in a religious context ... 215
Fundamental features: the past and (its) authority ... 218
Religion and idealization ... 221
Identity in religious groups – and shame ... 224
Conformity and compliance ... 227
The risk of shame in the context of religious practices ... 231
Confessional practices: shame perpetuated or overcome? ... 236
The body as a religious problem ... 239
Religious doctrines and shame ... 244
Atonement ... 245
Sin and feeling accepted or repressed ... 253
Images of God and the processes of the self ... 256
How should we assess the risks of shame in the context of religion? ... 262

Chapter 6 Shame and Morality ... 269
Introductory remarks ... 269
Brief comments on shame and moral theory ... 273
Kohlberg's different stages of morality: implications for shame ... 274
Development of moral competence ... 274
Shame under the conditions of the post-conventional stage ... 277
Shame at the pre-conventional level of morality ... 281
Shame at the level of conventional morality ... 281
Defending shame: Resources ... 284
Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni: Shame defended as morally relevant ... 284
Against the two dogmas ... 286
J. C. Manion: The possibility of determining the moral relevance of shame ... 292
Evaluation ... 295
Support for morality? Pattison on shame ... 296
Violence as a response to shame compromises a moral definition of shame ... 301
John Kekes: Shame and moral progress ... 310
Cheshire Calhoun: Moral shame as the result of relational practices ... 320
Michelle Mason: Are there good reasons for not being shameless? ... 328
Concluding remarks ... 334

Chapter 7 Concluding Remarks ... 337

Literature ... 345

Acknowledgments

As colleagues, we have, over the years, discussed the phenomenon of shame and tried to figure out what shame is and how it works in human life. Our discussions have always centered around the role that shame does play, should play, or should not play in human life. We have come to these discussions with different perspectives. Jan-Olav Henriksen has dealt with shame in his research in philosophy of religion and also criticism of religions. Henriksen's approach to shame has mainly been through theoretical studies, but he has also supervised doctoral students that engaged in relevant empirical studies of the topic. Terje Mesel has dealt with shame in empirical studies of adverse events in health care and also child sexual abuse. Thus, we have brought different perspectives to the table, although the fundamental theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of this study are familiar to both of us through our earlier research.

We started out with different viewpoints. Whereas Henriksen found shame to be a morally problematic and even harmful phenomenon that we should work to avoid for purposes of socialization and moral maturation, Mesel claimed that in an unjust world, shame is sometimes all we have to keep us from immoral behavior. However, during our long and inter-disciplinary discussions throughout this book, we have found common ground in a phenomenological description of shame. This book is the result of our discussions and the research they led us to do.

We have not written this in the style of a popular book. We aim to present perspectives on shame that allow it to appear as a complex phenomenon. Accordingly, we imagine an audience of professionals: in healthcare, psychology, education, philosophy, religious communities – people who want to move beyond introductory reading. We hope the book provides opportunities for engaging with the topic to better understand its dynamics and complexities, and why it creates so much trouble for many of us.

We do believe, though, that also laypeople may read with interest some of the chapters that follow.

It would not have been possible to write this book without support from our institutions: We have both been affiliated with the University of Agder, Norway. However, Henriksen's main affiliation is with MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion, and Society. Mesel is also affiliated with the Research Department of Child Psychiatry at Sørlandet Hospital HF. These institutions have provided resources for traveling abroad and carrying out most of the research necessary for thinking and writing. Hence, we are very grateful to librarians and colleagues in Oslo, Kristiansand, Oxford and San Diego who have supported our work in various ways. We are also grateful to the University of Agder for the financial support that made it possible to publish this book with open access, and to our publisher, who accepted the book almost immediately in a most favorable manner.

Ås and Flekkerøy, Winter, 2021
Jan-Olav Henriksen
Terje Mesel

Part I
Shame: The Basics

CHAPTER 1

Introductory Remarks

Our starting point

Shame interrupts us in an unwelcome way. It is hard to imagine any person who would like to feel the interrupting power of shame. Moreover, when we do feel shame, we search for ways to overcome it – in various responsive movements. This book is about shame from these perspectives. Hence, the title we have chosen.

Despite its often unwelcome occurrence, we regularly encounter the claim that shame serves some positive functions as well. But is that really the case? Can shame make a positive contribution to human life, or should we strive to make shame obsolete? This question forms the main background of the present book. To bring the short version of our conclusion to the fore: Shame is not so much a moral or non-moral phenomenon as it is an ambiguous and complex element in human life. It is part of an evolved composite cluster of interrelated emotional and cognitive abilities that makes possible the complexity of human interactions and relationships. As such, it may complicate the relationship that people have to their bodies, and in a religious context it is also often profoundly problematic. Accordingly, shame is not only one emotion among others; it is deeply rooted in the architecture of the self. Thus, shame plays an essential part in our self's complex becoming and being-in-the-world. We will attempt to elaborate this point in the following chapters. In so doing, we will focus on elements in human life that seem to closely condition intense experiences of shame: the body, religion, and morality. The reason for this limitation is apparent: these dimensions of human life have to do with basic elements in how we relate to ourselves and others, and they have a profound impact on self-experiences as well as on how we experience ourselves as beings in relation with others. Other dimensions

in human life are also connected to shame, and what we say about these three dimensions may have a bearing on and enhance understanding of how it functions in other dimensions.

Shame in the headlines

During much of 2016–17, shame appeared in the headlines of Norwegian newspapers in ways formerly unprecedented. This was connected to two phenomena: the first, and the one which received the most coverage, was a TV series about a group of Norwegian adolescents in their final years at high school. It depicted the struggles of ordinary young lives in easily recognizable ways. Therefore, it received much attention. The remarkable thing was that not only young people got "hooked" on this series – older viewers did as well. The name of the series, which ran for several seasons, is *Shame*.[1]

No one seems to have questioned the choice of name, even though shame is not explicitly thematized in the series. However, when we take a closer look, shame seems to function as a tacit organizing principle for the social interaction between the characters. Shame manifests itself when the characters define themselves as part of a group or outside of it, or when they conceal important life experiences such as abuse, homosexuality, or absent parents. That so many people were attracted to it and able to identify with the characters and the theme indicates that shame, although not often explicitly talked about, is nevertheless present and can be identified in peoples' lives. In the series, topics like body image, sexuality, belonging, moral dilemmas, and religion were negotiated in different ways.

Shame also reached the headlines of Norwegian newspapers in quite a different way. A small group of young women with an immigrant background declared themselves "the shameless Arabian daughters" in youth blogs and columns. They opposed the religiously and culturally defined uses of shame as an instrument of social control and discipline. It was both a feminist and a human rights-based protest directed against an idealized image of the "perfect Arabian girl," excluded and protected from the public sphere. One of the "shameless daughters", Nancy Herz, expressed her

1 Julie Andem, „Skam," in *Skam* (Norway: NRK, 2015), Television.

anger and opposition to the use of shaming tactics: "If anyone ought to be ashamed, it is those who, due to their narrow-minded attitudes, condemn homosexuals, support murderers and legislation against blasphemy, and allow rotten imams to remain in their positions"[2] (*Aftenposten* 25/4/2016).

"The shameless Arabian daughters" received a great deal of attention and support, even in the Prime Minister's annual speech on New Years' Eve. It also initiated a public discussion on how shame and other social control phenomena were at play, especially in immigrant communities. Feminist contributors also revealed the gendered bias of shame as a mechanism of social control: far more women than men are subjected to shaming. They are told to behave properly to avoid tainting both themselves and their families with shame. Such attempts at discipline may involve an unhealthy mix of elements, such as body focus, religion, and presumed moral attitudes.

From a more distant perspective, the name the young women gave themselves, "the shameless Arabian daughters," was well chosen. It expresses a head-on challenge and confrontation with the old, culturally defined notion of what being shameless entails. Instead of a concept signifying lack of modesty, morality, and religious and cultural adherence, they presented shamelessness as a liberating concept, freeing it from its immoral and gendered use as an instrument of social control.[3]

As we write the final version of the Introduction, in the summer of 2020, the consequences of the #Metoo campaign have reached far into the corridors of power. In boardrooms and parliaments, holders of seats have toppled, and powerful men that earlier considered themselves to be invincible have found out otherwise. Many have discovered that shame can shift place. Victims of sexual abuse and sexual harassment experience that society has finally opened a social space for their narrative, and that the power of boardrooms is no longer influential enough to close down that space. They also experience that with the recognition of their stories, blame can finally be shifted – from the offended to the offender.

---

2 Nancy Herz, "Vi er de skamløse, arabiske jentene – vår tid begynner nå," Column, *Aftenposten* (Oslo), 25th april 2016.

3 Thus, the "daughters" exemplify the need for diversity in the understanding of what shameless may mean in a moral and cultural context. This is a topic we will return to in Chapter 6, "Shame and Morality".

We claim that the above examples represent a noteworthy cultural and moral shift; they are examples of a Western and late-modern international rediscovery of shame. In both public and scholarly discussions, we see a new interdisciplinary and critical interest in the phenomenon. Surely, as a social phenomenon, shame has always been tacitly present in societal and relational mechanisms. But the critical discussion of shame has mainly belonged to the domain of psychotherapists and psychologists. The linguistic repertoire for the self-understanding of the *modern,* liberal and liberated human being contained few words and little space for shame, as it was abandoned as a cultural and societal remnant belonging to a pre-modern society without a sufficient level of liberty.

We argue that this lack of both linguistic repertoire and social space has, both scholarly and publicly, depleted the interpretative resources we have at hand for experiencing and understanding our human condition. The many faces of shame are present even when it is not identified, articulated, or understood. Therefore, we need to develop a nuanced interdisciplinary understanding of shame that captures both the ambiguity, the complexity, and the relevance of shame. The ambiguity and complexity not only suggest that it is sensitive to what goes on in different contexts and relations. It also suggests that different contexts may offer different resources for the identification, articulation, and handling of the manifested face of shame. This is the task we have before us and, like many other contemporary scholars, we find it important to establish a clearer and better understanding of how shame is a part of human reality.

A holistic interdisciplinary approach

The following is an interdisciplinary study where we attempt to draw on resources from different fields of research. But even though we will tangle with disciplines such as psychology, feminist studies, religious studies, and so on, we come to these scholarly fields from the viewpoint of philosophy/moral philosophy. Thus, a fundamental philosophical perspective has informed both our readings and the final analysis presented in this book. The foundation for our interdisciplinary approach is, therefore, to be identified in philosophy.

The success of natural science points to the importance of the physiological and biological factors in human life as important premises of both human existence and experience. We cannot ignore these factors when we discuss the phenomenon of shame. Shame is an embodied phenomenon. Nevertheless, when we ask what it takes to become human, we need to include other dimensions of experience than those studied by the natural sciences. In the following, we therefore speak about shame as expressed in different experiential dimensions. These dimensions are not separate "layers" of reality, but are only used to indicate how shame as a phenomenon is related to more than our inner, psychological structure or architecture. Shame has to do with our relational and social mode of being-in-the-world, and with culture and society, as much as being about society. Anthropologist Agustín Fuentes expresses it well when he points to how "humans need to be around each other for social, physiological and psychological reasons, and becoming (and being) human is a process that is simultaneously biological and cultural. We need to grow up around another to be fully human."[4] This means, for example, that we also need to see emotions as constituted by our relational mode of being-in-the-world.[5] Accordingly, we argue for *a holistic interpretation of human life,* and this is reflected in how we approach shame. We cannot ignore either psychological, social, or cultural dimensions of human experience of self and others. To reduce the study of human experience down to, for example, a reductionistic question of biology or psychology is especially unhelpful when it comes to an understanding of the complexities of shame.

Shame has many faces and many places in human experience

Human consciousness and our senses are not indiscriminately open, but are always intentionally directed and guided by a specific perspective. Moreover, the different dimensions of our experience cannot be fully separated

4 Agustín Fuentes, *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies They Told You: Busting Myths About Human Nature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 29.

5 In one way, this can be read as an argument for seeing shame as a social emotion. We will specify this later.

from each other. Our experience of the "inner world", such as our experience of love, is more often than not related directly to the experience of our family in the social-cultural dimension of experience. Furthermore, our experience of nature, for example our physical body, is contingent on how our body is experienced in the socio-cultural world. This interplay and interconnectedness contribute to how shame both manifests itself and functions in our complex world of experience. We may experience shame as an emotion, but at the same time, our cheeks may turn deep red in shame. The young child who has been subjected to demeaning sexual abuse may experience that both the terror and the shame he or she experiences are inscribed as automatic reactions deep in the limbic brain – as fight, flight or freeze responses, eye aversion, or in a body that automatically seeks to hide.

In recent philosophy, the complex interplay between the different dimensions of experience – the psychological, socio-cultural, and natural – is acknowledged as important for understanding human agency and interaction.[6] An analysis based on these dimensions makes it possible to differentiate between different factors in human experience and understand how they are expressed. As indicated, these dimensions cannot be separated from each other but are interdependent. They mutually condition our experience of ourselves and the world. This interdependency can be further elaborated. We cannot sufficiently access our inner dimension (of intentions, feelings, desires, and memories related to shame) without language (which belongs to the social and cultural dimension, i.e., symbolic world). Further, the symbolic world of language we use to articulate both shame and the conditions of shame cannot be explicated without also being related to the natural dimension and the body that harbors our desires and emotions.

Shame must be accessed: the role of signs and symbols

After birth, the infant immediately finds herself part of the social dimension and tries to make sense of it. The specific type of human sociality

6 See, for example, Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Polity, 1984) and John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (London: Allen Lane, 1995).

would not be possible without interaction being enabled by signs, symbols, and language – features that are specific to the human species in the way they appear.[7] The infant must learn how to interpret the world through different signs. It is this capacity for semiotic engagement with the world, the capacity to understand and use signs and symbols, that makes social experience accessible.[8] However, that does not mean that the social dimension is only experienced through signs and symbols. As we grow older, it is through the development of the capacity for signs and symbols that shame can be cognitively accessed, articulated, and dealt with. Shame can be, for example, a bodily experience manifested in muscle tone, posture, and gaze. A body can also take on a semiotic function when shame is deliberately inscribed in both skin and flesh through self-mutilation or anorexia. If the semiotic resources are poor or diminished, our capacity for interaction with both ourselves and others may be impeded. To put it succinctly, our capacity to identify, articulate and understand shame depends on the semiotic resources available to us.

Obvious examples of this are Freud's version of psychoanalysis and Protestant theology's focus on guilt, which have both, to a large extent, rendered shame a neglected phenomenon. The cultural movements they represent reduced the resources for nuanced interpretations of the impact that shame has as an important phenomenon in human life. Philosopher Charles Taylor says that humans are self-interpreting animals.[9] Our abilities for such self-interpretation are dependent upon the resources we have at hand in the culture and the society in which we participate. This can explain the variations in the way shame is addressed and shaped in different cultural contexts. It is empirically evident both in history and

---

7 Cf. the elaborations in Terrence William Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

8 It is possible to develop the understanding of this dimension in a very extensive manner, but there is no great point in doing that here. For an understanding of the social dimension of human life, see John R. Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) and *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995). For characteristic traits in human culture against the backdrop of evolutionary theory, cf. also J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen, *Alone in the World?: Human Uniqueness in science and Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2006), 222f.

9 Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 45–76.

in different social and cultural contexts in the present that the world of signs and symbols is dynamic, complicated and powerful and, accordingly, it makes shame a culturally manifold concept.[10] What is considered shameful in one social and cultural context may be considered entirely appropriate in another. The validity of the language used for shame is therefore dependent upon agreement on its use and its referents. We establish, negotiate, and renegotiate these normative conventions about what is shameful and what is not in our social world, and experience the impact of these conventions on social behavior. Thus, the interplay between signs and symbols on the one hand, and the users of these on the other hand, mirrors the shifting power-dynamics of society through changing conventions and what are conceived as acceptable practices. The "shameless Arabian daughters" and the #Metoo campaign we mentioned above are excellent examples of these shifting power dynamics, especially since the renegotiation of what and who is shameful, and what and who is shameless, is quickly made possible through social media. When power shifts, so too do signs and symbols; in this case, both the use of shame/shamelessness and what its referent is. Thus, shame does not exist without beings who are both embedded in these normative conventions, socialized into acting on them and, hopefully, able to renegotiate them towards greater liberty for their users.

Shame and our inner world

That some experiences are accessible to us only because of our capacities for language is perhaps most obvious in what we call the *inner* or psychological dimension of experience. Shame shapes and is itself shaped by elements such as emotion, memory, and self-perception. The inner dimension of experience develops and shifts through life, and the

10 Cf. Daniel M. T. Fessler, "Shame in Two Cultures: Implications for Evolutionary Approaches," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 4, no. 2 (2004). See also Gershen Kaufman, *Shame: The Power of Caring* (Rochester: Schenkman Books, 1992), 220–25, and Emi Furukawa, June Tangney, and Fumiko Higashibara, "Cross-Cultural Continuities and Discontinuities in Shame, Guilt, and Pride: A Study of Children Residing in Japan, Korea and the USA," *Self and Identity* 11, no. 1 (2012); Richard A. Schweder, "Toward a Deep Cultural Psychology of Shame," *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Social Science* 70, no. 4 (2003).

changes have a lot to do with how we deal with our shame (or shamelessness). Hence, shame is more than an affect when it comes to how it appears in human life. It is always framed and shaped within a life-story that is the result of our relational mode of being. As such, it is also tied to our intentions and our desires, be they acquired or innate. Therefore, we need to address shame from an angle that is broader than what we find in psychoanalytic theory or affect theory.[11] This is the reason why we draw on Heinz Kohut's self-psychology and Martha Nussbaum's philosophy in the coming chapters.

Our inner world is only *indirectly* accessible to us, for at least two reasons. First, we become aware of our shame by learning about ourselves through others. It is by communicating with others that we develop the ability or competence to find the appropriate words for what is going on.[12] Accordingly, access to this experience requires both a certain level of authenticity and self-consciousness (or self-awareness), and a type of self-knowledge that is developed through the use of everyday language and theoretical language as well. Thus, we cannot *appropriate* our inner world without learning about ourselves from others, that is, by using social and cultural resources that offer us an adequate language.[13] This

11 Although we think that S. Tomkins points to important features in shame, his affect-theoretical approach to shame ignores the distinction between affect and emotion in a way that downplays some of the complexities that we want to highlight Chapter 3.

12 This indirectly accessible character has been a problem for the more direct, empirically oriented forms of psychology, which have partially rejected the necessity of speaking about the inner and instead focused on psychology as the study of human behavior (B.F. Skinner). This approach loses out on the points that we try to make, and we consider it rather restricted as the only way to speak about the inner life of humans – as that which matters most to us.

13 As we see it, this is one of the lasting insights of psychoanalysis. For further explanation on these points in a context of psychology and philosophy of religion, see Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Relating God and the Self: Dynamic Interplay* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), Chapter 3. Deacon points to how "language functions as a sort of shared code for translating certain essential attributes of memories and images between individuals who have entirely idiosyncratic experiences. This is possible because symbolic reference strips away any necessary link to the personal experiences and musings that ultimately support it. The dissociation allows individuals to supply their own indexical and iconic mnemonics in order to ground these tokens in new iconic and indexical representations during the process of interpretation [...]. The "subjective distance" from what is represented confers a representational freedom to thought processes that is not afforded by the direct recall or imagining of experiences. This is crucial for the development of self-consciousness, and for the sort of detachment from immediate arousal and compulsion that allows self-control. Self-representation, in the context of representations of alternative pasts and futures, could not be attained without a means for symbolic representation. It is this representation

fact suggests a point we will develop later, namely that *overcoming* shame to a large extent requires a competence acquired through social interaction and participation. Secondly, the articulation of our innermost emotions, our idiosyncratic history, and what we carry with us as individual personalities, are socially constructed. Our access to these elements depends on whether others have provided us with a language to understand ourselves, about what we think and feel, and what it may mean. But it is also dependent on our ability to access the inner world of others, which again, is dependent on their ability to articulate with authenticity *what* they experience.

The experiences of our inner world tell us something about the tight dynamic between our self-interpretation, our experiences, and how these experiences are made accessible to us through language and interaction with others. The content and shape of our lives and experiences are very much dependent on how we symbolically relate to the inner dimension, and to our "inner selves." Relating to ourselves through language is a way of opening up to a complex and interplaying experiential world where the experience of the body (as our "natural" mode) is central as well. Actually, as we shall see later on, the body's semiotic function as a carrier of signs and symbols seems to have attracted much focus in contemporary research.

Shame and embodiment

Because the embodied experience of being-in-the-world is usually recognized and articulated through the signs and symbols of language, the self-conscious phenomenon of shame normally presupposes language. However, as we mentioned above, that is not to say that language is always the only or the dominant way of expressing shame. Neurobiological research shows that children who are subjected to sexual abuse, for example, may find it difficult to both articulate and understand the terror they have experienced, but still, it may leave them with a sense of deep

of self that is held accountable in social agreements, that becomes engaged in the experience of empathy, and that is the source for rational, reflective intentions." Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain*, 451.

and toxic shame. Due to processes deep in the structures of the limbic brain, such experiences can, for example, alter the way the brain perceives danger. When they lead to a shutdown of the thalamus, traumatic experiences can remain as horrific remnants of past experiences – as strong sensory images, such as sound and visual images – without being integrated into the autobiographical memory, thus evading both the time and space of a narrative.[14] Where ordinary memory is integrated, articulated, and interpreted through the axis of narrative time and space, traumatic memory can evade time and space. One of the language centers in the brain may also go into an off-line mode when children experience severe trauma.[15] Thus, wordless and narratively disintegrated fragments of past traumatic experiences can be left floating around in the subconscious, always threatening to break into consciousness through flashbacks of raw and isolated shards of painful and shameful experiences.[16] Reliving these sensations is not about reliving narratively ordered memories, but means actually reliving the experience.[17] Thus, the lack of a narrative, of a story ordering signs and symbols, makes it difficult to both cognitively access and articulate the shame these fragmented experiences can carry.

On the other hand, research also points to how experiences of shame seem to be necessary for the development of the infant's brain. In the infant's second year, such experiences contribute to the development of the orbitofrontal cortex, which is the region of the brain that is involved in social, emotional, motivational and self-regulatory processes. Thus, what we will later address as "optimal frustration" in the Chapter 3 has a biological or neurological counterpart that makes it possible for the infant to develop an adequate and sufficiently attuned mode of participating in the social world.[18]

---

14 Bessel A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking, 2014), 70.

15 Ibid., 43f.

16 Terje Mesel, *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep* (Kristiansand: Portal Forlag, 2017), 79f.

17 fMRI scans of flashback experiences show, for example, strong activity in Brodman's area 19, where sensory images are first registered in the brain. Thus, flashback experiences are not so much experiencing the past, as reliving what actually happened. Ibid., 80.

18 See Allan N. Schore, "Early Shame Experiences and Infant Brain Development," in Paul Gilbert and Bernice Andrews, *Shame: Interpersonal Behavior, Psychopathology, and Culture* (New York:

Even though shameful experiences may evade narrative articulation, at least to a certain extent, they may find other and coarser ways of expressing themselves. Thus, shame can manifest itself through the signs and symbols of the body. Unrecognized and unarticulated toxic shame can inscribe and express itself through the body and contribute to severe illness over time.[19]

The way forward

Our access to reality is dependent on our interpretative resources and competencies. So too with shame. Shame as a reality articulates itself in our physiology and biology, through our interactions in the social world, and in our psychological experiences of self (and others). How shame is experienced is also dependent on the conditions that exist in our biology, our social and cultural resources, and in our inner world. The human experience of shame is, therefore, not static, but dynamic, shaped in the interplay between different dimensions of experience. It is also very much a product of evolution, and of the evolvement of our symbolic capacities. These capacities are what allow us to express shame or contribute to shaming. The different dimensions of human experience we have described are all significant to the understanding of shame, and it would be a mistake to say that shame has its origin, significance or meaning in only one of them. The reality of shame articulates itself as a biophysical, socio-cultural and inner psychological experience. Accordingly, shame is not only multifaceted but potentially also deeply ambiguous. However, for the sake of the following analysis, we can unravel the complexity through a threefold "optic".

Oxford University Press, 1998); Allan N. Schore, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994). Here referred to by Miryam Clough, *Shame, the Church and the Regulation of Female Sexuality* (Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 46.

19 Anna Luise Kirkengen, *Inscribed Bodies: Health Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (Dordrecht; Boston: Kluwer Academic, 2001).

1. The first element is the **mechanisms of shame**. Shame has its roots deep in our evolutionary history, evolving into a complex phenomenon that presently adapts to the complexity of modern/postmodern societies. The mechanisms of shame answer to the question of what functions shame serves in the cultural complexity of modern/postmodern societies. The mechanisms of shame are the biologically and intra-psychological functions of shame as they are displayed in the current culture. One example may be that shame seems to serve a protective function, generating different strategies in different contexts.
2. Shame is always set in motion under a **set of complex defining conditions.** These are, for example, cultural and social conditions that define both the way shame is displayed and the coping strategies applied. For instance, shame is both displayed and coped with differently in a Chinese context compared to a Western European context. These sets of conditions are value-laden and can serve to impede or liberate both the display and the coping strategies of shame. One example here is how some religious or ideological norm-systems may serve as shame-inducing and oppressive social structures. "The shameless Arabian daughters" mentioned earlier are examples of both a rebellion against such oppressive conditions as well as a call for a more liberating religious norm-system where shame can be displayed, articulated and handled easier. Another example is the aforementioned #Metoo campaign, where the conditions for both articulating and coping with the shame of being a victim of sexual harassment have changed dramatically.

   However, material conditions also define the way the mechanisms of shame are displayed, articulated, and handled. Examples can be how material conditions, such as belonging to a vulnerable minority group, access to housing or food, and education, may be experienced as both shame-inducing and oppressive conditions that do not sufficiently allow for the articulation and handling of shame.
3. The third element deals with the **contextual consequences of shame**. The consequences of shame must be analyzed in view of both the identified mechanisms and conditions under which shame appears.

> In this context, we aim at both a phenomenological description and analysis in order to trace the complexity of both mechanisms and conditions in a Western postmodern context.

Against the backdrop of these distinctions, we aim to proceed as follows in the next chapters: In Chapter 2, we present the main features in recent research on shame for the purpose of establishing a comprehensive approach that allows us to understand it as a complex phenomenon. Then, in Chapter 3, we show how this understanding relates to and is substantiated by important features in psychological research. Taken together, these two chapters lay the foundation for our analysis of how shame works within the three different realms that are important for many people in the Western world: shame related to body and embodiment, shame related to religion, and shame in the context of ethics and morality. These three contexts are, accordingly, dealt with in Part II of the book. We have chosen these areas because they appear to be obvious sites for the use of shame in contemporary culture. Moreover, we have also had first-hand experience of these areas in our own professional lives as professors of ethics and religion, and our concomitant dealings with students, as well as with other people who have crossed our paths. Hence, although the following is mainly based on research literature, our study also builds on perspectives that are rooted in our lives as relational human beings who have been exposed to the challenges and suffering of others. These meetings with real others have not been without impact on the topics on which we have chosen to focus.

By investigating the role that shame has in relation to the body, religion, and morality, we can substantiate further our main theses: a) That shame implies an interruption of human agency that depends on specific conditions and is actualized by mechanisms that go beyond the context in question, and b) that shame implies movements that display the relational character of human existence, as it entails an impetus towards moving away from others as well as to moving towards restitution of community. The analyses we make provide further nuances to the mechanisms and conditions for shame that we identify in the first part of the study. Against the backdrop of these analyses, we conclude that shame is not the

most helpful emotion to build and sustain mature agents in postmodern society.

It goes without saying that in a field like this, with so many research disciplines involved, it is not possible to comment in detail on all relevant material. Nevertheless, we hope that our fundamental approach to shame, and the way we demonstrate its relevance in the fields of embodiment, religion, and morality, may still contribute to a deeper understanding of shame and the conditions in which it operates in the contemporary world – despite the fact that it sometimes goes under the radar, or one lacks a sufficiently nuanced language for articulating how it works.

CHAPTER 2

Circumscribing Shame

Shame comes in many forms. In the aftermath of #MeToo, it washes through political parties and over parliament members when the media exposes their sexist behavior and their harassment of women. But it can also wash over the victims of such behavior. It may also invade the Syrian refugee who managed to get out of Raqqa while many of his family members did not. Shame also comes in a varying degree of severity. There is a vast difference between the rather trivial and short-lived shameful experience of losing your towel when you are putting on your swimming trunks on the beach, to the toxic and invasive shame that can define a whole life.[20] Sometimes it hits with a powerful and shattering force. Other times it sneaks slowly in, but over time takes hold of both body and mind. As such, shame colonizes, often accompanied by, but also pervading other emotions. Shame is like desire: it shapes the way in which we experience our relations to those around us. This formative and binding power of shame is succinctly described by Virginia Burrus:

> Shame is an emotion of which we frequently seem deeply ashamed. Famously the great inhibitor, shame at once suppresses and intensifies other affects with which it binds. Shame can even bind with shame: "Shame, indeed, covers shame itself – it is shameful to express shame."[21]

Thus, shame is in a peculiar way self-pervasive; in its strongest modes, it breaks in and occupies the self, and extends further as more shame is produced because one is ashamed. However, even though shame is strongly pervasive, it is also elusive. It can colonize every dimension of human

20 See Mesel, *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep*, and Kirkengen, *Inscribed Bodies: Health Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse*.

21 Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 1.

experience, and still be difficult to describe because our sources of articulation are poor, impeded or restricted.

Evolution: Core positions on the complexities of nature and culture

Why do humans have such a propensity for shame? Where does it come from? Modern research on shame started in the early nineteen-seventies and was clinically focused.[22] Today, the field of shame research is a maze of different perspectives and is conducted on various levels. One approach addresses the origin of shame. Evolutionary biology, sociobiology, neurohistory, and other disciplines have brought their specific perspectives into the discussion. In this chapter, we want to focus on some of the accounts they offer for understanding the (evolutionary) origins of shame.

One topic any evolutionary account of shame needs to grapple with is the relation between biology and culture. How much does any given culture contribute to the shaping of a phylogenic trait, and how much does the phylogenic trait shape the cultural conditions in which it evolves? Our brain controls our body and its functions in any given environment.[23] As cultures shift, the body will adapt and remain integrated within human culture through *coevolutionary processes* and manifest itself through different cultural representations. Thus, the various cultural expressions of shame are the result of these coevolutionary processes that can be traced back to a pan-human (proto-shame) capacity to experience this emotion.[24] However, it is not possible to follow a straight evolutionary line backward towards an obvious origin. Different cultures can both exaggerate, suppress, and shape the display of shame. Therefore, any evolutionary account of shame needs to be based on cross-cultural research. It is only when we realize that the different cultural variations of displayed

---

22 Helen Block Lewis, "Shame and Guilt in Neurosis," *Psychoanalytic Review* 58, no. 3 (1971); "The Role of Shame in Symptom Formation," in *Emotions and Psychopathology* (Boston: Springer, 1988).

23 Jörg Wettlaufer, "Neurohistorical and Evolutionary Aspects of a History of Shame and Shaming," *RCC Perspectives*, no. 6 (2012).

24 Fessler, "Shame in Two Cultures: Implications for Evolutionary Approaches."

shame emerge from the same biological origins as different manifestations in the course of ontogenetic development, that we can start to trace the history of shame and, further, understand its function in human culture and society.[25]

Even though most (if not all) researchers recognize the evolutionary dynamic between culture and shame display and see it as a premise for any evolutionary account of shame, this does not imply that they conceptualize shame along the same lines. Within *a universalist psychological framework*, the evolutionary account of shame builds on the assumption of a species-wide human psychological make-up featuring social emotions, such as shame and guilt.[26] Variations in shame display in different human cultures along the hominid evolutionary timeline are rooted in basic psychological functioning that can be traced through different cultural variations. Of course, culture contributes to variations in the way the psychological function is manifested, for example, through emotional display:

> There are important cross-cultural differences, but these are found in the manifestation of common psychological processes; thus, there can be differences in the readiness at which certain cognitive algorithms are available, in the situations which solicit certain emotions and, in the beliefs, and norms that control patterns of social interaction.[27]

Although cultural manifestation or display may differ, the impact of culture does not create much divergence in the actual function of the core psychological functioning. Instead, there seems to be a *psychic unity of*

25 Heidi Keller, Ype H. Poortinga, and Axel Schölmerich, "Introduction," in *Between Culture and Biology: Perspectives on Ontogenetic Development*, ed. Heidi Keller, Ype H. Poortinga, and Axel Schölmerich, Cambridge Studies in Cognitive Perceptual Development (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002). This anthology gives a broad introduction to the field of ontogenetic development.

26 See also Ype H. Poortinga and Karel Soudijn, "Behaviour-Culture Relationships and Ontogenetic Development," in *Between Culture and Biology: Perspectives on Ontogenetic Development* (2002).

27 Keller, Poortinga, and Schölmerich, 4.

mankind, as these mechanisms seem to hold true across the span of cultures as universal psychological functions.[28]

At the opposite end of the spectrum of evolutionary accounts, we find more *relativist* approaches, for example, in the field of cultural psychology. These give stronger emphasis to the formative power of culture. The backdrop of such positions is the claim that both *culture* and *man* are constructs that have developed through complex historical processes. Attempts to understand human psychological functioning need to take these complex cultural constructions as their starting point.[29] Whatever biological backgrounds they may have in common, these have little to offer to the interpretation of what it is to be an actual person, since this person and her shame – as part of a core psychological function – also need to be understood from the point of view of the social and cultural history of man. Psychological processes, such as shame and shaming, are not only embedded *in* a culture, they are part of the constitution and construction of culture in the same way as both a culture and a person is a construct. Thus, the only empirical reference for any description and theory of shame/shame processes is the singular culture in which shame processes are displayed. As such, the study of biological processes, as in hominid evolution, needs to take into consideration both the cultural embeddedness of human ontogenetics as well as the cultural embeddedness of attempts to describe and understand the narrative about the evolution of shame.[30]

---

28 Poortinga and Soudijn. Of course, studies report statistical invariance on dependent variables that can be ascribed to culture. But according to Poortinga and Soudijn, in studies that report such invariance the inter-individual differences tend to be larger than the intercultural differences. See e.g. Ype H. Poortinga and Dianne A. Van Hemert, "Personality and Culture: Demarcating between the Common and the Unique," *Journal of Personality* 69, no. 6 (2001).

29 Michael Cole, "Culture and Development" in *Between Culture and Biology: Perspectives on Ontogenetic Development*, ed. Heidi Keller, Ype H. Poortinga, and Axel Schölmerich, Cambridge Studies in Cognitive Perceptual Development (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

30 Along the universalist-relativist axis, there is a host of meta-theoretical, philosophical and methodological premises underlying the various positions that make comparisons difficult. As an example, on the one hand, universalist positions tend to focus on causal mechanisms between culture and human behavior in order to establish an evolutionary line. On the other hand, relativists focus on historicity and context in order to understand the interplay between a person and context. Thus, these positions are both epistemologically, ontologically different, and thus, as research objects, release different methodological considerations. However, this falls outside our scope. For an introduction, see Poortinga and Soudijn, "Behaviour-Culture Relationships and Ontogenetic

Between universalists and relativists

Anthropologist Daniel M. T. Fessler strikes a fair balance between the universalist and the relativist positions we have sketched in the previous section. He argues that cultural constructivist accounts of emotional experience emphasize what he calls the "culturally constituted nature of subjective reality".[31] In other words, tracing the evolutionary road back to a *proto-shame* is difficult because, according to Fessler, there are no displays of shame that:

> … provide a direct and complete avenue for the exploration of pan-human emotional architecture – differential cultural exaggerating or ignoring of various features of emotional experience is such that relying on a single society (or set of related societies) limits our ability to discern the full outline of the species-typical trait.[32]

Fessler shows the complexity of tracing the evolutionary origin of shame and shame processes through empirical examples. He argues, for example, that the link between shame and failure seems to have some universal origin, while the relationship between the emotions of shame and guilt, as they are differently expressed in collectivistic versus individualistic cultures, seems to have a cultural background more than being the result of pan-human psychology. Consequently, it is not altogether clear what can be labeled core psychological functioning and what the constructs of culture are. As we understand Fessler, attempts to discern between core biological functioning and mere cultural construct must be based on cross-cultural studies.

Even though there are cultural differences in how and why emotions are triggered, it seems to be some consensus among researchers across the span of different approaches that human emotions have an evolutionary origin, even though there is lacking consensus of what this origin might be. This is not made easier by a lack of consensus of the definition of

---

Development."; Walter J Lonner and John Adamopoulos, "Culture as Antecedent to Behavior," in *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology: Vol. 1: Theory and Method*, ed. Ype H. Poortinga, Janak Pandey, and John W. Berry (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997).; Joan G. Miller, "Theoretical Issues in Cultural Psychology," *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 1 (1997); Fons J.R. Van de Vijver and Kwok Leung, *Methods and Data Analysis for Cross-Cultural Research*, Vol. 1 (Sage, 1997).

31 Fessler, "Shame in Two Cultures: Implications for Evolutionary Approaches."

32 Ibid., 209.

shame itself. Fessler suggests two criteria that any compelling account of the evolution of shame should meet. First, it would need to give a phylogenic account, i.e., is an evolutionary account of the trait of shame through evolutionary history.[33] Secondly, it would have to include what he calls an ultimate account, that is, it would need to make clear how shame would increase the biological fitness in the environment where it evolved.

A phylogenic account: continuity

Many, including Fessler himself, argue for a phylogenic continuity between human shame and the rank-related emotions of non-human primates.[34] Shame and pride are emotions that motivate behaviors that increase and control status or rank in a group. Shame is an aversive emotion and associated with lower or subordinate positions, while pride is a rewarding emotion associated with domination and the pursuit of high rank. In all social animals, high rank is associated with easier access to resources that increase fitness. Thus, belonging to a tribe with strong and resourceful leaders secures the ability to procreate in a world of scant resources. Displaying shame contributes to securing the social position of subordinates or those of lower-rank in the tribe. These motivational but opposing emotions (shame – pride) have also been tied to specific action tendencies, such as averted gaze (shame) or direct gaze (pride), bent posture (shame) or erect posture (pride), or the already mentioned tendency of the shamed to flee, hide or avoid social contact when shamed and so forth. Thus, as a motivational feeling, shame has increased the biological fitness of lower-ranked individuals in strongly hierarchical societies or tribes and has, thus, remained throughout the hominid evolution. Signals or displays of either dominance or subordination are, of course, not related specifically to the hominid evolution.

Gilbert argues along similar lines and points to an important difference in the way non-human and human primates organize their societies.[35]

---

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Paul Gilbert and Bernice Andrews, "Shame, Status and Social Roles: Psychobiology and Evolution.," in *Shame: Interpersonal Behavior, Psychopathology, and Culture*, edited by Paul Gilbert and

Non-human primates seem to establish rank-positions through their ability to fight. Fighting abilities are attributes that are rewarded with high social status, and thus, contribute to (biological) fitness. However, as primates evolved into human primates, the establishment of social positions and social order became a more complicated process. The hominid hierarchical structure upheld by a social rank-system based on fighting ability probably evolved into small and more flexible hunter-gatherer societies where social positions were determined not by fighting ability but by socially valued personal attributes of material or social character (small acephalous groups).[36] Hence, in a new, more complex and flexible society, biological fitness was secured by the individual's ability to both attract and hold positive social prestige.[37] Accordingly, shame evolved from a social rank-system determined by dominance, to a more complex social rank-system determined by prestige or social recognition.

An ultimate account: the ability to think

The above account of shame as the result of social interaction that recognizes more than physical capacities presupposes that human primates have *a mind*, that is, the ability to think of others as having an inner world similar to the one they experience within themselves. It must give an account of the evolution of the necessary cognitive abilities to experience such self-conscious emotions, as well as the ability to reflect over the complexities of what other individuals think is socially desirable or undesirable. Furthermore, to reflect on social attraction, as well as on how holding power is valued by others or oneself, presupposes the evolvement of symbolic self-awareness, self-presentation, as well as metacognition through language. Consequently, human shame is a lot more than an evolved competency signaling that our social status is decreasing in the

Bernice Andrews (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Paul Gilbert, "Evolution, Social Roles, and the Differences in Shame and Guilt," *Social Research* 70, no. 4 (2003). According to Fessler, this is an important point in establishing the phylogenic linkage between non- human and human shame.

36 Fessler, "Shame in Two Cultures: Implications for Evolutionary Approaches."

37 This is what Gilbert calls Social Attention Holding Power (SAHP).

eyes of the other. It indicates that our self-evaluation and self-judgment has assessed us as non-desirable.[38]

Consequently, as we see it, shame is a part of an evolved composite cluster of interrelated affective, emotional, and cognitive abilities that makes possible the complexity of human interactions and relationships. Thus, shame is not only an emotional consequence of the evolvement of complex societies. It is rooted deeply in the evolution of the culturally constructed architecture and expression of the human self. In this complex web of relations and interactions, we express ourselves through intentionally directed desires, interests or orientations. Shame may be our response when these are impeded, scorned, devaluated or shunned. Shame is thus an evolved culturally constituted response to our complex relational mode of being-in-the-world when we experience the vulnerability of expressing and exposing ourselves.

The ambiguity of shame: further lines of research on evolution and society

Psychological research has not reached any consensus on either definition, components, mechanisms, or the consequences of shame.[39] However, a core thesis has been that shame is an emotional experience that

38 Even though the submission-thesis seems to be the core evolutionary explanation of shame, there are many variations within the main theory. Peter R. Breggin, "The Biological Evolution of Guilt, Shame and Anxiety: A New Theory of Negative Legacy Emotions," *Medical Hypotheses* 85, no. 1 (2015) suggests that the evolution of shame, guilt and anxiety developed as emotional restraints against aggressive self-assertion within our own group. Thus, the hominid evolutionary advantage of being both aggressive and able to cooperate secured dominion outside the tribe. The evolvement of moral restraints secured the family unit or the tribe, thus optimizing the capacity to procreate within the group and the capacity to dominate outside the group. Matteo Mameli, "Meat Made Us Moral: A Hypothesis on the Nature and Evolution of Moral Judgment," *Biology & Philosophy* 28, no. 6 (2013) gives an account of moral judgment in terms of emotional disposition. His hypothesis is that the ability to make moral judgments evolved as an increasing moralization of social sanctioning. This evolved as bands of hunters started cooperating in large-game hunting, and the need to control and punish bullies and cheats arose. There is a clear resemblance (which he also acknowledges) to Christopher Boehm's theories of the evolution of human conscience and morality. See e.g., Christopher Boehm, "The Moral Consequences of Social Selection," *Behaviour* 151, no. 2–3 (2014); *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

39 Paul Gilbert, "What Is Shame? Some Core Issues and Controversies," in *Shame: Interpersonal Behavior, Psychopathology, and Culture*, ed. Paul Gilbert and Bernice Andrews (New York: Ox-

occurs when your self-image is temporarily shattered or even damaged in some way. Thus, shame signals an undesirable defect of the self, accompanied by a broken self-image or/and social image. To protect this broken image, the shameful person tries to isolate the damaged self from further negative evaluation.[40] According to Gausel and Leach, there also seems to be a consensus about the harmful effects of shame, whether one focuses on its damage to self-image or social image. They presume that shame manifests damage that needs to be hidden and protected from the negative evaluation of others. This withdrawal or protective hiding has negative effects, psychologically, socially, and ethically.[41]

Evolution revisited

Any general theory of shame needs to take into consideration why shame seems to be such a powerful emotion in human life, even with its cultural differences. Even though there is no clear consensus about the finer points of the evolution of shame, the general theory seems to be reasonably undebatable. If we can trace shame through our phylogenic history as part of a motivational system that evolved during the evolution of our hominid line towards more complex societies and higher cognitive abilities, this is relevant for our understanding of shame's recent functions. If the capacity for shame is part of the evolved architecture of the self, it becomes necessary to establish substantial evidence if we assess shame as solely maladaptive. From an evolutionary standpoint, it would require what Fessler called an "ultimate account".[42] In that case, it would have to explain how the absence of shame would increase the biological fitness in the environment where it evolves. If shame has (mainly) adverse effects, one would expect that it would be selected out over time, whereas

---

ford University Press, 1998); Jessica L. Tracy, Richard W. Robins, and June Price Tangney, *The Self-Conscious Emotions: Theory and Research* (New York: Guilford Press, 2007).

40 For an explication of the emotion of shame in comparison to the emotion of guilt, se for example June Price Tangney and Ronda L. Dearing, *Shame and Guilt*. (New York: Guildford, 2002).

41 Nicolay Gausel and Colin Wayne Leach, "Concern for Self-Image and Social Image in the Management of Moral Failure: Rethinking Shame," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 41, no. 4 (2011).

42 Fessler, "Shame in Two Cultures: Implications for Evolutionary Approaches."

other attributes with higher significance for fitness would prevail. However, such an account would only be a prediction of future societies, as it would not explain the prevalence of culturally different shame displays in the past.

Martha Nussbaum is among those who actually suggest that in contemporary society, shame is potentially maladaptive from a philosophical and psychological point of view. In *Political Emotions*, she shows how the conscious or deliberate employment of negative emotions like shame, envy, and fear are problematic when one engenders them on a societal level to make divisions between groups. It is also relevant when it comes to employing shame for the purpose of castigating minorities. The above-mentioned emotions inhibit other important human features, like love and compassion, which are crucial for the development of a more humane society.[43] The difference between Nussbaum's approach and that of Fessler is not only conditioned by how Nussbaum operates with a more extensive normative repertoire for the assessment of shame than Fessler. It is also conditioned by how Nussbaum allows for a more sophisticated approach to the ambiguity of shame that addresses its potential harm, despite its contribution to fitness. Thereby, she moves beyond the evolutionary approach and opens up to a more sociological, and not merely a biological, approach to shame.

Fessler, on the other hand, claims that there is a distorting Western bias in the empirical studies of shame. This bias has provided us with an incomplete view of what he calls the "underlying species-typical emotional architecture of man".[44] This incomplete view has made it challenging to explore both the phylogeny and the functions of shame:

> Perhaps more than any other emotion, shame, which makes subordinance, prestige failure, and social rejection aversive, reflects the probable evolution of hominid social systems from highly hierarchical structures to more fluid forms of organization. Though differentially masked or elaborated by the diverse cultures of today, shame carries the hallmarks of a motivational system that

---

43 Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 363ff.

44 Fessler, "Shame in Two Cultures: Implications for Evolutionary Approaches."

> evolved in bands of hunter-gatherers, groups in which widespread cooperation occurred alongside disparities in power and prestige.[45]

A narrow-minded psychological reading of shame through the lens of Western culture easily loses sight of the important social function of shame in the evolution of human cultures and leaves us with an incomplete and negative reading of its functions. If different cultures constitute different displays of shame, for example, through exaggeration or suppression, any account of shame needs to take both phylogenic history and cultural diversity into account.

Shame and the social matrix

Recently, biologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and others, have all suggested new ways of both differentiating and contextualizing shame, especially in light of cross-cultural research. There seem to be significant cultural variations in how the relations between selfhood, society, and the function of shame are constituted and constructed.[46] In that context, sociologist Thomas Scheff's critique has similarities with Fessler's. However, Scheff's focus is not on the evolution of shame but rather on the sociological function of shame as a bonding emotion. He claims that shame is the primary emotion regulating our daily life. Shame experiences signal threats to our social bonds.[47] Thus, it contributes to maintaining the relational networks in which our lives are embedded. Paradoxically, given the importance of shame, modern society has repressed and confined shame to an individually oriented and psychologically damaging personal experience. Thus, it has become a taboo.

Accordingly, Scheff claims that the exploration of shame within the domain of psychology has lost sight of the social matrix of shame by

45 Ibid., 251.

46 Vivian L. Vignoles et al., "Beyond the 'East–West' Dichotomy: Global Variation in Cultural Models of Selfhood," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 145, no. 8 (2016); Daniel Sznycer et al., "Shame Closely Tracks the Threat of Devaluation by Others, Even Across Cultures," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2016).

47 Thomas J. Scheff, "Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory," *Sociological Theory* 18, no. 1 (2000).

focusing on the individual emotional experience.[48] Even though a narrow focus can shed light on such a personal experience, one loses an essential frame of reference for understanding the sociological function of shame if it is approached from a mere individual perspective. What is especially important to note is that Scheff's own reclaiming of shame reaches far wider than the psychological definition commented upon above:

> I use a sociological definition of shame, rather than the more common psychological one (perception of a discrepancy between ideal and actual self). If one postulates that shame is generated by a threat to the bond, no matter how slight, then a wide range of cognates and variants follow: not only embarrassment, shyness, and modesty, but also feelings of rejection or failure, and heightened self-consciousness of any kind.[49]

Thus, Scheff includes a whole family of experiences in the concept of shame, or the bond effect, as he also calls it. We agree with Scheff that it is obvious that a definition of shame, and an understanding of the components and mechanisms of shame, need to take into consideration its social context. It even seems superfluous to mention that a social emotion needs to be contextualized in order to understand its function, conditions and mechanisms. If shame, as we claim, is an evolved culturally constituted response to our complex relational mode of being-in-the-world when we experience the vulnerability of expressing and exposing ourselves, it is by definition contextual and social, and it is displayed differently in different cultures. Hence, Fessler's argument about the Western bias underscores Scheff's point. Nevertheless, we are not convinced that Scheff's argument about the modern repression of shame is correct. It seems that our history of shame is more complicated. That does not mean that shame is not repressed both in modern and postmodern society. Moreover, it is not always adequately articulated or analyzed.[50] As we have previously mentioned, the poor cultural resources for the articulation of shame in

48 Ibid.; "Shame in Self and Society," *Symbolic Interaction* 26, no. 2 (2003).

49 "Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory.", 97.

50 For example, the religious and the psychological focus on guilt (following the focus of the Reformation and Freud, respectively) has led to instances of shame being underdiagnosed or falsely diagnosed as guilt. Shame has also been less focused on in recent psychology on trauma, despite its prevailing presence in victims. See, for an example of this, Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma*

contemporary Western society make coping with shame difficult, as a society, a group, or an individual.[51] That is not necessarily a new phenomenon. What is new, however, in the postmodern, transparent, virtual culture, is the display of shamelessness on the internet and in different social media. Here, we see people display elements of their private lives with hardly any restrictions or shame – although they may sometimes experience shaming as a response to what they present there.

Social psychology and recent attempts at differentiating shame

As we saw above, Scheff expands the definition of shame by cramming a whole family of different experiences into the concept. His aim to clarify shame conceptually is less successful. By the conceptual expansion he makes, it becomes even more difficult to establish formal and material criteria for what shame is. Our suggestion, as mentioned above, is to view shame as part of an evolved composite cluster of interrelated emotional and cognitive abilities that makes possible the complexity of human interactions and relationships. That makes it necessary to conceptualize, for example, both shame and the emotion of guilt as separate and differentiated phenomena for the purpose of identifying the different possible functions these can have as responses to the way we express ourselves in our social matrix. Thus, shame as a response to a perceived defect in our self-image that threatens our social bonds can certainly spur us into repairing action. Hence, shame as an internal phenomenon can prompt us to act in prosocial ways. Furthermore, shame and shaming processes can certainly contribute to both deregulating and fortifying social positions and social bonds. However, when the concept of shame is not sufficiently differentiated from how we conceptualize other socially conditioned feelings, we lose the ability to differentiate between shame that isolates and shame that bonds. We also lose the chance to understand the ambiguous ways shame functions in the architecture of the self.

---

and Recovery (New York, N.Y.: BasicBooks, 1992), which hardly focuses on shame at all, despite mentioning it on the title page.

51 Cf. above, 20f.

We pointed out above how shame in psychological research is appraised as a negative emotional experience, since the broken self-image and/or social image needs protection through, for example, withdrawal from interpersonal arenas. However, a recent position within social psychology has offered a more nuanced understanding of shame that can bring us closer to an ultimate account. This new line of research has focused more on the possible positive outcome of shame.[52] This does not mean that the prevailing understanding of shame as associated with withdrawal and other defensive measures is wholly incorrect.[53] Nevertheless, it contributes to a differentiation in the understanding of shame.

De Hooge et al. have suggested that shame, as a moral emotion, is associated with two motives.[54] These are parallel with two of the movements that shame causes, and which we have suggested earlier. The first is the *protect* motive. The second is the *restore* motive; shame can activate prosocial behavior to restore the damaged self when the experience of shame is relevant for the decision at hand (endogenous), but not when it is not relevant (exogenous). In other words, the choices you have to make in a shameful situation seem to push you towards prosocial actions. However, when removed from the situation, you tend to withdraw. Thus, as a moral emotion, shame can function as a prosocial commitment device to restore the threatened self. However, such prosocial commitment seems to be dependent on the assessment that such restoration of self is possible and not too risky. Accordingly, the restore motive diminishes when the risk and difficulty of restoration are too great, whereas the protect motive

---

52 This new line of research corresponds to a fairly common experience: when you experience shame, for example, because you have not done your job correctly or as good as could be expected, the answer is not always to hide away to protect your self-image. It can also be the opposite: you get right back in the saddle in order to prove that you can do it as well as anyone, and thus restore both the broken self-image and/or social image of who you are.

53 Colin Wayne Leach and Atilla Cidam, "When Is Shame Linked to Constructive Approach Orientation? A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 109, no. 6 (2015).

54 Ilona E. De Hooge, Seger M. Breugelmans, and Marcel Zeelenberg, "Not So Ugly after All: When Shame Acts as a Commitment Device," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95, no. 4 (2008) and Ilona E. De Hooge, Marcel Zeelenberg, and Seger M. Breugelmans, "Restore and Protect Motivations Following Shame," *Cognition and Emotion* 24, no. 1 (2010). What we do in the following paragraphs is to thematize some of the relationships between psychology and moral shame. We present a more extensive discussion of the relationship between shame and morality in Chapter 6.

seems to remain unaffected by risk factors. In other words, the balance between these two motives is shifting, and this sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish between protective behavior and avoidance behavior.[55]

Even though De Hooge et al. list empirical evidence supporting this understanding, we will later raise the question of whether identifying shame as a moral emotion is too constricting. We will claim that shame is not a moral emotion, but that it sometimes serves a moral *function*. De Hooge et al., however, seem to develop their ideas from a moral definition of shame, instead of seeing it as a psychological phenomenon that can be incorporated into moral frameworks. In other words, our moral sense uses shame for its own purposes, it is not shame that leads us to moral action. This conceptual turn opens up a room for understanding the many times when shame does not serve moral functions, for example, when it expresses itself through anger or even violence.[56]

In a theory-driven meta-analysis of 90 research publications, Leach and Cidam confirm the link between shame, constructive-approach motivation, and behavior.[57] One dominant finding is that the experience of shame related to a reparable moral failure seems to motivate constructive approaches, such as prosocial action or self-improvement. But when the experience of shame is related to a failure that damages the whole self, and where reparable strategies seem futile, or might even enhance the chance of further failure, prosocial action is absent. Spurred by this dual perspective on shame, Gausel and Leach developed a new conceptual model of shame where they differentiated between self-image and social image.[58] Accordingly, there are two basically different ways to appraise our moral failures.[59] We can interpret them as threats to our self-image,

55 De Hooge, Zeelenberg, and Breugelmans, "A Functionalist Account of Shame-Induced Behaviour," *Cognition and Emotion* 25, no. 5 (2011).

56 We deal more extensively with this topic in Chapter 6.

57 Leach and Cidam, "When Is Shame Linked to Constructive Approach Orientation? A Meta-Analysis."

58 Gausel and Leach, "Concern for Self-Image and Social Image in the Management of Moral Failure: Rethinking Shame." Further, shame is differentiated in 3 different appraisals and 4 different feelings (see the model, ibid., 475).

59 Nicolay Gausel, "Self-Reform or Self-Defense? Understanding How People Cope with Their Moral Failures by Understanding How They Appraise and Feel About Their Moral Failures," in *Social Issues, Justice and Status*, edited by Mira Moshe and Nicoleta Corbu (New York: Nova, 2013).

that is, we understand them as the result of a defect in ourselves. Such a defect does not need to be global; that is, it does not mean that our whole self-image is lost or broken. We are, for example, able to differentiate between acknowledging our moral defects as husbands, and still recognize that we are good at what we do at work, as well as being passable fathers. And even though it is shameful and unpleasant to admit to such a defect, shame may spur us to both self-reform and reparation of possible bonds that may be broken because of our failures. However, in some instances, appraisal of moral failure may be of such a character that our global self-image is broken and seems irreparable. Then we find no other alternative than protective strategies like withdrawal or hiding from others.

The other option is to interpret moral failure as a threat to our social image through the condemnation of others. In other words, because of our moral failure, we may feel threatened by rejection from others, and thus, the social bonds that hold us together are at stake.[60] When those with whom we share social bonds see our failures and reject us, we lose the necessary bonds that support us through much-needed relationships. An appraisal of lost social image may be real or imagined.[61] Nevertheless, as our actions are often social, so too are our failures. We may lie to ourselves, but more often, we lie to others. When others seeus lying or cheating, or see our betrayal or violence, it is our social image that is at stake.

Why do some people concern themselves with social image, and others with self-image? According to Gausel, it depends on the quality of our social bonds. Some have stronger social bonds, which may be tied to more mature people than others. Such bonds are not so easily cut because of moral failure. When those with whom we share important bonds are able to differentiate between what we do and who we are, the fear of loss of self-image and possible rejection seems to lessen. This is a crucial insight,

60 Ibid. Scheff, "Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory."; "Shame in Self and Society." The approach offered here can also be related to the one offered in Krista K. Thomason, "Shame, Violence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91, no. 1 (2015), who distinguishes between identity and self-conception in her analysis of shame. Shame is the result of their difference. See more on this in Chapter 6 below.

61 Gausel and Leach, "Concern for Self-Image and Social Image in the Management of Moral Failure: Rethinking Shame."

well-documented in both criminological studies and abuse studies.[62] For those who try to deal with their own moral failures, the ability to distinguish between self-image and failure is crucial. When important social ties are cut because of rejection, the loss of social image leaves scant resources for the self to come to grips with this important distinction. It is more likely that the severing of social ties and loss of social image will enhance the overlap between global self-image and moral failure. When all you are left with is what you have done, the resources are inadequate for self-improvement and restoration of social bonds.

However, rejection is a subjective feeling and does not need to actually take place. Possibly, feelings of rejection may correlate with perceived social image. Much is at stake when the loss of social image is a possibility. Our standing and our position in the social order are in play, and, thus, we go to great lengths to hide our moral failures, to prevent the downgrading of our social image.[63]

One core strategy is self-defense, by trying to conceal or cover up failure so that no one will notice. Another strategy can be aggression towards others, by aggressive behavior and shifting blame. In victimological studies, we often see strategies such as victim blaming or scapegoating coming into play. A third strategy is the use of social defense strategies that aim at enhancing social standing, as a counterweight to the weight of moral failures, such as when a political candidate accused of greediness directs full media focus to his alleged philanthropic foundation.

Previously, we asked whether it would be possible to find an approach that could contribute to a more ultimate account of shame. In several ways, what we have now presented does. Even though the suggested route to an ultimate account of shame is not yet fully researched, the above contributes to a more nuanced understanding of shame that takes into account the social function of shame, as well as identifying ethically relevant prosocial functions of shame. If shame, as we have suggested, is an evolved response in human self-architecture that regulates

---

62 Paul Leer-Salvesen, *Tilgivelse* (Oslo: Universitetsforlag, 1998); Mesel, *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep*.

63 Gausel and Leach, "Concern for Self-Image and Social Image in the Management of Moral Failure: Rethinking Shame."

our self-expression in our vulnerable complex relational mode of being-in-the-world, it makes sense to differentiate between a partial and a full rupture of our self-image. Our self-image reflects our assessment of the social and personal value of our self-expression in this complex network. We can summarize the complexities at hand in the following list:

1. Shame may warn us that the way we express our intentions, desires, interests or orientations, falls short of what we perceive as sufficiently valuable and acceptable in our relational network.
2. If our shortcomings are sufficiently severe, our social image may be severely damaged and beyond repair. Thus, our whole self-image may shatter, and leave us with an all-encompassing and chronic sense of shame and limited options, such as avoidance behavior and other protective strategies.
3. However, in many instances, shame is a reminder to ourselves that our vulnerable position in our relational network is at play, thus spurring us to regulate and improve our self-expression and our self-image through reparative prosocial strategies. We may, for example, be ashamed of our impatient and rude attitude towards a neighbor that regularly pesters us. Our shame is a response to the fact that this attitude does not reflect who we want to be and thus leads us to reparable strategies. Through shame, we are made aware of our moral failure as a neighbor, and it makes us change our attitude in concord with who we want to be.
4. Nevertheless, in severe cases, such as, for example, for victims of abuse, shame can be all-pervasive, leaving the victim in a state of chronic and toxic shame and with a full rupture to their self-image. The mechanisms of such abuse often transport both the experience of moral responsibility and moral guilt from the abuser to the abused. It leaves the victim with a full-blown destructive self-image, a "willing victim of sexual abuse." For many in this situation, there are no strategies for regaining a positive self-image, and the only way left is to hide the ruptured self-image through different protective strategies.

Preliminary circumscription: shame and the question of morality

Shame and guilt as emotions with a potential moral function

We saw above that Scheff included a whole family of concepts and phenomena within the concept of shame. It is not uncommon to associate shame with a wide array of phenomena such as anger, embarrassment, blushing, pride, and so forth. The most prominent neighboring phenomenon, however, is guilt. In the following, we will try to set these two concepts apart in order to understand the difference between shame and guilt as two possibly moral emotions.

Haidt suggests a preliminary definition of moral emotions as "those that are linked to the interest and welfare of either a society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent."[64] Both shame and guilt can be classified as such emotions. The main question we will try to answer in the following is: in what way may we describe and identify shame as a possible moral emotion in relation to guilt? However, we bear in mind our previous remark about how these emotions are not moral in themselves but can serve moral purposes under given circumstances.

The discussion is still ongoing about what constitutes and what is typical of the emotions of shame and guilt. The empirical mapping of these emotions through various instruments has not led to a clear understanding. The discussion is still going strong and hard to oversee but has nevertheless contributed to some insights into the architecture of the moral self. The moral function of shame and guilt, and the role they play as we try to express ourselves in the interrelated mode of being-in-the-world, is essential for understanding both moral/immoral reflection and action. Tangney et al. suggest that the self-conscious emotions, such as shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride, are crucial elements in our moral

64 Jonathan Haidt, "The Moral Emotions," in *Handbook of Affective Sciences*, ed. Richard J. Davidson, Klaus R. Scherer, and H. Hill Goldsmith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

apparatus. These emotions influence the links between moral standards and moral behavior.[65] They also disclose our relational constitution as humans.

The most prominent line of research views guilt as the prosocial opposite of antisocial shame.[66] In other words, shame and guilt are adversaries in an emotional tug-of-war.[67] The underlying assumption here is that shame focuses on the self, whereas guilt focuses on the actions of the self. Thus, shame is an emotional response indicating that the self is flawed, defective and/or rejected, while guilt is an emotional response indicating that the *actions* of the self are flawed, defective, and/or rejected.[68] Consequently, shame and guilt have different roles and different moral values in our moral apparatus. When you have harmed or violated other people, shame will protect you through isolation and withdrawal. However, as a rule, it will also widen or fortify the moral gap between the offender and the offended. As the gap widens or fortifies, the possibilities for making moral amends for wrongdoing lessen. Consequently, it contributes little to repairing or closing the moral gap. Hence, shame is a response when the interests of the self are threatened but does not promote strategies for repair when harm has been done.

Guilt, on the other hand, focuses on the action or the harm that has been done. It is morally other-oriented. It reminds us of the harm or violation our actions have brought on others, and for which we are morally responsible, and, therefore, need to seek amends for. Because it is not a response signaling a defect of the self, it does not activate

65 June Price Tangney, Jeffrey Stuewig, and Debra J. Mashek, "What's Moral About the Self-Conscious Emotions?" in *The Self-Conscious Emotions*, ed. Jessica L. Tracy, Richard W. Robins, and June Price Tangney (New York: The Guilford Press, 2007).

66 For a review of arguments, see Tangney and Dearing, *Shame and Guilt*.

67 Tamara J. Ferguson et al., "Shame and Guilt as Morally Warranted Experiences," in *The Self-Conscious Emotions: Theory and Research*, edited by Richard W. Robins, Jessica L. Tracy, and June Price Tangney (New York: Guilford Press, 2007). For a historical overview of the research of shame as a self-conscious emotion, see Kurt W. Fischer and June Price Tangney, "Self-Conscious Emotions and the Affect Revolution: Framework and Overview," in *Self-Conscious Emotions*, edited by Kurt W. Fischer and June Price Tangney (New-York (1995): Guilford Press, 1995).

68 Tangney and Dearing, *Shame and Guilt*; Gausel and Leach, "Concern for Self-Image and Social Image in the Management of Moral Failure: Rethinking Shame"; Paula M. Niedenthal, June Price Tangney, and Igor Gavanski, "'If Only I Weren't' Versus 'If Only I Hadn't': Distinguishing Shame and Guilt in Counterfactual Thinking," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 67, no. 4 (1994).

avoidance-behavior strategies such as running or hiding. Rather, it is an emotional (and potentially) moral response pushing us towards moral behavior that aims at repairing or closing the moral gap between the offender and the victim. Thus, guilt can be a morally positive emotion by reminding us of our wrongdoing, as well as providing us with the chance to develop a reflective space in which to evaluate both actions and moral repair strategies without threatening the self.[69]

Shame and guilt are categorically different

We argue that, from a moral point of view, there is a categorical difference between guilt and the feeling of guilt, and between shame and guilt. We have earlier suggested that shame is an emotional response deeply rooted in the architecture of the self as a response tied to rejection, demeaning or shunning of our (intentionally guided) self-expression, thus exposing our vulnerability in the world and interrupting our immediate agency. Hence, shame is a response that regulates our relational ties, either by repairing or further severing them. Guilt, however, is basically a moral and subsequently sometimes a legal condition that can elicit morally relevant emotional responses, such as feelings of both guilt and shame.[70] As a moral condition, guilt describes the relation between subjects when harm or violation has occurred. Guilt appears in a specific context and situation that renders someone a victim of the action or attitudes of others. As such, guilt as a moral condition between subjects exists independently of feelings or emotions of guilt. A sexual offender may abuse his victim without anger, remorse or feeling of guilt, but that does not alter the fact that the moral condition between the offender and the victim is one of guilt. Therefore, we need to distinguish clearly between the experience of guilt and the condition of guilt.

---

69 Ferguson et al., "Shame and Guilt as Morally Warranted Experiences"; June Price Tangney and Kurt W. Fischer, *Self-Conscious Emotions: The Psychology of Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, and Pride* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995).

70 Jeff Elison, "Shame and Guilt: A Hundred Years of Apples and Oranges," *New Ideas in Psychology* 23, no. 1 (2005).

Elison is among the scholars who make the critical distinction between guilt and feeling of guilt. He proposes the following definition: "Guilt is an objective description or a subjective evaluation which may be made by someone other than the party deemed guilty."[71] The question is whether his definition provides a sufficient way of articulating the distinction. Put briefly, a person can certainly be found guilty of a moral and legal offense in a court of law, through an evaluation of the facts of the case and the testimonies of the offender, the victim, and other witnesses. Nevertheless, guilt is more than a socio-legal condition. It can also be established outside the courtrooms, in everyday situations where we find others or ourselves guilty of actions or attitudes towards others by breaking established moral norms. Thus, guilt is not only a matter of who has the authority to judge someone guilty. It is a matter of the contextual premises on which a moral judgment is based. Accordingly, it is a question of whether it is contextually fair or reasonable to judge someone as guilty of breaking moral norms, and thus violating a victim. The principle of fairness is important, especially if culpable responsibility for wrongdoing is a premise for some forms of shame and/or feelings of guilt.[72]

Marion Smiley questions the assumption that guilt is only applicable when emerging from voluntary acts. She holds that in real life, the criteria of clear intent and a free will through voluntary action does not work. Both intent and will come in degrees, shaped by the contextual possibilities and limitations of the situation in which they are executed. This is the reason why the question of possible culpability needs to be based on the principle of fairness; that is, it needs to take into account the contextual complexity of the situation where the alleged violation occurred. It is important to consider the principle of fairness – not only for delivering just verdicts in a court of law, but also in the complexity of everyday life where the possibility of doing harm is always present, either by intent, negligence, or by accident and sheer bad luck.

On a deeper level, one can also raise the question of whether guilt only exists as a consequence of a moral evaluation that meets the suggested

71 Ibid.

72 For further explication of the *principle of fairness*, see Marion Smiley, *Moral Responsibilities and the Boundaries of Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

criteria. A murderer who kills his victim without moral reflection or moral feelings of any kind is still morally guilty of murder, even when there are no witnesses to his act. Thus, it makes sense to understand guilt as something more than the result of moral evaluation only. It is rather an existential ever-present possibility of harm or wrongdoing between ourselves and others due to our vulnerable relational mode of being-in-the-world. As interdependent beings, we expose others to our way of expressing desires, interests, or orientations. Thus, we always leave open the possibility to harm or violate others in the same way as we are exposed ourselves. Thus, guilt takes on an objective character in the case of morality that is not similar to what we can say about shame. The closest we can come to a parallel is when we make assessments like “She did something for which she ought to feel ashamed.”

Shame: a part of the human capabilities

It follows from the above analysis that the emotions of guilt and shame can both be linked closely to the fundamental moral condition. Thus, emotions such as shame and guilt are both part of the human capabilities that, for example, make us able to recognize and act upon the precarious moral dimension of our mode of being-in-the-world. These capabilities are deeply rooted in the architecture of the self, as part of a cluster of cognitive and emotional capabilities that aid and regulate our self-expression in our interrelated and dependent mode of being-in-the-world. As such, these emotions may serve as moral responses or reminders of conditions of guilt. On the other hand, we need to keep in mind that displays of guilt and shame may be emotional responses that are morally irrelevant. Thus, an unqualified categorization of these as moral emotions is somewhat misleading, as we have already suggested. A more adequate description, based on their function as emotional capabilities, is to consider them as part of the human emotional capabilities that under certain conditions can serve a moral function. The question remains, however, whether these conditions can be sufficiently identified.

It is obvious that shame is not always elicited by harmful actions or wrongdoing that constitutes a condition of guilt. Shame may, for

example, be the response to the way our body is displayed in the world when it does not conform to the prevalent cultural ideals.[73] It may also be a victim's confused and emotional response to degrading abuse and traumatization. Hence, shame is complex and ambivalent and does not always serve a moral purpose. According to Aakvaag, shame needs to meet three interrelated criteria to be morally useful.[74] First, there needs to be a fit between shame and the situation in which it occurs. In other words, it must be a reasonable response in the context at hand. As an example, have we acted in violation of our norms and values that put our self-image at risk? When a victim of sexual abuse responds with shame, it is not a moral response to wrongdoing. Rather, it is a consequence of the corrupted moral logic of sexual abuse, where responsibility, guilt, and shame are often transported from the offender to the victim.[75]

We use the notion 'transport' here and in the following to indicate how a violation's corrupted moral logic often transports such feelings from a perpetrator as the one who should, rightly, harbor them, to the victim. Even though the offender may not deliberately attempt to transport these feelings, it may still take place as part of the corrupted logic of the act itself. Hence, there is not a fit between the shame the victim feels and the situation from which the shame originated.

Secondly, the emotional strength in the shame response needs to be calibrated to the situation at hand. If the emotional response is so strong that it overwhelms the agent in a situation where he or she is guilty of only a minor violation, it does not serve a moral purpose because it misleads the moral judgment emotionally. Thus, shame – like the feeling of guilt – needs to be contextually calibrated to serve a moral function.[76] Finally, shame needs to activate appropriate action in the situation at hand. If the emotional response is too strong and uncalibrated, it may activate

---

73 This is a central topic in contemporary shame research, and we will return to it in a later chapter.

74 Helene Flood Aakvaag, *Hei, Skam: En Bok Om Følelsen Skam, Hvorfor Den Oppstår Og Hva Den Gjør Med Oss* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2018).

75 Mesel, *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep*, 97.

76 For further introduction to the calibration of the emotion of guilt, see Herant A. Katchadourian, *Guilt: The Bite of Conscience* (Stanford: Stanford General Books, 2010), 21ff. We want to raise the question, though, if one can calibrate feelings of shame in the same way that one does with guilt? The global character of shame seems to make it difficult to think of it as fully parallel. See our previous discussion of shame vs. guilt above, pp. 47–51.

inappropriate behavior such as, for example, avoidance or anger, which will widen and/or fortify the moral gap. However, a morally relevant shame response may remind us that our action(s) has put our self-image and social position at risk, which calls for strategies of repair. But such repair has its moral limitations. It is the nature of shame, as mentioned above, that it is self-oriented, and not other-oriented. Thus, even though shame may be a response to wrongdoing that spurs actions of moral repair, the focus is not primarily on the welfare of the offended but on the welfare of the one committing the offense.

Recent studies within social psychology suggest a differentiation between heavy shame responses that damage the whole self-image, rendering it unrepairable and without other strategies than avoidance behavior, and lesser shame responses that only damage part of the self-image, and, accordingly, present strategies of repair as viable options.[77] Furthermore, the differentiation between the self-image that can open up for repairing strategies, and the social-image that seems to render no strategies except for protective ones will, when read together, contribute to help identify and describe the conditions under which shame may serve a moral function. However, they need to be elaborated further to present a more detailed understanding of the possible moral functions of shame, especially as they relate to the interrelated cluster of cognitive and emotional capabilities. As an example, what role do our cognitive or our relational capabilities have in the necessary calibration of our shame responses if they are to serve a moral function? We will address these questions in a later chapter. Suffice to say at this point that although shame may serve a moral purpose, its moral value is relatively limited compared to the feeling of guilt.

---

77 Gausel, "Self-Reform or Self-Defense? Understanding How People Cope with Their Moral Failures by Understanding How They Appraise and Feel About Their Moral Failures"; Gausel and Leach, "Concern for Self-Image and Social Image in the Management of Moral Failure: Rethinking Shame"; Leach and Cidam, "When Is Shame Linked to Constructive Approach Orientation? A Meta-Analysis"; Ilona E. De Hooge, Seger M. Breugelmans, and Marcel Zeelenberg, "Not So Ugly after All: When Shame Acts as a Commitment Device," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95, no. 4 (2008); Ilona E. De Hooge, Marcel Zeelenberg, and Seger M. Breugelmans, "Moral Sentiments and Cooperation: Differential Influences of Shame and Guilt," *Cognition and Emotion* 21, no. 5 (2007); De Hooge, Zeelenberg, and Breugelmans, "Restore and Protect Motivations Following Shame"; "A Functionalist Account of Shame-Induced Behaviour."

Strategies for transporting or transforming shame

We have suggested above that shame is sometimes transported to the victim from the one who ought to feel ashamed, namely the perpetrator. In this section, we want to mention some of the strategies that shame seems to engender, and which are employed by the shame-feeling individual in order to overcome, transform, and/or avoid shame and restitute his or her agency. Some of these strategies are transporting shame to others, whereas others imply a transformation of shame. These strategies are, nevertheless, all attempts to defend oneself against the experience of shame.

A child who experiences contempt from a parent, given specific, unfavorable conditions, may transform the shame he or she feels in facing the parent's contempt into self-contempt. Whereas shame is an ambivalent experience, because the self still longs for reunion with the self or the significant other, in contempt, "the object, be it self or other, is completely rejected."[78] Kaufman points to how the transformation of shame into contempt in the long run may establish deep and enduring traces in the conditions for interpersonal relationships, because it is a way of putting oneself above others. "In the development of contempt as a characterological defending style, we have the seeds of a judgmental, fault-finding, or condescending attitude in later human relationships. To the degree that others are looked down upon, found lacking, or seen as somehow lesser or inferior beings, a once-wounded self becomes more securely insulated against further shame, but only at the expense of distorted relationships with others."[79]

Rage as a defense mechanism is an emotional response directed against oneself or another, and it precludes from feeling shame because it covers or serves to impede the shame feeling. It serves to keep others away. When directed towards others, it can take different forms, from aggressive outbursts, via hatred, to the scolding of others. The revered minister caught in a shameful scandal may direct, or project, his rage towards others to escape his shameful position. As such, rage helps to avoid shame,

78 Gershen Kaufman, *Shame: The Power of Caring* (Rochester, Vermont: Schenkman Books, 1992), 84.

79 Ibid., 85.

although fundamentally, it is caused by shame and cannot be understood as totally separated from it.[80] Thus, shame is usually transported to someone more vulnerable than yourself – someone who is subjected to your actions, or below you in the pecking order. It can happen in a deliberate way (by blaming someone), or it can happen as an "unconscious transfer from one person to another without any action being necessary to effect that transfer."[81]

To *strive for power* is another strategy: here, the individual seeks control over those conditions that may cause him or her to feel shame through withdrawal to a context that is easier to control or hold power over, or by adopting a more authoritarian control over the given context. However, the strategy of authoritarian control seems the most likely to fail as it does not prevent other people from seeing what is shameful, even though they do not have the power to voice their critique. Thus, when the shamed CEO withdraws from his position and isolates himself, he is in a better position to control the conditions that cause shame than the CEO that strives for more power in the given context to eliminate the possibility of further critique and shame.

When this strategy is successful, it makes one less vulnerable and, hence, also less prone to shame. The struggle for power to overcome or control shame may be apparent, or it may be invisible at first sight. For some, this struggle may determine their whole way of life. Thus, "power becomes the means to insulate against further shame."[82] It becomes a means for security, but like the previous strategies, when it becomes predominant, it may destroy the conditions for human relationships.

An obvious response to shame is to *strive for perfection*, since to achieve perfection is a way to compensate for an underlying sense of defectiveness, and thereby avoid further chances for experiencing shame. A doctor struggling with shame after being responsible for medical errors may promise himself never to commit such errors of judgment again, and

---

80 For a more extensive analysis of the mechanisms that causes rage, see the section on Shame and narcissistic rage in Chapter 3 below.

81 Cf. Kaufman, *Shame: The Power of Caring*. 82. The following paragraphs are inspired by Kaufman's identification of such strategies, but are only loosely based on his analysis.

82 Ibid., 86.

attempt to compensate by becoming the best doctor he can. Nevertheless, it is a rather futile strategy. Firstly, because errors may be committed by even the best clinician. Secondly, because it aims at the impossible: to eliminate shame once and for all. It can, nevertheless, still have positive effects in terms of accomplishing moral improvement or temporarily overcoming an underlying sense of defectiveness. Kaufman writes:

> The quest for perfection itself is self-limiting and hopelessly doomed both to fail and to plunge the individual back into the very mire of defectiveness from which he so longed to escape. One can never attain that perfection, and awareness of failure to do so reawakens that already-present sense of shame. It is as though one sees the only means of escaping from the prison that is shame is erasing all signs that might point to its presence.[83]

Thus, the struggle for perfection may involve the self in a perpetual game of comparison with others, in which the individual is always at risk of losing. Moreover, it can lead to unhealthy forms of competitiveness, which, in turn, may have devastating consequences for relationships with others. A strategy that is both obvious and known to most is the *transfer of blame*. It can take many forms, from accusing others of being the real cause of one's own failure to more elaborate forms of scapegoating at a societal level. As for the latter, anthropologist Rene Girard[84] has developed a comprehensive theory about how societies can use modes of scapegoating to regain order (or in our notion: conditions for communal and coherent agency) by separating someone as the victim that is to blame. Girard's analysis, in which he is not very explicit about shame, can be applied to at the societal level as well, for example, in the response of Germany to the Versailles Agreement (which initially caused shame, and then, later on, aggression[85]); or the Irish feeling of inferiority in relation to England (which resulted in abhorrent strategies for moral perfection in a

83 Ibid., 87.

84 See René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (London: Athlone Press, 1986); René Girard and Patrick Gregory, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

85 Cf. Kaufman, *Shame: The Power of Caring*, 227ff.

close cooperation between the authorities, the Catholic Church, and the smaller, local communities.)[86]

Finally, *internal withdrawal* is also a strategy that can transfer or transform *the subject of shame* from one context to another, in which the latter (the internal world) is one in which he or she is not susceptible to shame to the same extent as in the social dimension. This strategy has similarities with the strive for power. When a child experiences shame as caused by a significant other human in a relationship, it may engage this strategy for coping with the painful experience at hand. "The self withdraws deeper inside itself to escape the agony of exposure or the loss of the possibility of reunion." In the inner world, the child can "engage in internal fantasy and imagery designed by him to restore his good feelings about himself."[87]

All the above strategies imply some form of transportation and/or transformation of shame. They must be seen as defense mechanisms against the painful experience that shame often is. Most of them are outwardly-directed, whereas some may also impact on the architecture of the self, such as when rage, blame, or contempt are directed against the self. No matter who they are directed towards, they can all have a negative impact on the conditions by which the self can develop relationships with others. They also create problems for the development of a coherent agency, because they emerge as interruptions of the normal agency whenever the individual needs to defend herself from the experience of shame, be it consciously or at an unconscious level.

Circumscribing shame as disruption: components of and types of shame

Shame as loss of positive self-experience

To feel shame, you need to have at least a rudimentary sense of yourself as distinguishable, although not necessarily fully separated, from others. This sense of self can be pre-subjective (as in infants) or part of a more

86 Cf. Clough, *Shame, the Church and the Regulation of Female Sexuality*, passim.
87 Kaufman, *Shame: The Power of Caring*, 95.

clearly developed sense of subjectivity. In both cases, this sense of self is developed, explored, and articulated through agency. Agency is the capability to act according to chosen objectives, such as specific aims, qualities, or values. As fathers, we may, for example, express our agency by both sharing and adhering to aims, qualities or values for good parenting. This relation between a sense of self and the chosen objectives in question is important. There is a reciprocal dynamic between the content of the self and the chosen objectives.

One the one hand, through agency the self chooses, articulates, and develops these objectives and manifests them through action. We choose values or standards we want to live by as parents, as citizens and as fellow human beings. Ultimately, through a responsible agency we try not only to adhere to these standards but also to act them out, as examples of who and what we are and what we choose to believe in.

On the other hand, the content that the self achieves and manifests implies that the self will experience itself as connected to these qualities, and entitled to recognition or respect for the choice of objectives and values, and, ultimately, to the sense of self these objectives and values mediate. This point is of the utmost importance to the way we will understand the conditions for shame later on: such assumptions of recognition, respect, or affirmation make it possible to experience oneself as part of a world one shares with others, and which can be described as a *common context of agency,* whether it is as a citizen, a colleague or a family member. It is when one realizes that one no longer partakes in such a shared context of agency that shame may occur. As long as there is an uninterrupted relation between the sense of self and the objectives by which it defines itself, there is little room for a sense of shame, and agency can go on in ways that confirm the self's perception of being in a world where it shares the values or intentions of others and is recognized by them. As we shall argue, it is when this shared context of agency is no longer present that the conditions for shame present themselves most strikingly.

This analysis does not imply that shame is absent when an uninterrupted coherence between the self and its projects, as the sum of its chosen objectives, is the case. Even when one is absolutely convinced of the choice of one's values, and experiences the acting out and the receiving

of both self-assurance and self-worth as a reciprocal consequence, shame may occur. One can picture a shameful situation where others, who do not share either our objectives or conditions for agency, ridicule or mock them despite our conviction about doing the right thing. A convinced anti-abortion protester standing outside a hospital may feel shame when passing men and women, patients and staff, laugh and ridicule his views and his one-man protest. Accordingly, there is always a social dimension to the experience of the self, where loss of recognition can be experienced as shameful. That does not diminish the strong tie between sense of self, its objectives and its agency. Ultimately, it is this self-experience that is interrupted by shame.

However, shame seems to be connected to a varying degree of loss in this continuous, positive self-experience. As humans, we continuously need to develop and maintain a sense of self, and appear to ourselves and others as worthy of recognition. Such sense of self is the result of our long-term attempts to achieve coherent agency, in which we pursue a sense of self through the goals we have set before us. Shame can interrupt these intended struggles to achieve or maintain this sense of self. Thus, with shame the grip and self-control can be diminished or put under pressure. In severe shame, there is not only an interruption in coherent agency, that is, stable intentions, actions and chosen values, interests, and so forth, but its actual outcome implies a rupture, a realization of the total discrepancy between actual intentions/values and those of a shared context of agency, values, and recognizable intentions.

Hutchinson's analysis of Hatzfeld's book *A Time for Machetes*, about the Rwandan conflict,[88] describes an interview conducted in prison with a perpetrator called Léopard. He had participated in the atrocities. Hutchinson describes how Léopard's shame emerges as he starts to acknowledge his crime and the gradual realization of how he, through his actions, violated the core values of both himself and humanity:

88 See Phil Hutchinson, *Shame and Philosophy* (New York: New Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 141ff.; Jean Hatzfeld, *A Time for Machetes: The Rwandan Genocide: The Killers Speak: A Report* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2005), 154.

> However, he had turned away from, had denied, that which would force him to acknowledge his moral crime; he had denied, turned-away-from, that which would allow him to acknowledge the true meaning of his actions. Léopard denied that in carrying out those actions he had not merely violated a code to which he was bound by an external authority, but that he had done violence to the very fabric of human existence (and, therefore, his own).[89]

When Léopard finally acknowledges this rupture between his actions and his own humanity, he realizes that the values he shared with his peers were not commonly accepted. Thus, he also needs to acknowledge another meaning of being human, and consequently, shame washes over him. The aims or qualities of being human are something he has not lived up to, and so to speak, by his own actions, he has denounced them.

Another example of this interruption or rupture can be found in the nursing profession. Nursing research has shown that nurses who experience a gap between their nursing standards and ideals, and the standards they can manage to uphold in their daily practice, over time will accumulate moral distress.[90] Such distress can manifest itself through emotions of both shame and guilt, as he or she has to administer suboptimal care due to limitations that he or she does not control, such as lack of resources.

In other words, the feeling of shame also entails an experience of exposure to something outside one's desires and control, such as when our objectives are put under pressure and/or downgraded. The more dependent the self is on others for recognition, and the weaker its independently established self-esteem accordingly is, the more it is prone to the interruptions or rupture of shame.[91] On the other hand, the less it is dependent

89 Hutchinson, *Shame and Philosophy*, 142.

90 Sofia Kalvemark et al., "Living with Conflicts – Ethical Dilemmas and Moral Distress in the Health Care System," *Social Science & Medicine* 58, no. 6 (2004); Sture Eriksson, Ann-Louise Glasberg, and Astrid Norberg, "Burnout and 'Stress of Conscience' among Healthcare Personnel," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 57, no. 4 (2007); Ann-Louise Glasberg, *Stress of Conscience and Burnout in Healthcare: The Danger of Deadening One's Conscience* (Umeå: Umeå University, 2007).

91 To what extent such recognition is lacking is due to how well the child has been met, confirmed and guided safely in its earlier years – also in ways that imply a certain frustration of its inborn tendency towards grandiosity. This links shame to what we, in the present context, call the narcissistic complex. More on this below.

on others for continuous recognition of sense of self-worth, the less the self is prone to shame, and the more he or she is resilient to shaming. Still, shame can hit the self in both cases, and with disastrous effects. Thus, one tenet in a preliminary definition of shame can be described as:

> a negative and emotionally charged interruption of the positive sense of self that one needs to have in order to experience oneself as good and one's actions and intentions as meaningful and worthy of recognition by others, as when (actual or imagined) ridicule or rejection by (actual or imagined) peers take place.

This experience of emotional interruption or rupture means that the evaluation of oneself or of others suddenly changes and downgrades a previously existing, positive sense of self, no matter how weak or strong this sense may be. This point also suggests that shame, for the most part, is a retrospective response. It also implies a double movement: one withdraws from others while, simultaneously, also wanting to recover one's position among those to whom one feels shamed. Thus, shame describes the emotional and existential dilemma of a double movement, in which the first step is movement away from the other when the movement towards others is somewhat thwarted and our vulnerability is exposed. The second movement is relational and social – a moving towards the other to become part of the community again – which is one of the reasons why shame is so effective in social disciplining.

However, the desire to return to the community or group may not always be present; another tenet in the understanding of shame comes into play when it is not the boundary of the emotional self that is disturbed, shattered or violated, but one's physical integrity, as in violence or sexual abuse. Then, the need to retract from those or that which causes shame may be permanent, and there may be no need for reconciliation with the one who caused shame. Accordingly, shame may manifest a situation in which the relationship to others is severed permanently – and for a good reason. However, such severing of bonds may not necessarily alleviate the experience of shame, although it may contribute to its weakening.

Thus, simplified: shame is what happens when the positive sense of self is interrupted in a way that makes the self realize that it is not living up to

or achieving the intended goals or values that others and/or the self determine it by. This interruption is caused by an experience of dissonance. It means that the initially positive disposition to feel good about oneself, manifested in one's intentional being, is no longer present and becomes disturbed and confused. The interruption can happen in different ways: through words that interrupt, through ways of relating to it that makes it feel excluded and not recognized, through a realization that one is cut from the same cloth as one's tormentor, or, as mentioned, through physical threats or actual violence, as well as overstepping the boundaries that secure one's sexual integrity. In all of these instances, the self is exposed in ways that makes it feel bad about itself and having lost a grip on what was hitherto the basis for its coherent intentional agency in the world.

Shame is not only related to actual occurrences of interaction with others or tied to cultural expectations (see below). Shame is also something that the self may be made prone to experience in contexts and situations that would not instigate such experiences in others.[92] Self-acceptance and self-insecurity are two crucial factors. Thus, in order to understand the mechanisms that may engender shame, we need to develop a psychological account of its conditions. This will be developed in one of the following chapters.

Gilbert's circumscription: five components

In the circumscription above, shame emerges as a powerful, dynamic and elusive experience that at the same time is difficult to identify and articulate. These many faces of shame have spurred research from a host of perspectives and disciplines. Paul Gilbert describes the many approaches to shame:

92 We will not go into the discussion of shame-proneness and guilt-proneness, or the balancing of, on the one hand, a person's proneness and on the other hand, the contextual elements that together generate shame reactions. For further reading on the topic, see June Price Tangney, Patricia Wagner, and Richard Gramzow, "Proneness to Shame, Proneness to Guilt, and Psychopathology," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 101, no. 3 (1992); Tangney and Dearing, *Shame and Guilt*.

> Not only are there different schools and theoretical approaches to shame, but it can also be conceptualized and studied in terms of its components and mechanisms (Tangney, 1996). It can be examined in terms of emotion (e.g., as a primary affect in its own right, as an auxiliary emotion, or as a composite of other emotions such as fear, anger, or self-disgust); cognitions and beliefs about the self (e.g., that one is and/or is seen by others to be inferior, flawed, inadequate, etc.); behaviors and actions (e.g., such as running away, hiding and concealing, or attacking others to cover one's shame); evolved mechanisms (e.g., the expression of shame seems to use similar biobehavioral systems to those of animals expressing submissive behavior); and interpersonal dynamic interrelationships (shamed and shamer; Fossum & Mason, 1986; Harper & Hoopes, 1990). Shame can also be used to describe phenomena at many different levels, including internal self-experiences, relational episodes, and cultural practices for maintaining honor and prestige.[93]

This long quote does not offer a taxonomy of shame. Rather, it presents a set of interweaving perspectives that express shame, and, thus, can be examined as such.[94] It includes emotions, cognitions and beliefs, behaviors and actions, evolved mechanisms, and, lastly, interpersonal dynamic interrelationships. Put into our terminology, components and mechanisms of shame manifest themselves in different dimensions of experience, such as emotion (primary, auxiliary or composite), or cognition in the inner dimension of experience, or evolved mechanism in the natural dimension, or as behavior or action, or as interpersonal relationships in the social dimension.

Gilbert also describes the different conceptualizations and debates on what constitutes a shameful experience.[95] He describes shame basically as a complex set of feelings, cognitions and actions, although its

93 Gilbert, "What Is Shame? Some Core Issues and Controversies," 3–4.

94 Hutchinson, *Shame and Philosophy*, 138–39.

95 Paul Gilbert, "Body Shame: A Biopsychosocial Conceptualisation and Overview with Treatment Implications," in *Body Shame: Conceptualisation, Research and Treatment*, eds. Paul Gilbert and Jeremy Miles (Routledge, 2002), 2–3. For further reading on the conceptual issues regarding shame, and also shame versus guilt, see for example, June Price Tangney, "Conceptual and Methodological Issues in the Assessment of Shame and Guilt," *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 34, no. 9 (1996); Linda McFall, "Shame: Concept Analysis," *Journal of Theory Construction & Testing* 13, no. 2 (2009); Alon Blum, "Shame and Guilt, Misconceptions and Controversies: A Critical Review of the Literature," *Traumatology* 14, no. 3 (2008).

manifestations can vary considerably. He underscores an important point regarding the relation between shame and morality (which we will return to later): Shame "is an experience that is self-focused however, dependent on the competencies to construct self as a social agent."[96] Although shame is self-oriented, in contrast to the feeling of guilt that is often other-oriented (as described above), both are dependent on the signs and symbols of the social dimension in order for someone to construct themselves as shameful or feeling guilty.[97] As we pointed out above, our capacity to identify, articulate and understand shame depends on the semiotic resources we have learned from others. Gilbert elaborates these features further by differentiating between five aspects and components of shame.[98]

The first component, a social or external cognitive component of shame, manifests itself through automatic negative evaluative thoughts about others who see the self as inferior, bad, inadequate and/or flawed. It is worth noting the automatic component here: shame is not the result of pondering or reflection, but the immediate experience that "others are looking down on the self with a condemning or contemptuous view."[99] Such shame can also be linked to various forms of stigma, self-consciousness caused by illness, the disfigurement of the body, etc. In other words, shame links the social and the inner dimensions of experience. Furthermore, the self-conscious element of shame adds a complexity that is also present in the way it is made manifest in the world. The cognitive

---

96 Gilbert, "Body Shame: A Biopsychosocial Conceptualisation and Overview with Treatment Implications," 6. Cf. also the description by G. Kaufman: "Shame itself is an *entrance* to the self. It is the affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression, of inferiority, and of alienation. No other affect is closer to the experienced self." Kaufman, *Shame: The Power of Caring*, xix.

97 We briefly discussed above the relationship between shame and its neighboring concepts, such as guilt/feelings of guilt. The distinctions in real life are somewhat blurrier than what is put forth here. See also June Price Tangney, Jeff Stuewig, and Debra J. Mashek, "Moral Emotions and Moral Behavior," *Annual Review of Psychology* 58, no. 1 (2007).

98 Gilbert, "Body Shame: A Biopsychosocial Conceptualisation and Overview with Treatment Implications," 5–6.

99 Paul Gilbert and Jeremy Miles, *Body Shame: Conceptualisation, Research and Treatment* (Hove: Brunner-Routledge, 2002), 5.

component allows for a more deliberate processing and also a more frequent use of language when we communicate and handle shame.[100]

The second component is that shame is internally self-evaluative. This has been the focus of much research and specifies the nature of the cognitive component above.[101] Thus, shame is a negative evaluation of the global self. As such, it differs from the feeling of guilt, which, as shown above, normally does not include the global self, but is merely a negative evaluation of a specific action. Shame as a global negative self-evaluation, for example, when experiencing oneself "as bad, inadequate and flawed", is not only an expression of negative automatic thoughts about the self. It implies an active expression of self-critique and self-attack. Such self-devaluations and internally shaming thoughts mean that the presence of actual others is not always necessary in order to feel shame.[102] In a specific situation, it is not necessarily the presence, or even the imagined presence, of an audience that activates shame. The revered minister giving in to his desires in ways he struggles to avoid may certainly feel shame for his weakness even when others do not see him. Thus, shame becomes internalized.

The third component is that shame often manifests itself as emotion. As such, shame can be an affect associated with the interruption and sudden loss of positive affect, such as pride or honor.[103] Shame invades and activates other emotions as well: anxiety, anger, disgust in the self,

---

100 Jessica L. Tracy and Richard W. Robins, "The Self in Self-Conscious Emotions. A Cognitive Appraisal Approach," in *The Self-Conscious Emotions: Theory and Research*, eds. Jessica L. Tracy, Richard W. Robins, and June Price Tangney (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 7.

101 See Gilbert, "Body Shame: A Biopsychosocial Conceptualisation and Overview with Treatment Implications."

102 This discussion of the presence of an audience in order to experience shame reaches far. Empirical studies in victimology, especially Holocaust studies, have documented that survivors of atrocities can feel both shame and guilt when they realize the atrocities that were inflicted upon them, and that they are alive when so many others perished. See, for example, Tzvetan Todorov, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps* (New York: Metropolitan, 1996); Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, (New York: Vintage International, 1989); Hutchinson, *Shame and Philosophy*. Hutchinson describes the same when he analyzes Jean Hatzfeld's book on the Rwandan genocide. The shame of the perpetrator emerges as acknowledgment of the crime sinks in, even though there is no audience.

103 See above. Cf. for example, Chapter 5 where this interruption is visible in relation to the wish for celebration.

self-contempt and inner deflation or dejection. In their analysis of the self-conscious emotions, such as shame, guilt, pride, and embarrassment, Tracy and Robins identify five major features that distinguish them from non-self-conscious emotions:[104]

- self-conscious emotions require self-awareness and self-representations
- these emotions emerge later in childhood than basic emotions
- they facilitate the attainment of complex social goals
- they do not have discrete and universally recognized facial expressions
- they are cognitively complex

Even though these are features of a whole set of self-conscious emotions and therefore lack the specificities of a single description, we recognize these as features of shame. Hence, we agree that shame both critically involves the self and is complex, as we have mentioned above. However, there is a difference between claiming that shame is (only) a self-conscious emotion (Tracy and Robins), and that shame displays or manifests itself as a self-conscious emotion (Gilbert). As it will be shown later in this work, this is an important distinction. In order to describe both the function and the many faces of shame, we need a theoretical model that opens a larger space in the architecture of the self for shame as more than only an emotion. Whereas the emotional character of shame is certainly a necessary and very prominent feature in any definition of shame, we will argue that shame is a complex phenomenon both through its manifestations and its functions in human life. On the one hand, displays of shame can be analyzed as consequences of the specific interconnectedness between the natural, social and inner dimensions of the experience of a specific situation, such as if we blush with shame when being caught in a compromising situation. On the other hand, shame is more than an emotional consequence of such instances – it has consequences for agency.

---

104 Tracy and Robins, "The Self in Self-Conscious Emotions. A Cognitive Appraisal Approach," 5–7. For further discussion, see Jessica L. Tracy and Richard W. Robins, "Putting the Self into Self-Conscious Emotions: A Theoretical Model", *Psychological Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (2004).

The point about consequences for agency is also demonstrated in Gilbert's fourth component, where he shows that shame has a behavioral component. Shame, or more precisely, the handling of shame, often includes retractions or other defensive action to remove the threat of exposure.[105] When one is ashamed, one avoids looking others in the eye, and one can feel behaviorally inhibited or engage in submissive-defensive behaviors. Furthermore, one can behave in ways that mean acting out in anger, based on "the desire to retaliate or gain revenge against the one who is 'exposing' the self (as inferior, weak or bad)."[106] Thus, the need for deliberate defensive and/or evasive actions, such as moving away from the scene where shaming took place underscores the interdependency between the above-mentioned inner and social dimensions of the shame experience. However, not all action is deliberate. As mentioned, automatic actions, such as eye aversion, sudden anger, or the reflex to quickly evade shameful situations, also seem to be a behavioral feature of shame.

The fifth component is physiological. Shameful experiences can activate stress responses in the body, by heightening the parasympathetic activity to a varying degree. One obvious example is how a sudden experience of shame can manifest itself through blushing, a heightened pulse, or a lump in the throat. Another and more severe form of physiological manifestation can take place when toxic shame over time forms and shapes both body posture and body movement.

In sum, Gilbert's distinction between the five components shows the complexity of the phenomenon of shame, and the concomitant need for attempting an interdisciplinary description. In the subsequent chapters, we attempt to integrate and unravel these different components or perspectives through our analysis of how shame's different dimensions are articulated in different arenas of social life.

---

105 Gilbert, "Body Shame: A Biopsychosocial Conceptualisation and Overview with Treatment Implications," 10–16.

106 Gilbert and Miles, *Body Shame: Conceptualisation, Research and Treatment*, 6.

Types of shame: contextual demarcations

In the following, we will attempt to sort out the most important forms of and perspectives on shame in order to demarcate their role in human experience. These demarcations are essential for the later analysis, especially in Chapter 4 and Chapter 6.[107]

Discretionary shame

Given that shame may not only be related to what we do, but often to who we *are*, shame can be difficult to manage, because it cannot be controlled by adapting to others by means of what one does and does not do. We have seen that shame manifests itself as an experience of the self, and as such, it manifests a sense of self that is not desired, and which signifies that "I am not what I should be." The experience of shame may then generate two opposing impulses: on the one hand, the desire to flee from those who are your peers, and on the other hand, the desire to regain community with them by overcoming the causes of your shame.

In the literature on shame, there is a decisive and important distinction between two forms of shame that may help us to access some relevant nuances related to later development as well. There is what we suggest calling *discretionary shame*; and there is what we suggest calling, *disgrace shame*. This important distinction was described as early as 1977 by Schneider in his book *Shame, Exposure and Privacy*.[108] Schneider describes man as "the creature that blushes." Discretionary shame protects our vulnerability to violation.[109] Thus, discretionary shame may

107 There are other ways of classifying shame, and also forms of shame, than those we point to here. However, the forms we develop in the following occupy our focus as they all testify to a pluralist approach to shame with regard to conditions, causes, functions and consequences, and in a way that also includes the often-neglected topic of shame in a Western religious context. For a nuanced and comprehensive analysis of different forms of shame with a clear therapeutic scope, see Marie Farstad, *Skammens Spor: Eksistens, Relasjon, Profesjon* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk 2016).

108 Carl D. Schneider, *Shame, Exposure, and Privacy* (London: W.W. Norton & Co, 1977).

109 Ibid. Cf. Francis J. Broucek, *Shame and the Self* (New York: Guilford, 1991), 5ff; Thomas J. Scheff and Suzanne M. Retzinger, "Shame as the Master Emotion of Everyday Life," *Journal of Mundane Behavior* 1, no. 3 (2000).

also be part of a sound self-perception, as it does not necessarily jeopardize the basic trustful relationship that a self may have towards the self and the world. This kind of shame may, on the contrary, even contribute to the self-other relationship: it may provide a relationship with a protective discretion, tact and sensitivity. When you accidently barge in on a compromising situation that puts the vulnerability of others at risk, you may feel discretionary shame. Such shame may therefore also imply that one has internalized respect for others and their values.

As we saw above, Scheff and Retzinger criticize any attempt to individualize shame by pulling it out of the social matrix. Shame is more than a reaction to personal failure to live up to one's ideal:

> Shame arises in an elemental situation in which there is a real or imagined threat to our bonds; it signals trouble in a relationship. Since an infant's life is completely dependent on the bond with the caregivers, this emotion is as primitive and intense as fear. The point that shame is a response to bond threat cannot be emphasized too strongly, since in psychology and psychoanalysis there is a tendency to individualize shame, taking it out of its social matrix. Typically, in these disciplines, shame is defined as a product of the individual's failure to live up to her own ideals. But one's ideals, for the most part, are usually a reflection of the ideals of one's society. Mead's idea of the generalized other captures this notion perfectly. If one feels that her behavior has been inadequate or deviant, not only an internal gap has been created between behavior and ideals, but also a gap between group ideals and one's self, a threat to the bond. The sociological definition of the source of shame subsumes the psychological one, pointing to the source in shared ideals.[110]

Thus, discretionary shame may strengthen the bond between the individual and the community to which he or she belongs.[111] James Fowler describes this as a type of shame that protects the elements that provide the basis for a person's worth in the eyes of others, and for his or her positive sense of self-worth and pride.[112] It is not difficult to see this type of

110 Scheff and Retzinger, "Shame as the Master Emotion of Everyday Life," 5.

111 James W. Fowler: *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville: Abingdon 1996), 104.

112 Ibid., 105.

shame as developing out of a nuanced and balanced interaction between the self and its primary caretakers, who are able to mirror the child sufficiently to develop his or her basic self-trust, while also being able to provide the necessary frustration for relating more realistically to the challenges and demands of others. In this way, shame may even be seen as the result of the monitoring and regulating of some of the important boundaries between self and other.

Shamelessness and possible consequences

Shamelessness is the opposite of discretionary shame. The shameless comes close enough to see both the vulnerability and the compromised situation of the other but does not have the moral sensibility or the moral standards to act accordingly, for example, by retreating in order to protect. The shameless have no regard for the boundaries of the other, and/or the moral sensibility that is activated when the boundary is broken. Rather, the shameless seeks fulfillment of her own needs and desires without reflecting on the other. As such, both shame and shamelessness are opposing features of the self that are closely tied to varying degrees of positive mirroring and self-experience in early childhood, and later manifested through differences in way of interacting with others. Thus, they are phenomena with strong relevance for morality – and we discuss them further in Chapter 6.

Shamelessness is especially recognizable in acts of violence. That is not surprising. As suggested, the shameless possess neither the ability to see nor respect the boundaries of the other. We saw earlier how the Rwandian citizen Léopard experienced shame when he saw that his own actions denied others the rights and recognition of being simply human. To be able to recognize one's shameful and violent acts presupposes an ability to both identify and respect the boundaries of the other. It takes a moral person to retreat in shame when faced with his own immoral actions. The more room a person can establish between themselves and the victim, the easier acts of violence become. As the face and the boundaries of the other becomes blurred, readiness for violence may increase. Thus, violence correlates with the social, geographical space between victim and offender. It is far easier to push the button and open the trapdoor

to the bomb bay than to kill face-to-face. It is also far easier to kill the ones we have dehumanized through language and ideology.[113] There is far less shame in wreaking havoc in villages of Rwandian "cockroaches" and faceless families of Vietnamese "gooks", than to faces where we recognize our own humanity. The strategies for evading responsibility, guilt and/or shame are plentiful, as soon as the moral person has established some form of distance. But it is far more complicated to escape the shame of one's actions when we come within the reach of empathy.

However, it is not only in violence that shamelessness can be found. In recent times, the emergence of social media has led to a prevalence of both verbal abuse and attempted shaming of others from behind the curtain of anonymity. It is far more difficult to remain shameless when one is confronted with one's actions by having to face others. In the Scandinavian countries, journalists have confronted people who have "trolled" others online, and the result has mostly been a reaction of shame and remorse. This is an indication of the validity of the point above: shamelessness is easier to maintain when you are not confronted with the face of another, who represents other values and who questions your belonging to a community of shared values and qualities.

Nevertheless, as we mentioned above, not all perpetrators retreat in shame even though the vulnerability of the other is all too clear. The Norwegian philosopher A. J. Vetlesen comments: "What we need to recognize is that, in certain circumstances, evildoing thrives in proximity. Evildoing, be it modern or postmodern, be it ideologized along racial, nationalist, religious, or ethnic lines, does not depend on distance, invisibility or anonymity."[114]

---

113 For an introduction to this discussion, see, for example, Erwin Staub, *The Roots of Evil. The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Arne Johan Vetlesen, *Evil and Human Agency: Understanding Collective Evildoing*, Cambridge Cultural Social Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Zygmunt Bauman, Modernity and the Holocaust, (Cambridge; Maldon: Polity Press, 2007); Arthur G. Miller, *The Social Psychology of Good and Evil* (New York: Guilford Press, 2004); Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide.*2000 ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

114 Arne Johan Vetlesen, "Det Er Ofrene Som Skammer Seg," in *Skam: Perspektiver På Skam, Ære Og Skamløshet I Det Moderne*, ed. Trygve Wyller (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2001), 31ff.; See also his *Evil and Human Agency: Understanding Collective Evildoing.*

Many victims of child sexual abuse (CSA) describe the particular shame tied to the shamelessness of the abusive close other.[115] A child naturally expects to be safe, to experience trust and recognition in the closeness of the other. A safe and nurturing relationship is the place where its vulnerability is both allowed, recognized, and met with empathy. But in instances of CSA, many children are met instead with the opposite: with violence and degradation. It happens without any sign that the offender recognizes the obvious vulnerability of the child and reacts to it with at least a hint of compassion that slows down or holds back the abuse, or a sign of the offender feeling remorse, guilt or shame over his shameful actions. The shame of the abuse is not picked up by the offender, but is left with the abused child, generated by the shameless exploitation of trust. It is a shame over being reduced to a sexual thing to be exploited, over the total lack of recognition of the self in the eyes of the other.[116] It is the shame of not being recognized as a vulnerable person even within the reach of empathy.

In his book *Facing the Extreme*, the philosopher Tzvetan Todorov analyzes the shame in Holocaust survivors, especially Jean Améry:

> The shame of the camp survivor has several components, the first being the shame of remembering. In the camps, the individual prisoner is deprived of his will. He is made to perform acts that he not only disapproves of but also finds abject, that he does either because he is ordered to or because he has to so as to survive. Améry compares this feeling to that of a victim of rape; logically, it is the rapist who ought to feel shame, but in reality, it is the victim who does, for she cannot forget that she was reduced to powerlessness, to a total dissociation from her will.[117]

Violence is the severing of any positive intentions in the victim. Violence within the boundaries of empathy thus negates the very essence of human constitution; the vulnerability and interdependence of the self. Therefore, shameless violation leaves the victim with the deepest sense of shame: shame over not being recognized as a vulnerable and

115 Mesel, *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep*, 117ff.
116 Vetlesen, "Det Er Ofrene Som Skammer Seg," 124.
117 Todorov, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps*, 263.

interdependent person recognized and affirmed in her own being and intentional agency.

To sum up, the shameless carries no discretionary and protective shame but may leave the offended or the victim with a deep and toxic *shame that signals the dangers inherent in losing the self* when facing the shameless other. The shameless acts without recognition of the subjectivity of the other. Instead, the other is made into an object with no independent existence. Another interpretation of the shameless is that he acts only as an object by having failed in developing a proper sense of selfhood. In that sense, an emerging presence or recognition of shame may provide possibilities for proper individuation, for developing autonomy and selfhood, and for mutual subject-object relations.[118]

Disgrace shame

The above description of discretionary shame provides us with a sufficient basis for understanding so-called disgrace shame. Disgrace shame manifests itself in varying degrees, from strong but passing instances of shame that interrupts what we have called coherent agency, to the paralyzing, toxic and pathological shame that creates a permanent rupture in coherent agency and leaves the subject outside the boundaries of the community. Disgrace shame entails the loss of respect, honor or recognition by others from whom this was considered important, relevant and desirable. The examples may be many, from being rejected by a former friend or a lover, to the toxic shame of abuse, which we shall elaborate on below.

Consequently, disgrace shame also leads to the experience of being placed outside a community in ways that distort self-development by compromising the unavoidable and constitutional vulnerability of the self. It may emerge when one experiences oneself as someone other than the ideal, due to the perception of how (one believes that) others experience oneself. As related to others, we are vulnerable and not immune to others' perceptions of us. Such shame may be culturally conditioned,

118 Stephen Pattison, *Shame: theory, therapy, theology* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 79f.

for example, by how one (and others) perceives oneself as ill, disabled, imprisoned or unemployed.[119] This shame may accordingly emerge out of the self's inability to live up to socially and culturally mediated ideals. It may also arise from warranted or unwarranted disappointment in oneself or others, in ways that make the discrepancies in self-perceptions between the ideal and reality more salient, and that may have an impact on social relations.[120] Sometimes one has to live with such shame, while at other times, one needs to develop a different self-perception in order to free oneself from this emotion. It is in this context that the ability to develop relations to others that can provide alternative self-perceptions becomes important.

Pathological shame

Not everyone who experiences variations of what we have described as disgrace shame finds themselves in a toxic and pathological condition. This severe mode of shame, which we will unfold in the following, is one that temporarily or even permanently seriously jeopardizes relationships with others and with the community.

Toxic or pathological shame has at least two forms. The first form of pathological shame has its origin in long-term dysfunctional relations between the self and (proximate) others, and we will unfold this form of shame in the following. The second form of shame can be found, for example, in the effects of traumatic violence and abuse. Especially sexual violence can sometimes generate a deep and toxic disgrace shame that can lead to a full rupture between the needed positive sense of self, in order to experience oneself and one's actions as good and worthy of recognition, and a destroyed and shattered self-image, with the concomitant impeded intentions and aims, and sometimes also destroyed social image. This type of shame holds the power to negatively shatter and reconstitute the architecture of self in ways that permanently damage social functioning.

---

119 Accordingly, sometimes the standards that condition such shame may be generally approved, i.e., regarding greed, while on other occasions, one may question the standards (i.e., not being slim enough, or not wearing the right clothes in the schoolyard).

120 In the words of Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis, 1993), 89: "The idealizing self experiences shame when it is rejected or disconfirmed."

The pathological condition of shame is characterized by how it affects the self's ability to be part of, relate to, and find fulfillment in a community with others. Such shame impedes the potential for a fulfillment that is shaped by a sense of self-worth and a genuine concern for others. It therefore differs from discretion (concern for others) or an awareness of a serious mistake or problem in one's own life (which is also constituted by a different role of others in the self). Instead, pathological shame is serious and destructive because it builds on a fundamental experience of being placed outside of the community of one's peers, of lacking self-esteem, of being assigned a lower value than others, or even a non-existing value. Thus, a primary mark of such pathological shame is the self's inability and lack of potential to maintain self-respect and a sense of self-worth when faced with (imagined) others. The presence of (perceived) others in the self instigates this experience, and hence, every instance in which others are present may appear as problematic and may throw the self back onto herself. Pathological shame manifests itself in the perception that there is absolutely no basis for self-appreciation or self-worth.

Accordingly, this type of shame does not contribute positively to the self-other relationship. Thus, it stands in contrast to what discretionary forms of shame may do, as these may even serve to uphold positive relations with others.[121] Pathological shame may make relations appear *toxic*, simply because they feed the feeling of a lack of self-worth even more when the individual remains in such relations than when he or she or has withdrawn from them. Accordingly, it is not the result of individual dispositions but emerges from specific forms of interpersonal relations that have severely affected the architecture of the self, more specifically the self-other constitution. This is of the utmost importance for the self's identity, because it means that the self's potential to experience itself in a positive manner is severely constricted. Thus, we can define pathological shame as an expression of destroyed and dysfunctional relations between the self and its (symbolic) others.

121 Cf. James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville, 1996), 107.

The most important implication of this definition from a theoretical point of view is that pathological shame affects the architecture of the self, that is, how the fundamental features of one's experience of self and agency are constituted. This shame does not have to emerge out of the self's ability to thematize itself by means of symbols or language, nor does it have to be a product of how the self has conducted itself as an agent in the world. Its origin can be placed within the dimension of self that must be described as pre-subjective, and thus affected by the early development of the child. Accordingly, in a crucial sense, this shame conditions the self's capabilities to be in the world, to experience and thereby to be, or to regain, a self at all.[122]

Pathological disgrace shame and the pre-subjective

Some kinds of shame may result from narcissistic deprivation or narcissistic wounds, a topic we will go deeper into later.[123] Thus, shame is the result of interruption of interests or desires. These occur when the infant is deprived of his or her opportunity to develop in an emotionally healthy direction, because caretakers mainly relate to the child on the basis of their own emotional needs and concerns. Because lack of care disturbs the child's need for affirmation and mirroring, the intentions that search for such recognition are impeded and may cause shame. Hence, we can speak here of shame as a pre-subjective element that contributes to the shape and content of the emerging subject's self-experience. Shame is, in the pre-subjective context, the result of the child not being given a sufficient opportunity to be affirmed and recognized as valuable and lovable in his or her own capacity. Instead, the child's self-worth becomes

---

122 We use the notion of pre-subjectivity here because it identifies the conditions for self-perception even before one becomes capable of articulating oneself as a subject by means of thought and language. There are some *given* pre-subjective conditions that are part of psychology as well as personality: desire, body, relations with others, vulnerability, and dependence are all such conditions that exist prior to and partly also outside of the subject's ability to control them. At the same time, they are elements that the subject may have to appropriate in a specific manner in order to become a more qualified subject.

123 Cf. Fowler, *Faithful Change*. For a similar approach, see also J. Patton, referenced by Pattison, *Shame,* 199, pointing to how shame is basically a response to a narcissistic wound, including the responses of rage and power, self-righteousness etc., which cuts off the self from re-establishing relations with others.

permanently dependent on who he or she is in the eyes of the parent.[124] He or she is referred to the insecure state manifested by and within relationships with other subjects who are not able to take care of him or her sufficiently. Lack of self-confidence may then substitute the trusting self-relation the child needs and increase the child's vulnerability, anxiety, and lack of self-worth – as well as his or her dependency on others for affirmation.[125]

Instances of such shame imply that a dysfunctional relation is expressed not only in the child's inability to experience himself or herself as appreciated and affirmed, but also in the fact that the presence of such shame emotions deprive the child of the possibility to differentiate himself or herself emotionally from the parent in a healthy manner. Accordingly, the child is thrown into a process in which he or she must constantly consider his or her own identity in relation to others, and how the implications of what he or she does impacts *their* emotional status. Thereby, the other is integrated into the self in a way that does not allow for a sufficiently differentiated self. The lack of differentiation may keep the child permanently aware of its inability to live up to the expectations of his or her (m)other, and thereby contribute to a constant condition of shamefulness.

Winnicott's understanding of the false self may shed some light on shame as emerging out of a similar kind of relationship: when faced with a parent who is not good enough, some infants become compliant and do everything to please them without considering their own needs, feelings or desires in a sufficient manner, or rendering them as unhelpful for the relation. The unacceptable feelings and energies that constitute the "true self" are thereby denied and regarded as unwanted. As a result, the child may lose its sense of individuality and be deprived of a properly separate existence.[126]

Shame that originates as a pre-subjective phenomenon therefore determines the self-relation in ways that profoundly affect relations

124 Fowler, *Faithful Change,* 108.
125 Ibid.
126 Pattison, *Shame*, 101, referring to Phil Mollon, *The Fragile Self* (London, 1993), 45f.

to others as well. Such shame is constituted by passivity, that is, the present architecture of the self is the result of others' actions or lack of action towards her. The result is not due to what he or she has done or not done, but due to what others have made him or her. This pre-subjective character of pathological shame implies that it can be experienced as uncontrollable. Thus, it is much more than an emotion that we can strive to control, it is a component in the way the self is organized and works – what we have called the architecture of the self. Healing from such shame can only take place if one engages in a therapeutic process that interiorizes a different self-other system than the one that has been instigated by the primary caretakers. This new system or architecture must provide the ability to differentiate both emotionally and cognitively between the self and others. Only in this way will the self be able to experience shame as something that the self has not caused. However, the reinstatement of such a new self-other system may be a long process.

Shame: attempting a comprehensive phenomenological description

Towards a preliminary comprehensive definition

Shame is rooted in the specific relational mode of being-in-the-world where humans exist as intentional beings. Shame is a composite phenomenon that involves an inner, a social and an embodied experience of self. We therefore recommend that one sees shame as more than an emotional reaction to one clearly delineated set of conditions. Shame is the result of a diversity of types of interplay between different experiential dimensions in which an agent participates.

In this section, we aim at providing an overarching description of what shame entails and implies when it comes to self-experience, and do so in a way that builds on, summarizes, and develops further some of the observations already presented. The section intends to highlight some of the diverse elements that shame entails to show that it is more than an emotional response. We shall provide examples in the end in order to contextualize our description.

Shame and intentional investment or engagement

Let us try to elaborate the aforementioned complexity from a phenomenological point of view. Because human beings are *intentional*, they are directed towards others, towards the world, and are involved in different kinds of projects. These projects are related to their self-image and their social image, and reflect these images to a lesser or greater extent – although the self-image and the social image behind intentional projects need not correspond. The notion "projects" is important here, since it captures the intentional and projective character of the self as one who always engages in the world and with different objects or aims that it wants to achieve or accomplish, which have some kind of value or attraction for it. Intentionality is expressed as orientation towards something. Concomitantly, it has to do with how the self manifests an interest that is directed by and shaped by the relation to this something.[127] The intentional and projective character of being (which Heidegger calls *Da-sein*, or "being-towards") is not based exclusively on intellectual deliberations. It may also be rooted in instinctual elements (as in the infant seeking the breast for food) or in desires that emerge as the result of interactions with others (as in Girard's mimetic desire, which implies, for example, that an infant wants to have what another has, simply because the other has it).[128]

---

127 Another way to express this intentionality is by means of the notion "interest". In her book on shame, Probyn comes close to the description we develop here, especially with regard to relationality and interruption: "Interest constitutes lines of connection between people and ideas. It describes a kind of affective investment we have in others. When, for different reasons, that investment is questioned, and interest interrupted, we feel deprived. Crucially, that's when we feel shame. That little moment of disappointment – 'oh, but I was interested' – is amplified into shame or a deep disappointment in ourselves. Shame marks the break in connection. We have to care about something or someone to feel ashamed when that care and connection – our interest – is not reciprocated." Elspeth Probyn, *Blush: Faces of Shame*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 13.

128 When Merleau-Ponty understands consciousness as a kind of bodily understanding, it can be related to the idea of intentionality's relation to shame that we sketch here. He argues that our exploratory and goal-directed movement constitutes a way of being conscious of things, and is a form of understanding what is perceived that is not derived from activities of conceptual categorization and inference (which belong properly to the intellect). Thus, the organization and adjustment of movements involved in bodily understanding, though norm-guided and experienced, must not be regarded as always chosen – our moves are objects of personal choice only when specifically endorsed for reasons. Cf. Charles Siewert, "Consciousness and Intentionality," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017).

Intentionally-based agency is simply the human mode of being-in-the-world, and is therefore the contextual frame of any modality of shame.

These projects entail personal investment, and we hold that this investment is also a part of the contextual framework of shame. Therefore, we hold that the instinctual and/or desire-based intentions are not only an expression of the embodied self, but that the embodied mode of intentionality and "directed-towards" that is articulated in the self's projects and projections are of crucial importance for understanding shame. How?

The intentional projective mode of being implies that the self always understands itself in relation to something that is of importance or value to it to a varying degree, something it wants to achieve to a varying degree. What it seeks to achieve is not simply external to it or of merely instrumental value but is linked to its sense of self and the way that self expresses itself in the world through agency. Thus, it invest itself in these projects and the projects become expressions of its intentions: it may want to be fed, sexually satisfied, recognized as the bearer of a specific status, admired, considered as skilled, worthy of recognition, etc. All of these elements also imply some (albeit sometimes tacit) participation in a world with others. Often, such projects turn out to be successful, or at least partly successful, as different contextual elements make possible and delimit its way of expressing itself through agency. Some projects may be of great importance and demand a large personal investment. But some projects may also be of lesser importance and, accordingly, require a smaller personal investment. Although the importance of the intentionally based projects may differ, as well as the amount of personal investment in them, the human relational mode of being is never non-intentional and without some sort of invested interest expressed through some sort of action. *Shame manifests the unwelcome interruption of these intentional projects both cognitively, emotionally, socially, and bodily.*

Shame as disruption, rupture, or impediment of coherent agency

Shame may occur when there is some sort of disturbance in, disruption of, or full-blown rupture between, intentions, desires and the projects they

engender *and* the possibility of expressing these in the world through agency. Thus, shame can manifest itself in the lack of the personal ability to fulfill the intended project or achieve the desired aim. It can also manifest itself through contextual restraints, such as when the social structures or the internalized normativities within which an agent conducts agency impede or block the possibility of expressing certain personal projects in a coherent manner, because they are deemed undesirable in the context.[129] Similar suggestions can be found in the understanding of shame as "an awareness of a distinctive inability to discharge a commitment that goes with holding self-relevant values."[130]

Interruption also occurs when a person realizes that their context of agency is not shared by others, and that the others' context of agency and conditions are not in consonance with their own. Then we can speak about shame as emerging from the clash between contexts of agency. This is often expressed as becoming aware of the other's (disapproving) gaze at you or your actions (be it imagined or real). The expansion of the context of agency from the immediate and personal towards a broader context where others are involved causes an interruption and the potential impediment of the original intentional orientation. This impediment throws the self back at itself in a way that makes it aware of itself from another perspective than the one manifested in the original intentional

129 Silvan Tomkins describes shame on the basis of affect theory, as "inevitable for any human being insofar as desire outruns fulfillment sufficiently to attenuate interest without destroying it. The most general sources of shame are the varieties of barriers to the varieties of objects of excitement or enjoyment, which reduce positive affect sufficiently to activate shame, but not so completely that the original object is renounced: "I want, but –" is one essential condition for the activation of shame. Clearly not all barriers suspend the individual between longing and despair. Many barriers either completely reduce interest so that the object is renounced or heighten interest so that the barrier is removed or overcome. Indeed, shame itself may eventually also prompt either renunciation or counteraction inasmuch as successful renunciation or counteraction will reduce the feeling of shame. We are saying only that whatever the eventual outcome of the arousal of shame may be, shame is activated by the incomplete reduction of interest – excitement or enjoyment – joy, rather than by the heightening of interest or joy or by the complete reduction of interest or joy." See Silvan S. Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness.: The Complete Edition*, electronic resource, Ebook Central (New York: Springer Publishing, 2008). Book 2, Vol. 1, 388.

130 Julien A. Deonna and Fabrice Teroni, "The Self of Shame," in *Emotions, Ethics, and Authenticity*, eds. Mikko Salmela and Verena E. Mayer, (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009), 33, cf. 34.

project. Thus, the ability to act in coherence with the original intentions is compromised.

Here coherence means that there is a certain consonance between intentions and desires, actions, values, and the expressed results of these. Thus, shame is specifically linked to projects where lack of consonance, especially for moral reasons, reflects negatively on the self. This approach implies that shame does not occur when projects do not reflect negatively on who we are and on our sense of self. The significance of lacking coherence correlates both with the degree of perceived importance for the agentitself, and its investment in the project, as well as with its ability to cope with such a lack. Thus, the (mode of) reciprocal dynamics between the sense of self and the possibility of coherent agency mirrors the solidity of the self. Its ability to handle both external and internal pressure without reverting to shame is dependent on the extent to which it can maintain a coherent agency when it comes to fulfilling its intentional projects.

The problematizing interruption of the intentional project and the investment therein is, as mentioned above, not necessarily mediated by the intervention of others; it may be that the person in question realizes that he or she is not competent to fulfill the intentions or may come to see that the project implies a way of appearing that is not desirable after all. This realization may be based on his or her self-image or social image. But it may also be that others react to the project in ways that engender shame, as when the infant is rejected in its intention to be fed, or when one realizes that the project one is investing in is considered by others to be morally repugnant (such as stealing or committing adultery).

The interruption of the intentional project that engenders shame is, therefore, more than an experience of failure to achieve the desired good, no matter how much or how little it is cognitively articulated. It may also comprise an experience of failure or the lack of ability to act in ways that can lead to the desired result, or it may entail an experience of the desire or intention itself as failed, impeded, or considered by others as objectionable. The frustration of the desire that leads to the intention is among the elements that allow us to see shame as an embodied phenomenon: shame could not occur unless an agent, which had intentions fueled by a desire for an assumed good, had been denied.

Shame as a mediator of self-experience

We can develop and substantiate our phenomenological account of shame further by addressing elements in Dan Zahavi's work. He takes issue with other important analyses of shame, including those that exaggerate the need for an actual audience in order for shame to occur, and those that downplay the importance of sociality for the same reason. Building on Sartre's analysis of shame, Zahavi first points to how shame is a form of intentional consciousness.[131] Shame implies an apprehension of self and, therefore, it exhibits a certain mode of self-relation. However, shame is not primarily and initially a phenomenon of reflection.[132]

Moreover, Zahavi's analysis underscores our previous point about shame as linked to interruption. It appears as "an immediate shudder which runs through me from head to foot without any discursive preparation."[133] It is the result of one's experience of oneself in relation to someone else who interrupts one: "It presupposes the intervention of the other, not merely because the other is the one before whom I feel ashamed, but also and more significantly because that of which I am ashamed is only constituted in and through my encounter with the other."[134] Accordingly, Zahavi maintains "that shame contains a significant component of *alterity*."[135] This point corresponds to what we wrote above about the sudden expansion of the context of agency, which we can now see as constituted by the (imagined) presence of the other.

Zahavi's account of shame offers a profound explanation of why we can see shame as an experience of the self, and not only of a situation, an act, or something else; shame is a mediated mode of self-relation. The other serves as a mediator of this experience of self, and this mode of being. Thus, shame "reveals our relationality, our being-for-others."

131 Dan Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 212.

132 Ibid., 213. "I can reflect upon my failings and feel shame as a result, just as I might reflect upon my feeling of shame, but I can feel shame prior to engaging in reflection."

133 Jean-Paul Sartre, quoted by Zahavi, ibid.

134 Ibid., 213.

135 Ibid., 239. Italicized by us.

Accordingly, as we have already pointed out, shame is both a self-conscious emotion and a social emotion.[136]

Above, we suggested that shame is the result of a clash between two different contexts of agency and evaluation. This description fits well with how Zahavi points to how "shame makes me aware of not being in control and of having my foundation outside myself."[137] It presents one with an immediate experience of powerlessness when one is faced with the context that clashes with one's immediate intentionality in agency, and the previous immediacy is substituted with a sense of becoming an object for one's own consciousness. This objectification may itself be shame-inducing, and it is also part of the interruptive character of shame, in which the subject changes position, or realizes that his or her agency clashes with that which others can or will recognize. However, "although the feeling of shame reveals to me that I exist for and am visible to others, although it reveals to me that I am (partly) constituted by the other, and that a dimension of my being is one that the other provides me with, it is […] a dimension of myself that I cannot know or intuit in the same way as others can."[138] Consequently, this situation also involves an aspect of alienation from the immediate self which is articulating itself through intentional agency.

Accordingly, Zahavi sees it as insufficient to analyze shame only "by focusing on the fact that the shamed subject is thrown back upon itself." Instead, he subscribes to the idea that the subject, when shamed, is both "entirely self-present" and "beside itself."[139] Thus, shame involves an existential alienation:

> In some cases, the alienating power is a different subject […]. In other cases, the feeling of shame occurs when we sit in judgement on ourselves. But in this case as well, there is a form of exposure and self-alienation, a kind of

136 Ibid., 213.

137 This point can also be substantiated by Gabriele Taylor's analysis, according to which "shame is crucially related to a shift in the agent's perspective on himself or herself – a shift that specifically occasions the realization of an adverse discrepancy between the agent's assumptions about himself until now and the perspective offered by a more detached observer." See Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 66.

138 Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*, 213–14.

139 Ibid., 238.

> self-observation and self-distancing. To put it differently, in the company of others the experience of shame can occur pre-reflectively since the alien perspective is co-present. When alone, the experience of shame will take a more reflective form, since the alien perspective has to be provided through a form of reflective self-distancing.[140]

Zahavi further nuances the other-based experience of shame by claiming that "there is a self-directed form of shame which is just as fundamental as the shame one can feel in the presence of others, and […] the core feature of shame is that it points to the clash or discrepancy between our higher spiritual values on the one hand and our animal nature and bodily needs on the other."[141] Thus, shame becomes a specific reaction in the human sphere because humans can always consider or contemplate different ways of being than those present. As such, shame belongs to the human condition, a point that also has been developed in Martha Nussbaum's analysis of the phenomenon. She sees it as an emotional response to the uncovering and display of our weakness, our defects, and our imperfections.[142] We shall see how this point is elaborated in a later chapter.

Shame as the result of lack of recognition or humiliation

Zahavi develops his final point, on how interruption mediated by the other may occur, via Axel Honneth's understanding of the role of recognition in the development of a child's perception of its own agency. "Honneth points to infancy research that suggests that there is a range of adult facial expressions such as the loving smile, the extended hand, the benevolent nod, that will let the child know that he is the recipient of attention and devotion, and then argues that the child, by being the recipient of such pre-linguistic expressions, becomes socially visible."[143] These elements, we

140 Ibid., 238–39.

141 Ibid., 215–16. Here, he builds on Max Scheler.

142 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 173, 85. See for example Nussbaum's account in Chapter 3.

143 Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*, 224.

would argue, support the child's immediate performance of its agency. It does so in ways that affirm it and allow it to go on without interruption. However, when the child is intentionally ignored and becomes aware of this, or is humiliated, it causes a negative mode of disruption of agency that not only concerns the child in his or her early years. It can also cause the adult to stop up and consider his or her actions. To make any person socially invisible is to deny him or her opportunities for recognition and to place him or her outside the human community – a feature that we also see as important for the experience of shame.[144] This experience is, therefore, also one of interruption, and one that may cause shame. There is a significant relation between shame and the need for and perceived absence of recognition, a point that we will develop further in Chapter 3. The absence of approving reciprocity may engender shame and make one more prone to it.

A few illustrations of the above position

Finally, let us briefly consider some examples that can illustrate the understanding of shame we presented above:

A special case here concerns the victims of violence or sexual abuse. For them, shame is the result of the experience of not being worth anything – and being totally under the control of someone else's agency. Such violence and abuse takes away the necessary sense of being at the center of one's own actions, as an agent that is in control. The deprivation of agency here, as well as the impediment of one's perception of what should be the desired qualities of one's life, results in shame. Victims of rape or other types of violence may, therefore, experience shame because of their intentions of achieving something good in the world. Their ability to be embodied agents in control of themselves has been impeded by the attack to which they were subjected. They lose (at least for some time) their ability to be in control of their actions and realize their own goals. Their

144 Axel Honneth and Avishai Margalit, "Recognition," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 75 (2001). Cf. Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*, 224.

sense of self (including the embodied self) becomes so shattered that it is hard to experience any kind of trust that can sustain the confidence in further positive projects that are guided by intentions to realize valuable aims. Shame is then not only the reaction to not being recognized as worthy of respect in the eyes of the offender, but also the emotional strategy of withdrawal, in order to protect oneself, into a state with a restricted will to perform agency. Since such offenses imply a transgression of the boundaries of the self, it also means that the structure of desire in the victim has been violated. His or her further intentions do not remain as reliable as earlier, and he or she cannot be confident that he or she has the respect of others any longer. Here shame is not due to how he or she is perceived by his or her actual peers, but the result of the offender's inscription of himself/herself in his or her sense of self in a way that makes him or her perceive himself or herself as unworthy. Concomitant to this mental intrusion of the violator may be the lack of control of oneself and one's projects.

Another example: The new boy at school wants to be recognized and included by his peers and accordingly, he invests in that project. When they ridicule him for his clothing or his dialect, he experiences the failure of his project and the frustration of his intentions. His desire for recognition is not fulfilled. His retraction from the others is a response aimed at shielding or defending himself further from the exposure that perpetuates this experience of failure. This retraction will often have a physical component, such as turning away, walking away, looking down, etc. It is likely that people who feel shame due to illness or physical disabilities or psychological challenges may have similar desires for the value of inclusion that are frustrated. Intentions for agency are changed, and the experience of shame also creates a sense of being placed outside the community of shared values, intentions, and qualities. Shame need not be the result of violence or immoral behavior, though.

Moreover, we have had students from other parts of the world who were unable to realize their expectations of getting an "A", and who therefore felt shame on returning to their home country with a less honorable grade. Their desire to bring honor to themselves and their families turned out to be impossible to fulfill. This form of shame is one that has to do

with the shared understanding within a certain group or community about what is considered honorable – and one is excluded from the group due to lack of sharing the traits required for that. Here, shame is also the result of failed intentional projects, but the interruption of the project is because of a personal lack of capacity rather than the result of a rebuke or the rejection of others.

Shame as an individual experience: why does it differ?

People are prone to shame to different degrees.[145] Some, who have developed a solid sense of self and concomitant independence and self-reliance, may be less prone to shame than those who have learned that it is how you appear in the eyes of others that matters. We will come back to this point in the next chapter on the psychology of shame. Here we only want to point to how the different variables that actually cause shame work in tandem with the extent to which the person is prone to shame, and that this proneness may vary considerably in different individuals. Furthermore, this point makes it important for us to not only underscore the ambiguities of shame, and the fact that shame comes in many different forms. It also points to the reason why shame may be experienced to different degrees, as strong and debilitating, or as a reaction that passes away more or less quickly. The variations in the experiences of shame may thus not only rely on the degree of personal investment, or on proneness to shame, but also on the access one has to the resources for overcoming it.

In the following chapter, we shall address in more detail how shame as a pre-subjective state manifests itself in how the lack of trust in oneself is the result of a lack of integration of a sense of self that can put trust in one's own agency. The result of early relational distortions contributes to the infant being prone to shame, lacking trust in itself and pride in what it is doing. Agency becomes fragmented, and there are less chances for

145 For an introduction to the discussion of shame-proneness, see Tracy, Robins, and Tangney, *The Self-Conscious Emotions: Theory and Research*; Tangney, Wagner, and Gramzow, "Proneness to Shame, Proneness to Guilt, and Psychopathology"; and Tangney and Dearing, *Shame and Guilt*.

coherent and self-directed agency. Here, we only want to draw attention to the fact that these conditions are related to shame-proneness.

Related to this is shame as the result of actual or imagined rejection because of one's actions or features. This goes for anything from exposure of handicaps or disease, ridicule because of being naked, or when one is exposed as vulnerable in a sexually-charged situation. Discretionary shame works here in a similar manner to other types of shame – as an interruption that leads to withdrawal and protective actions. Again, projections or intentions are interrupted by something occurring in the situation as the cause of shame. Such experiences of shame need not be instigated by actual others but can just as well be a manifestation of an internalized inferiority feeling. Hence, shame is often, but not always, a manifestation of actual social relationships, but it can be the result of not being able to achieve one's own goals or aspirations – even when no one else knows, sees, or cares.

CHAPTER 3

Shame from a Psychological Point of View

Starting point: shame and the architecture of the Self

It should be apparent from our description so far that we see shame as deeply rooted in complex psychological conditions and the concomitant architecture of the self. Shame can be related to intentions, desires, aspirations, and the need for acknowledgment and recognition, as well as frustration, disappointment, exclusion, violence, and a sense of failure – all of which may be caused by others or by one's own responses or assessments. Thus, shame is a relational phenomenon, and as such, it often occurs in, or as the result of, interaction and interpersonal exchange. In this chapter, we will elaborate further on the underpinnings of our initial description, with the help of elements in the self-psychology of Heinz Kohut and other theoretical approaches that supplement the perspectives it offers.[146]

The analyses in this chapter take as their point of departure an understanding of how the self's "architecture" is constituted relationally. It is conditioned by the interaction between the biological and social conditions, and the subjectivity of the (emerging) individual. The structure of the self (the self's architecture) develops through the interaction between two sets of conditions: the biological makeup and the psychological, social, and material conditions in which the self participates. Accordingly, the development of the self is always vulnerable, and the self is

146 We have chosen self-psychology as the main theoretical approach because of its fundamentally relational understanding of the development of the self, which allows for perspectives that are not present in traditional psychoanalytic theory, and which go beyond understanding shame as a mere affective response.

always potentially exposed, because it is subjected to conditions that can both promote and restrict the possibilities for self-affirmation and self-realization.

Shame is not only a complex emotion, but the different types of shame can be seen as engendered by intentions all of which are guided by aims and desires. When these are impeded, for whatever reason, shame may occur. The ideals and aims that guide and inform our intentional projects and aspirations are constituted in part by what we learn about what matters and what needs to be done when we are in relationships with others from early on. Shame's complicated character is fundamentally related to how it arrives early in human life – usually, before infants have language. And as mentioned, one's proneness to shame may, therefore, also be dependent on how relationships with others make one more susceptible to criticism and shaming, or the opposite: more self-reliant, with more self-esteem and pride in what one does.

Heinz Kohut and the development of the self

Mirroring and idealization

Heinz Kohut's work on the development of the self stands out among the psychologists who have worked with notions of the self that are relevant to our purposes. In the following, we draw on those parts of his theory that may be of relevance for understanding the dynamics that result in shame. Accordingly, we do not develop a comprehensive presentation of all the different elements in his theory of the self.

According to Kohut, the self is initially fragmented, and its experiences are not in any way related to a clear sense or feeling of being a unified self. It is by interacting with others that a unifying feeling or experience of self and world can be developed, and the different experiences become integrated with something that is a sense of self. Hence, interaction with others who can mirror the child and thereby provide it with something that grows into a more or less stable self-experience is crucial. Thus, the self becomes both more cohesive and more enduring than at the previous, fragmented stage.

This self develops in relation to two poles.[147] The first pole finds expression in the infant's need to be emotionally affirmed and encouraged in its authentic being and its own achievements (the *mirroring* pole). This need directs the infant towards the caretaker, who is then also the one upon whom the development of the self becomes dependent. Kohut calls the process of confirmation that takes place "mirroring," and it both affirms and guides the child in discovering who it may be. In the process of being seen for what it truly is, the child may then be able to realize its own potential. Thus, this process "leads the child to a sense of enjoyment of his or her own capabilities, fuels self-esteem and a sense of worth, and forms a basis for developing ambition and a sense of self-pride."[148] Thus, the child's in-born narcissistic grandiosity is here both confirmed and adjusted in the process of mirroring.[149] Part of its experience of its agency is, therefore, dependent on its relation to the other who represents this pole, and the more consistent the response is, the more firm is the basis for the self. Stated in the terms that we have used earlier: The embodied intentional mode of being-in-the-world is recognized, and thereby also contributes to a stable sense of self to the extent that it is validated, affirmed, or recognized.

However, if the mirroring pole (the parent) does not contribute to this type of stable affirmation, the child's chances decrease for developing a more self-reliant attitude to the world and a more stable self. Nevertheless, the need for confirmation remains, and the child becomes more dependent on others for mirroring, due to the insecurity that it experiences because of this lack. Thus, the lack of a stable response from a significant other implies that it becomes more uncertain about the abilities of its agency, and concomitantly, may become more prone to shame. In our previously established terms: insecurity leads to an awareness that its context of agency is not necessarily shared by others and may make

147 The résumé of Kohut is based on the following texts: Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* (New York: International Universities Press, 1971); *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1977); Kenneth Bragan, *Self and Spirit in the Therapeutic Relationship* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996).

148 *Self and Spirit in the Therapeutic Relationship*, 5.

149 For more on narcissism and shame, see below.

it more susceptible to how others consider it – but not in an approving manner.

Failure to receive an adequate response is crucial in understanding Kohut's interpretation of the origins of narcissistic disturbances in the formation of the self. This point is also of great importance to the understanding of shame. If we relate it to what we have sketched in the previous chapter, it means that the infant's intentions and desires lack a firm basis and may more easily become interrupted by the experienced lack of confirmation by others, no matter if this is expressed openly to, or just assumed by, the insecure self. We will return to the topic of narcissism later.

The infant's need to gain strength from feeling a part of, or being identified with, someone or something which is experienced as strong and reliable, manifests in its search for another pole of identity formation. This pole contributes a fundamental sense of safety and security, which is the basis for developing trusting relationships. Hence, this may also be called the idealizing pole:

> Idealization is the process by which the child at first is comforted and reassured by being held in mother's arms, and later finds strength by identifying with an idealized other or with idealized values and aims. This pole of the self gives life direction and structure, knowledge of right and wrong, and a sense of self-control. Deficits result in feelings of weakness, aimlessness and not being in charge of one's life.[150]

The image of the idealized parent originally constitutes the idealized pole, but later on, other idealized persons or entities may also serve as objects which the self, through a process of identification, can experience as contributing to its own feelings of strength and capability. *Thus, idealization is the other important element in what constitutes the content and coherent direction of intentional agency.* Unclear or blurred ideals may, therefore, make the person more prone to shame because they may more easily run into conflict with each other. The idealization process is

---

150 Bragan, *Self and Spirit in the Therapeutic Relationship*, 5. Note how this idealization also plays a role in the development of religion – a point we will return to in Chapter 5.

of crucial importance to the formation of intentions, desires, aims, and projects that the self finds important to pursue, as well as the values on which it bases its assessments of the achievements they result in. Accordingly, we can identify here the origin of the ideals and values that may cause experiences of shame when not lived up to as well. The idealizing pole is thus both internally and externally based – as is shame and its conditions.

We are now in a position where we can define more specifically what makes a person prone to shame from Kohut's point of view: As the above presentation suggests, when the child is not sufficiently cared for and not provided with sufficiently stable relationships that mirror or guide it, a sense of weakness and of not being in charge may be the result. Hence, the child's perception of its agency competence is not solidified and introduces it into a constant quest for recognition – which, in turn, also entails narcissistic traits. Thus, lack of care makes the infant or child more prone to shame because it weakens the child's capacity for agency and self-direction. The blurred boundaries between self and other thus reflect in a proneness to shame. Shame is, therefore, not only the result of failed agency but also the result of not being able to hold a secure position where one can be self-reliant and feel that one is in charge. Accordingly, shame is related to the experience of weakness and vulnerability – a topic we explore further below.

Optimal frustration shapes a solid self

We can now understand how what the child learns through affirmation and mirroring is relevant to how it comes to see its own skills and talents, and thereby, its self and potential for agency. To develop a self is related to a learning process where one is both subject and object. This learning also implies experiences of what Kohut calls optimal frustration. Such frustration is the means by which one can have non-traumatic experiences of whom one may potentially be and not be.[151] It provides opportunities

151 Heinz Kohut, Arnold Goldberg, and Paul E. Stepansky, *How Does Analysis Cure?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 102–103.

for a more realistic self-understanding and appreciation of capacities and limitations. Consequently, as the result of such optimal frustration, one becomes increasingly able to differentiate oneself from the idealized object, as well as achieving a more nuanced understanding of the limits of one's own grandiosity. The outcome of this process is a mature and integrated self with a solidified psychic structure that can provide itself with a sense of cohesion and continuity, and does not need to look outside itself to achieve this sense. The self which results from a process of optimal frustration and adequate mirroring and mature idealization is, in our view, therefore less prone to shame because its structure, or architecture, has developed into a more solidified self.

The ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality is a crucial condition for successful agency. Therefore, optimal frustration by which the self is neither over-stimulated (if it meets only affirmation, this will foster the continuation of an immature, grandiose self) nor under-stimulated (a process that would force the self into a constant quest for further affirmation, while trying to conform to the demands that may help to achieve it) is a device that can contribute to making the child less prone to shame. A self which is insecure concerning its ideals or capacities may be more prone to shame than one which has developed a realistic sense of its capacities and its accompanying ability to be self-reliant about the judgments and ideals that direct its intentions, projects, and desires. Consequently, such self-reliance contributes to a more coherent agency and to ideals that are in consonance. Furthermore, the individual's agency is then not only oriented towards assurance from others that offers compensatory mirroring but towards internalized aims and objects of a more stable character.

Selfobjects

From the processes of mirroring and idealization emerge a specific type of experience of elements that are of vital importance to the sense of self in its development. Kohut calls these elements (or objects) *selfobjects*. A selfobject is not a part of the objective world but is a part of the inner world: it belongs to the space of the self. Bragan sums it up thus:

> Any person or object experienced as having a self-discovering, self-promoting or self-strengthening function is a selfobject. However, it is the experience of the object that matters, not the external reality, not the actuality, and selfobjects must be clearly distinguished not only from the external objects that are the focus of the experience but also from internal representations of objects and from self-representations. The concept is difficult to grasp because it is purely subjective. Its reality is in the inner world, and it is best to think of it simply as how an object is experienced. Selfobjects are the self-fortifying internal reflection of the outer world, the internal soil in which a cohesive self can grow.[152]

According to this understanding, selfobjects provide the necessary means by which the self is able to experience itself as someone. Furthermore, selfobjects are objects of emotional or libidinal investment. They may also develop in ways that give them compensating functions, for example, due to a lack of care. Since selfobjects are fundamental building blocks of the self, they may exist in rudimentary and undifferentiated forms in the archaic self, or as more mature, differentiated, and symbolic forms in mature versions of the self. Furthermore, they have cognitive as well as emotional aspects. These self-objects that guide action, shape experience, and represent personal investment, intentions, and desires, may condition the individual to experience varying degrees of shame. The more compensatory the selfobjects appear in relation to the lack of ability to build a solid self, the more prone the self may be to shame. The need for compensating strategies when mirroring and idealization has been inadequate testifies to how the self's lack of independence from others makes it prone to shame: it increases the need for immediate recognition by others, and makes the self less reliant on its own sense of self and the internal resources that guide agency. However, the extent to which the self is insecure and reliant on others may vary in different contexts of agency.

Kohut's notion of selfobjects circumscribes the function that other people may have in a person's experience of harmony, strength, firmness, vitality, responsiveness, and creativity. A solid self can be more vital and creative simply because it can direct more energy towards such projects

152 Bragan, *Self and Spirit,* 6.

instead of using it for compensatory projects aimed at recognition and safety. The weaker the conditions for these experiences are, the more we think the subject is prone to shame. It is due to one's relationships with others that one gains access to the necessary resources for experiencing oneself as a person in control and with a coherent agency. It is worth noting here that real creativity requires that the self is no longer inhibited by the demands that were present in the archaic self and its struggle for success and admiration. As one becomes more self-reliant and less dependent upon others, this may increase the flow of creativity and reduce the proneness to shame.

Shame, vulnerability, and narcissistic rage

The processes described above are the backdrop for understanding Kohut's approach to the connection between narcissism and shame: a natural tendency in infants is to act in ways that seek mirroring. Infants are narcissists by default. Such "natural" narcissism is not the result of a lack of care, but the way in which the infant relates to the world. However, as the child grows, and learns to see the other as independent, and not only as an extension of itself (a process that may also imply frustration), it can become more aware of who it is in relation to the other, and the archaic form of narcissism may recede. Then, it may be transformed into a kind of creativity in which the child matures and become increasingly more reliant on itself instead of on others – partly because it has become liberated from the need to struggle for recognition and acceptance constantly. Thus, a more autonomous mode of acting overcomes narcissism.

It is when the differentiation process between self and other does not run its normal course that the self may develop more problematic narcissistic traits and the insatiable "object hunger" for that which can provide it with some sense of self-worth and safety. Then the self is set on a life-long quest for affirmation and safety. Accordingly, Kohut sees narcissistic distortions as caused by instances when the two poles of the self are not experienced and integrated as an adequate response from a person to whom the self is close. Because such experiences are vital to developing a firm sense of self-confidence and self-worth, the narcissistic

disturbance not only implies lack of self-esteem (although this may be present, but is often hidden or covered up). It also impedes the ability to engage empathetically with other people. Kohut sees defects in empathic engagement as caused by the absence of, or inadequacy of cooperation with, early caretakers. It leads to a mechanic and lifeless understanding of the inner reality of the self and others. The selfobjects in such an immature or arrested self may, therefore, contribute to the petrification of a narcissism that makes the self unable to transcend its captive state. At times, it may imply that it can, when frustrated, develop a narcissistic rage that is directed outwards toward others.[153] This rage is also related to shame. How should we understand this relation?

Narcissistic rage is related to the omnipotent demand for control (power) in the grandiose but immature self. It emerges from feelings of frustration and insecurity that are the result of a lack of such control. It is directed towards the features that threaten and frustrate the narcissistic self. Kohut sees shame as emerging out of the concomitant and denied demand for admiration and affirmation. Usually, by engaging with selfobjects that may help to meet this demand, the self can mobilize its libido so that it is ready to express itself when it receives an affirming and admiring response from the environment. However, when the anticipated answer does not appear, or the intentional object does not appear, the self can no longer unfold itself in the same process.[154] Shame is the result, as rage may also be. Furthermore, rage may cause shame, or shame may cause rage – it can go both ways. Hence, the narcissistic process is back to square one, and the self has to find new ways to affirm itself. In other words: shame and rage may emerge as a result when the intention is impeded or interrupted, so that the self loses control over the intentions and purposes in which it has invested itself and its agency.

Shame and rage are, therefore, according to these perspectives, the results of inadequate attuning in the self-selfobject relation, that is, the relation that the self has to its image of itself (itself as self-object), and

153 Cf. what we said in the previous chapter about transportation and transformation of shame, pp. 51–57.

154 Sigmund Karterud, *Fra Narsissisme Til Selvpsykologi: En Innføring I Heinz Kohuts Forfatterskap* (Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal, 2009), 93.

which consequently allows it to experience itself. A self-self-object that never allows the self to appear in its own eyes as accepted and valuable may become strongly prone to the development of shame. A self that has never been allowed to overcome its insecurities by forming an alliance with idealized others, or feel affirmed by such selfobjects, may continue its grandiose struggle for control to overcome these insecurities.

According to this analysis, shame-proneness derives from serious defects in the self that prevent a firm sense of cohesiveness and self-esteem.[155] Thus, shame-proneness seems to be correlated with the vulnerability that is enhanced through this process:

> Shame-prone individuals are more vulnerable than most to experiencing even ordinary criticism as devastating. Thus, when either chronic or traumatic injuries occur to the already fragile self, the person becomes shamed in his or her own eyes and may then use strategies such as substance abuse, delinquency, or suicide to escape the pain and thereby prevent further deterioration of the sense of self.[156]

Against this backdrop, it is possible to identify four pathological syndromes of self-development that may be accompanied by debilitating amounts of shame for differing reasons. These are:

a) The *understimulated* self is a condition resulting from chronic, inadequate responsiveness of the individual's selfobjects during childhood.[157]
b) The *fragmenting* self is a condition that results from the inconsistent and capricious responsiveness of selfobjects and their failure to respond to the developing adolescent as a total individual. As a result, the individual never develops a truly cohesive sense of

155 Cf. Barry W. Shreve and Mark A. Kunkel, "Self-Psychology, Shame, and Adolescent Suicide: Theoretical and Practical Considerations," *Journal of Counseling & Development* 69, no. 4 (1991): 308. The following builds on their summary.

156 Ibid. The point here of numbing one's pain by substituting another will occur also later in the present treatise.

157 Ibid. They describe the outcome of this thus: "An adolescent in the understimulated selfcondition may exhibit behaviors such as compulsive masturbation, recklessness, promiscuity, and drug and alcohol abuse. Such behaviors may be construed as an attempt by the adolescent to defend against unbearable feelings of emptiness and depression."

identity.[158] Although these elements may occasionally be something that most adolescents experience, they are usually "neither overwhelming nor debilitating to any significant degree. But for the vulnerable fragmenting self, lack of internal cohesiveness is powerful and potentially overwhelming and necessitates the activation of additional defensive or compensatory actions."[159]

c) The *overstimulated* self, which results from phase-inappropriate, excessive responses from the adolescent's selfobjects. The individual who ends up in this condition avoids any possibility of becoming the center of attention or avoids contact with potentially admirable selfobjects, or both. This condition has severe consequences for the subject's sense of agency: "feelings of a lack of drive, a sense of having nothing or no one to look up to, and a sense of isolation" is common in this case.[160]
d) The *overburdened* self is the result of prolonged emotional deprivation. When the developing self has not had the opportunity to partake of the quieting, soothing experiences that comes with the subjective merger with the omnipotent selfobject, it results in "an individual who is unable to maintain a sense of inner control over his or her emotional state, one who is unable to maintain emotional equilibrium in a threatening and potentially hostile world."[161]

Shame may be the result when a person is not able to deal with the stress caused by any of these conditions. It may have different causes. It may come from an inner sense of emptiness, from a fear of being overwhelmed, from feelings of inadequacy, or from the risk of public exposure of an individual's lack of cohesiveness. "For each of these forms of

158 Ibid. The description they offer of this mode is much in consonance with what we have previously suggested by the notion of interruption: "Commonly encountered adolescent expressions of this experience are the feeling of being 'scattered,' the feeling of 'not being in the flow,' and feeling 'like I'm coming apart at the seams.'"

159 Ibid.

160 Ibid.

161 Ibid. "Understandably, defense mechanisms tend to be more active and externally directed for this type of person. When reacting to perceived threats, such an individual will tend to lash out first rather than trust either in the other or in his or her own inner ability to deal with the emotions that may be aroused."

self-pathology, shame is a possible result of the failure of defensive or compensatory maneuvers." Shreve and Kunkel conclude:

> The failure of the maneuvers for the vulnerable self may result in the activation of powerful, archaic fears. The understimulated self fears exposure of his or her essential emptiness, the fragmenting self fears the exposure of his or her lack of cohesion, the overstimulated self fears the exposure of his or her need to be distant from others, and the overburdened self fears the exposure of his or her inability to maintain internal emotional equilibrium. One by-product of these fears is the development of the feeling of shame.[162]

The advantage of this approach to shame thereby becomes fully observable: shame is not merely a result of failure to perform a specific form of intended agency, but is also the result of the relational conditions that shape the individual who is a potential agent. Thus, shame is the result of the interaction between the individual and her peers and how the self has been psychologically shaped (what we have called the architecture of the self) by parents and other significant others from early on. This analysis points to a more nuanced role for the social environment of the one who feels shame:

> The adolescent who feels threatened and vulnerable as a result of not experiencing empathy will naturally turn for support to those selfobjects that have been most recently supportive. In adolescence, the turning is most frequently to the alter ego selfobjects as represented by the peer group. A failure of this support at this crucial time is frequently cause for an increased sense of futility, vulnerability, and shame. The shamed, vulnerable adolescent becomes a distant and elusive figure, severing what relationships he or she may have left that could possibly serve as future supports. This pattern of behavior increases as the adolescent becomes more sensitive to and expectant of negative evaluations from others. As the adolescent becomes more isolated, old relationships atrophy and new ones are avoided, and it is precisely this severing of significant self-selfobject relations that often results in the profound sense of shame, despair, and withdrawal preceding many adolescent suicides.[163]

162 Ibid.
163 Ibid.

Thus, we find a much deeper understanding of shame here than we do when we simply see it as the result of moral failure or as instances of embarrassment. In the last sentences of the quote just cited, we also see how shame and the rage that can result from it may be directed in fundamentally destructive ways towards the shame-bearing self. Hence, we have developed an argument for rejecting shame as a positive factor in the building-up of the self, apart from what it supplies in terms of frustration that is necessary for biological/neurological development.[164]

Martha Nussbaum: Psychological considerations within a philosophical framework

In her philosophical approach to shame in *Hiding from Humanity*, Martha Nussbaum makes several important observations that can help us to understand the ambiguities of shame further. Her analysis combines psychological insights with normative elements, and thus, she is able to show how shame is not a neutral phenomenon, but points towards and even implies normative considerations and assessments. Therefore, her contribution may serve as a bridge between what we present as the psychological background of shame, on the one hand, and how we understand the role that shame may and may not play in relation to ethics, on the other hand. Ethics will be a topic in one of the subsequent chapters.

Primitive shame

Although she carefully underscores how shame can take on a positive role "in development and social life, in connection with valuable ideals and aspirations," Nussbaum nevertheless makes it clear that not all the roles that shame plays in life are positive. Its ambiguity appears from early on, as is visible in the version of shame she calls "primitive," on which she bases much of her deliberations. Primitive shame is "closely connected to an infantile demand for omnipotence and the unwillingness to accept

164 Cf. p. 23, on how the frontal cortex depends on shame experiences for its development.

neediness."[165] It emerges out of the primary narcissism of a typical human infant, and it "gives rise to a particularly primitive and pervasive type of shame, as the infant encounters inevitable narcissistic defeats."[166] In other words: such defeat causes shame. The infant that realizes it is dependent on others, "and is by this time aware of itself as a definite being who is and ought to be the center of the world" feels primitive shame due to the "realization that one is weak and inadequate in some way in which one expects oneself to be adequate. Its reflex is to hide from the eyes of those who will see one's deficiency, to cover it." Thus, "all infant omnipotence is coupled with helplessness."[167] Against the backdrop of our previous attempt to describe shame, this makes perfect sense: the realization of lack, vulnerability or deficiency makes it apparent that the intentions which one immediately enters the world with, cannot be fulfilled or realized. This realization might lead to shame, but it need not do. To what extent it does depends on a wide variety of variables, not least how one is guided in tackling such interruptive realizations.

The normative implication of the understanding of shame sketched so far is that on these premises, it is an irrational emotion.[168] Why is that? Because the wish to be omnipotent and without need is to wish for something that cannot be. Moreover, shame is therefore also an unreliable emotion: as we have already pointed to earlier, it does not inform us properly or adequately about how others are and why they react as they do. Shame is, namely, often bound up with narcissism and "an unwillingness to recognize the rights and needs of others."[169] When shame is combined with this lack of empathy, it is possible to see it as related to the narcissism that is a consequence of being subjected to a lack of care – a point that we saw that also Kohut emphasizes. It follows from this point that people

165 Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, 15.

166 Ibid., 184. The features that Nussbaum elaborates on here have been analyzed in more detail in the section above on Kohut's self-psychology.

167 Ibid., 183. We find reasons here to note also how this withdrawal severs the bonds to others. The intentional and immediate desire for realization of oneself in the eyes of others (desire of recognition) is frustrated or impeded.

168 To what extent shame is irrational is a topic we will return to repeatedly in different contexts.

169 Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, 15.

who feel shame may be impeded in their capacity to relate with empathy towards others – a point that is not without relevance for moral agency.

Shame, self-perception and agency

Nussbaum argues against Silvan Tomkins' understanding of shame as an affect. He understands shame as "a painful affect resulting from any interruption of pleasure and expectation, as when the infant expects a pleasurable feeding, and that does not take place"[170] and situates it in a comprehensive-affects theory.[171] Accordingly, Tomkins does not presuppose any cognitive content as necessary for feeling shame, whereas Nussbaum, who develops her notion of shame from a more object-relational point of view, thinks that some rudimentary cognitive content is a necessary requirement for shame – at least in humans.[172] Nevertheless, they both seem to be open to the idea that shame implies some kind of interruption of intentional agency. From Nussbaum's point of view, though, she argues for this agency as dependent on, or at least possible to articulate as conditioned by, some cognitive content, and a rudimentary sense of self:

> Emotions, of course, may involve thoughts that are primitive or archaic. One may have a kind of rudimentary fear, for example, even before being securely aware of the distinctness of one's own body from the caretaker's body, and I have suggested that young infants do have such rudimentary emotions. Nonetheless, shame does require at least an incipient sense of one's own being, and an incipient sense of the distinctness of the helpless being that one is from the sources of comfort and nourishment.[173]

---

170 Ibid., 183.

171 Tomkins also writes, aptly, how "shame may be evoked by a *complete rejection of* any affect, including shame." See Silvan S. Tomkins and E. Virginia Demos, *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S. TomkinsWhat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 405.

172 "At least in humans" is added here because there seem to be some elements that are shame-like also in dogs that have done things that are forbidden, or in other species that have experienced defeat in their competition for a mate (moose). Such examples suggest that even animals may have some experience of interruption of their agency – what we in humans describe as shame. It is hard to know, however, if these responses are similar to human responses, and to what extent they manifest (rudimentary) self-consciousness.

173 Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, 183–84.

Here, Nussbaum makes two crucial points concerning the conditions for shame: first, shame seems to presuppose some ability to differentiate (at least partly) from the mother. Thus, shame means that the symbiosis is dissolved, or in the process of dissolving. However, in Nussbaum's view, this symbiosis should not be taken to indicate that everything is blissful and unproblematic until the differentiation process starts. She holds that "the world was never really blissful at any time after birth: infants experience an alternating absence and presence of good things as soon as they have experience, and gradually develop awareness of their powerlessness to control those good things."[174] This view entails that we can see shame as something that "emerges gradually over the course of the first year of life, perhaps becoming the full-fledged emotion only after a sense of one's own separateness is achieved."[175]

To see shame as the result of being able to differentiate between oneself and others seems obvious, but it is nevertheless an important presupposition for all experiences of shame – not only for what Nussbaum calls primitive shame. Against the backdrop of our phenomenological description of shame, we can understand the role of this differentiation more precisely: *We can now see shame as a specific emotional manifestation of the relational character of being, in which the separation between self and other appears as painful and problematic and contributes to the experience that the intended goodness is impeded and the chances for its realization interrupted*. The separation is, in turn, a precondition for how we see shame as the result of clashing contexts of agency that leads to disruption and lack of agency coherence.

Before we proceed with our analysis of Nussbaum's position here, we can benefit from Helen B. Lewis' analysis of shame and agency from a more emotional point of view. Her classic analysis underscores our point about shame as the result of a clash between contexts of agency. She sees it as the result of a conflict – a conflict that, to a large extent, mirrors the phenomenological description we developed in the introduction, although she works from a psychological angle. However, whereas

174 Ibid., 184.
175 Ibid., 184.

Zahavi's analysis of shame pointed to the mediated experience of the self via the other, Lewis develops the conflict and the components in this "clash" further. She points to how "the divided functioning of the self in relation to the 'other' – its being in two places at once – and the 'split' between cognition and affect, together with the global nature of the whole self as the target of hostility from the field, make shame a difficult experience to rectify."[176] Thus, shame might imply a separation between cognition and affect. Furthermore, her focus on the latter also opens up for a broader understanding of shame than one that focuses on moral transgressions. She describes what we have metaphorically termed as a "clash" as a "failure by comparison with an internalized ego ideal"[177] which may comprise of other components than those circumscribed by moral standards and norms. This clash implies what we are addressing when we say that shame implies a double perspective on the self: the immediate, and the other-mediated.

Lewis also relates experiences of self to the experience of one's own agency in a way that underscores why self and shame are so closely related. Self as registration of identity is mediated by agency. "The self is, first of all, the experiential registration of the person's activities as his own. This registration of activities may, and most often does proceed silently and automatically, i.e., without the person's awareness of his registration mechanism." Here, we claim, she describes what we have defined as the immediate character of agency before the interruption of the shaming "other." She continues, in a way that also supports our initial analysis further, by pointing to how "instances of the failure of automatic registration, such as depersonalization and estrangement, make clear by contrast how much of the registration of activity as one's own is taken for granted."[178] Shame suspends this "taken-for-grantedness" in one's experience, and thereby, it suspends agency's immediacy. The mediation of shame by the presence of the other is, in her view, not only a cognitive effect but relies on the "emotional relationship between the person and the "other"

176 Helen Block Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (New York: International Universities Press, 1971), 40.

177 Ibid.

178 Ibid., 30.

such that the person cares what the other thinks or feels about the self. In this affective tie, the self does not feel autonomous or independent, but dependent and vulnerable to rejection." Lewis can, therefore, also say that "shame is a vicarious experience of the significant other's scorn."[179] Consequently, the actual presence of the other is not necessary to experience shame.

Shame and imperfection

Nussbaum makes a further point that underscores shame's ambiguous character: The painful experience that shame contributes to implies more than a simple diminishing of self-regard. Shame emerges only against the backdrop of some kind of already existing self-regard. "It is only because one expects oneself to have worth or even perfection in some respect that one will shrink from or cover the evidence of one's non-worth or imperfection."[180] Expectations like these do not appear out of thin air but are themselves the result of interactions with others – an insight that, in turn, underscores the relational conditions of selfhood in general, and the conditions for shame more specifically. Against the backdrop of our suggestion for seeing shame as the interruption of intentional personal investment, this feature makes sense, since that which is interrupted can be identified as the positive and immediately present regard of oneself in its concrete manifestation of agency. We can elaborate this point with an example:

> Consider the case of a boy who thinks that he is good at skiing, because he has never had the chance to think otherwise. Then there is a ski-contest at his school and, like the other pupils, he signs up. He has no idea of how good he is or not, but he thinks that he is just as good as the others in his class, at least. He participates in the competition like his peers and feels good about himself for doing so. However, when the results are announced, he sees that he is at the end of the list – significantly behind all the others. For him, this is a shameful experience. He feels bad about himself and wants to hide.

179 Ibid., 42.
180 Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, 184.

Children's need to perform and to feel good about themselves for performing well may often end with this type of frustration – which we may call the frustration of the desire for recognition by achievement – a recognition that is crucial for the development of positive self-esteem. The case above illustrates both of Nussbaum's points: How the child can differentiate between himself and the others, and how it is that he has an initial positive feeling about his performance – perhaps assisted by parents who have given him no opportunity for a reality check that could help him make an adequate assessment of his skiing skills.

In the example given, shame is a "painful emotion responding to a sense of failure to attain some ideal state."[181] It affects the whole experience of self, and not only the specific act. The boy did not only feel bad about his skiing skills – his whole self-perception as an excellent skier was crushed. "In shame, one feels inadequate, lacking some desired type of completeness or perfection. But of course one must then have already judged that this is a type of completeness or perfection that one rightly ought to have."[182] The other side of this point is that shame can be diminished if one can operate with more realistic ideals of who one can and should be; be it in the eyes of oneself or the eyes of others.[183] However, this way of handling potential shame does not exclude the possibility for a continuous influence of the primitive type of shame later on in life: shame may follow whenever the subject suffers a narcissistic defeat and realizes that he or she is not uniquely special in some way. Therefore, Nussbaum concludes that "the primitive shame that is connected to infantile omnipotence and (inevitable) narcissistic failure lurks around in our lives, only partially overcome by the later development of the child's own separateness and autonomy."[184]

It is worth noting here that shame seems to stand in a certain opposition to, and may even at times compromise, autonomy – a point that will be discussed in Chapter 6 on shame and morality. But this point is not

---

181 Ibid., 184.

182 Ibid., 184.

183 We want to stress here that this strategy for diminishing the potential for shame is conditioned on developing a more *realistic* basis for self-esteem, and not on the strive for perfection, which can never help one overcome what caused shame in the first place.

184 Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, 184–85. Quote 185.

only relevant for ethics. From a psychological point of view as well, autonomy is at risk. Even when one has developed a sense of self and the psychological maturity that results in self-reliance, shame may appear. What Nussbaum calls the "narcissistic defeat" is, therefore, not necessarily the result of a negative or immature attitude: it can happen when the investment of desire, creativity, or struggle for recognition that all humans articulate, in some way or another becomes frustrated or impeded. Such investment need not be a manifestation of unrealistic grandiosity: it might just as well be the result of the natural struggle for recognition and self-articulation that every human being exhibits.

Shame as a social and relational phenomenon

As indicated, the need for being recognized as unique, and the feeling of grandiosity that one may feel the need for in comparison with others, testifies to the profoundly relational character of being human. These narcissistic traits, with their potential risk of failure and concomitant effect in the experience of shame, need not necessarily mean that shame is a social feeling in any qualitative sense of the word. Instead, we may say that it is an emotion that separates one from others and contributes to a feeling of being set apart or isolated from them, when one is, in the default position, related to them. Thus, an experience of shame would not have been possible *unless there was already some form of relational self-understanding present*. We argue, therefore, that shame is among those emotions that make it necessary to establish a distinction between a *relational* and a *social* character. To speak of an emotion as social implies that the one who harbors it feels a (deep and positive) connection with others, whereas the one who feels shame has an experience of this connection as severed, as lacking, or as manifested only negatively. Accordingly, shame as an emotion separates one from the community with others and dissolves the experience of social belonging. (This is probably also the reason why shame is so often used for punishing others or for disciplining them). Hence, it entails a movement away from others, as well as away from one's previous and immediate experience of oneself.

Accordingly, we can see shame as the possible (but not a necessary) result of an interruption or even a breakdown in self-relation via relation to others that is usually expressed in forms of self-esteem and the experience of belonging to a community of peers. Thus, shame articulates "an awareness of inadequacy that precedes any particular learning of social norms" – a point that is important to note since it makes shame far more about self-relation than relation to others. Thus, it can exist before any capacity for subjectivity and self-reflection is fully developed. Nussbaum nevertheless holds that this (to our notion, *pre-subjective*) experience of shame does not rule out "that in later life it will become inflected with social learning."[185]

Furthermore, when Nussbaum sees the primitive form of shame as a breakdown in self-relation as self-esteem, it does not require that the one who is ashamed experiences the presence of a more general audience.[186] The qualitative state of shame comes to expression in shame as the experience of being disconnected from that which one holds to be the source of good, and this need not be a general audience or a specific group, but only that or those in which one's self-esteem is grounded (or, in our mode of expressing it: *that towards which one's agency is intentionally directed*), be it one's own self-conception or the relation to the admiration and recognition of the other/others. Nussbaum refers to Piers' analysis of shame as "connected to a fear of abandonment by the source of good; its pain is felt primarily in relation to an ideal state that one fantasizes oneself, not, at least in primitive shame, in relation to the group as such."[187] This fear of abandonment by the good is, accordingly, part of what can interrupt the intentional agency and cause shame. The relation to the good is also among the elements that we see as relevant for identifying shame as an embodied phenomenon that originates out of frustration of desire (since desire is always, at some level, the desire for the presumed good).

---

185 Ibid., 185.

186 Here, she comments indirectly on a topic that we shall discuss further in the Chapter 6 on shame and morality, namely what Dionna, Rodrigo & Teroni call the "socialist dogma" for understanding shame. See below, pp. 286–292.

187 Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*. 185. Note here how her analysis underscores the initial and immediate experience of social relation that is a presupposition for agency that seeks recognition in the eyes of others or oneself.

We should also note here how the above analysis testifies to the composite character of shame and the various dynamics in which it can manifest itself. Because shame is rooted in the disruption of positive self-esteem, it is, as indicated, of crucial importance to consider what constitutes the sources of this self-esteem. The variety of ways in which shame functions in the social arena, therefore, makes it a rather dynamic emotion. Nussbaum points to how, in our minds rightly, "societies have a good deal of room to shape the experience [of shame] differently, both by teaching different views of what is an appropriate occasion for shame and by linking shame differently with other emotions."[188] Hence, what counts as shameful to "the shameless Arabian daughters" may be totally different to what is shameful for a young woman who posts pictures of herself on *Instagram*.

Nussbaum holds that primitive shame can be transcended. However, as we have seen, she is also well aware that this does not always happen. She holds that "all human beings very likely carry a good deal of primitive shame around with them, even after they in some ways transcend it."[189] We would argue that the universal potential of primitive shame to reappear and be present makes it difficult to see it as something that can be reliable in public life as a device for normative guidance. Nussbaum holds that, to the extent that there is any cognitive content in "primitive shame," it has a negative content for the self and is not likely to serve any apparent positive purpose in society. However, she is realistic in thinking that it would be hard to eliminate shame from human life since primitive shame is so deeply rooted in the structure of life itself. Thus, her normative assessment is that shame neither can, nor even should, be eliminated from human life. Shame is one of the ways "in which we negotiate deep tensions involved in the very fact of being human, with the high aspirations and harsh limits that such a life involves."[190]

188 Ibid., 185.
189 Ibid., 15.
190 Ibid., 70.

Shame and individuation: overcoming narcissism

We need to add a further point, that builds on the previous ones, to the above analysis. It concerns how psychological conditions contribute to developing what is required for a mature and moral relation to others and the world. Thus, we need to repeat some of the points in the previous analysis with regard to their significance for moral maturation and moral relationships. This section is, therefore, also relevant as a backdrop to the forthcoming chapter on morality and shame.

When the infant's narcissistic grandiosity engages it in the world in modes that lead to (optimal) frustration, the subsequent result is individuation. As already seen, it is when the child is sufficiently affirmed, and its feelings and achievements recognized that it slowly develops the ability to exist as separate from the caretaker and gain a sense of self with a distinct self-experience and world-experience. Then it also becomes increasingly more able to see the caretaker as a person with distinct needs and activities. Furthermore, "the parents' (or other caregivers') ability to meet the child's omnipotence with suitably responsive and stable care creates a framework within which trust and interdependence may thus gradually grow: the child will gradually relax its omnipotence, its demand to be attended to constantly, once it understands that others can be relied on and it will not be left in a state of utter helplessness."[191] Due to this process of individuation, the child also becomes better able to deal with the composite character of its feelings and regulate them better: it can see that the relationship to (m)other is ambiguous, meaning that it comprises both negative and positive elements: Nussbaum refers to Fairbairn's account of how the child develops a moral defense that makes it possible to relate to its own feelings without being crushed by them:

> The idea is that the child who recognizes that it wishes to destroy the parent whom it loves feels threatened with a sense of limitless blackness in itself. It sees that it has badness in itself, and feels that perhaps it is all bad. But by now the child is capable, in a rudimentary way, of understanding the distinction between the self and its deeds. It can seek atonement for bad acts without feeling

191 Nussbaum, 187.

> altogether lost. Morality comes to the rescue, in the sense that it is able (with help from others) to understand that doing bad, and even wanting bad, are not the same as being bad through and through.[192]

When the child gradually becomes able to renounce its demands for complete control over the caretaker, by seeing these demands as inappropriate, it is experienced as a loss. However, Nussbaum underscores, with Melanie Klein, that "it will also be attended by creativity, as the child learns that it can atone for bad wishes and deeds with good wishes and good deeds." She goes on, writing:

> It now sets about doing things for others, showing that it recognizes that other people too have a right to live and have their own plans. In general, the child learns to live in a world of individuals, in which others have legitimate claims and separate purposes, and in which respect for those claims limits the inordinate demands of the self. Love is increasingly understood in terms of interchange and reciprocity, rather than in terms of narcissistic fusion and the rage for control; the self is increasingly understood, and accepted, as human, incomplete, and partial, rather than as grandiose and demanding completeness.[193]

As we have seen, when the child's emotions are not affirmed and/or contained by the (m)other, it remains dependent on others for a sense of self that allows for self-esteem and safety. Moreover, the child finds itself captured in a tension between having the need for the other, whereas this other for which it has the need is never going to give it access to the resources it needs for becoming self-reliant. The parent who attends insufficiently to the child keeps it in a continuous craving for response and thus contributes to maintaining its narcissistic orientation towards the world.

The precondition for developing a mature self is therefore to provide care that can overcome such narcissistic delusions and establish a more adequate self-perception. This can only happen if consistently affirmed and offered ideals that enable the development of other-oriented empathic interpersonal interaction. A fundamental outcome of this development is

192 Ibid., 187–188.
193 Ibid., 188.

the *basic trust* with which the child can meet the world.[194] This trust, is, as we shall develop in the final chapter of this book, among the prerequisites for avoiding or overcoming shame. Trusting and empathic interaction not only allows oneself to function better, but it makes it possible to overcome some of the causes of shame. Hence, we argue, shame is rooted in conditions that one should try to work against or overcome by improving the conditions for emotional and cognitive interaction in the social dimension of existence. This is most vividly apparent in how shame can be avoided by having more adequate expectations about one's achievements and limitations. In reality, we are not omnipotent, and since we are dependent on others, primitive shame represents a significant emotional response to the disruption of this self-delusion. It does, in a significant manner, represent the emotional response to the disruption of this self-delusion. Thus, to overcome shame, one needs to come to terms with one's vulnerability.

Emerging features in the philosophical discussion of shame

Shame and vulnerability

We have suggested that shame is linked to the vulnerable state of being human. Shame is the result of the experienced exposure to others of our vulnerability, which can lead to exposure to others in (deeply) emotionally charged situations and relations. Shame may thus also be seen as one of the ways in which we respond to our vulnerability, in movements of withdrawal, reclusion or isolation. All of these responsive movements suggest that we try to shield ourselves from further exposure. Thus, the way we deal with vulnerability can explain how there is a connection between shame and hiding, shielding oneself from the gaze of others, or looking away oneself. This withdrawal can be understood as the result of recognizing that one's intentions or projects imply a failure or are scorned

194 For the psychological basis of such trust, see Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, Revised edition. (London: Triad/Paladin, 1977).

by others, and accordingly, expose oneself to the vulnerability of one's intentions and agency.

In the above analysis of the relationship between shame and narcissism, we have seen that narcissism comes in both healthy and pathological variants. Positive and "natural" narcissism is conceived of as "any mental activity which serves to 'maintain the structural cohesiveness, temporal stability, and positive affective coloring of the self-representation.'"[195] Thus, we see narcissism "as a continuum phenomenon, from healthy and adaptive at one end of the spectrum, to pathological and severely maladaptive at the other."[196] Kealy and Rasmussen describe the problematic sides of narcissism as not originating out of grandiosity as such, but as a result of "the veiled and vulnerable counterpart to grandiose display." Accordingly, "[t]he self-regulatory deficit of pathological narcissism is not the grandiosity itself, but a secret fragile core that must be warded off from conscious awareness and prevented from discovery by others – and indeed from the self."[197] Given our previous understanding of the self which experiences shame as dependent on others and lacking the self-esteem or self-reliance that can supply autonomy and independence from the gaze of others, this approach seems to underscore further the role shame plays in the psychological complexities that come to the fore in narcissistic individuals. Shame can then be seen as an immediate response to instances when the self suddenly experiences itself as vulnerable and exposed – experiences that are more than likely to occur in a narcissist that is not assessing its capacities, abilities, and concomitant projects in an adequate manner.

The "vulnerable theme" that occurs in narcissism "refers to feelings of helplessness, suffering, and anxiety regarding threats to the self, and reflecting inner feelings of inadequacy, emptiness, and shame. These phenomena we have already touched upon in both Nussbaum and Kohut above. Narcissistic vulnerability involves "hypervigilance to insult, and

195 David Kealy and Brian Rasmussen, "Veiled and Vulnerable: The Other Side of Grandiose Narcissism," *Clinical Social Work Journal* 40, no. 3 (2012), 357, with reference to Robert Stolorow, "Toward a Functional Definition of Narcissism," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 56 (1975).

196 Kealy and Rasmussen, "Veiled and Vulnerable: The Other Side of Grandiose Narcissism", 357.

197 Ibid., 358.

excessive shyness or interpersonal avoidance in order to retreat from perceived threats to self-esteem."[198] We have already indicated that the vulnerable condition may be either overtly or covertly expressed. We see this as one of the possible psychological reasons for why people may feel ashamed for being ashamed: the display of shame implies an admission of vulnerability that only makes one even more vulnerable.[199] It allows us to see grandiosity as an attempt to defend and compensate for the experiences of chronic shame and vulnerability.[200]

If we, furthermore, consider the origin of shame from the point of view of attachment theory, children whose parents are narcissistically preoccupied may suffer from a lack of affirming responses to their unfolding self because the parents are too self-occupied. This lack of adequate response "has a traumatic effect, generating chronic feelings of shame and emptiness, from which an escape is sought via grandiose fantasies and self-enhancing behavior."[201] In other words: narcissism begets narcissism. Attachment theory identifies this as a condition in which the child lacks a 'secure base.' Accordingly, it develops "an insecure internal working model of the self, propelling maladaptive searching for security and validation."[202]

If we look at this analysis from some distance, we see then that shame belongs to the emotions and psychological conditions in which the self

---

198 Ibid.

199 Cf. also David Kealy and Johns Ogrodniczuk, "Pathological Narcissism: A Front-Line Guide," *Practice* 24, no. 3 (2012), 164: "Narcissistic vulnerability refers to feelings of helplessness, suffering and anxiety regarding threats to the self, reflecting inner feelings of inadequacy, emptiness and shame. Interpersonally, narcissistic vulnerability involves hypervigilance to insult, and excessive shyness or inter-personal avoidance in order to retreat from perceived threats to self-esteem. As useful as sub-typing may be for heuristic purposes, grandiosity and vulnerability likely do not exist in pure form. Instead, some degree of fluctuation between grandiose and vulnerable elements is likely to occur for most clients with narcissistic problems. Indeed, these themes may simply be two sides of the same coin, with grandiose features serving to mask underlying self-esteem deficits."

200 Ibid., 164.

201 Ibid., 165. Cf. C. A. Gross and N. E. Hansen, "Clarifying the Experience of Shame: The Role of Attachment Style, Gender, and Investment in Relatedness," *Personality and Individual Differences* 28, no. 5 (2000), who also find that secure attachment is negatively associated with shame while preoccupied and fearful attachment are positively correlated. In a similar vein also are the results in Alessia Passanisi et al., "Attachment, Self-Esteem and Shame in Emerging Adulthood," *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 191 (2015).

202 Kealy and Ogrodniczuk, "Pathological Narcissism: A Front-Line Guide." 165.

is mainly preoccupied withitself. This self-occupation also means, as we have briefly touched upon earlier, that one becomes less able to respond empathically to the state of others. The reasons for this lack of attunement to others can be found in the attachment trauma just mentioned: such trauma inhibits the development of mentalization, which is "the capacity to reflect on mental processes in oneself and others."[203] This point is of relevance to the present treatise because it points further to the unreliable relationship that shame and processes leading to shame display, when it comes to how one relates to the world and to oneself. The traumatic attachment provides the self with fewer chances for self-transparency, and offers less understanding of what the real responses, attitudes, and minds of others are:

Mentalization is fostered within secure attachment relationships in which the child experiences his or her mind being reflected and represented by attachment figures. This process essentially affords the individual a theory of mind in which behaviors and emotions can be thought about beyond their face value. Impaired mentalization involves a lack of flexibility in interpreting mental experiences: the individual's interpretation is the interpretation. For example, when confronted with situations that trigger shame and insecurity, the client with narcissistic problems may have great difficulty in taking a step back to consider potential alternative perspectives or responses.[204] To summarize the above in straightforward terms: severe shame seems to be among the modes of being in which the individual manifests how it is captured in the prison of its own self, or, at least, how shame impedes its chances for developing into a free, creative, spontaneous and self-reliant individual.[205]

Shame: self-esteem and self-respect

We now need to take a closer look at the relation between self-esteem, self-respect and shame, because shame seems to impact these ways of

203 Ibid., 165.
204 Ibid., 165.
205 The notion of captivity we have chosen here is not arbitrary: the withdrawal to the inner self as a prison can also provide a shelter for the shamed self.

relating to oneself. We do this in two steps: first, by discussing some elements of the understanding of shame in Deonna *et al.*,[206] and then by looking into a thorough discussion that points towards elements in moral theory as well, by John Deigh.[207]

Deonna et al. make a distinction between self-respect and self-esteem. It serves to address the conditions for shame in the identity of the person in question more specifically. Deonna et al. hold that the identity that is relevant for shame must be internally specified "in terms of the subject's failures with respect to values to which he has a particular attachment."[208] Hence, they see shame as related to values, and we argue that values are always, in some sense or another, among the basic conditions for agency, even when they are not recognized or cognitively acknowledged.

Deonna et al. problematize the Rawlsian idea that shame is a blow to self-esteem, and they support this position by referring to Gabriele Taylor, who holds that the Rawlsian view of shame misconceives the relation of the subject to its values. Taylor, on her part, offers an account in which shame is correlated to self-respect rather than self-esteem.[209] This approach allows us to see what is at stake in terms of expressions of identity in the type of projects and agency that may cause shame when they are interrupted.

According to Taylor, self-esteem means that one takes a favorable view of oneself, whereas lack of self-esteem means that one takes an unfavorable view of oneself. However, Taylor holds that one can maintain self-respect even when one does not take a favorable view of oneself in concrete situations where one loses one's self-esteem. Furthermore, this point implies that self-respect is a precondition for an uninterrupted and trustful engagement with the world, since there is no disturbance to one's intentions and accompanying expectations. "To respect oneself is to have a sense of one's worth that goes together with having certain expectations."

206 Julien A. Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno, and Fabrice Teroni, *In Defense of Shame: The Faces of an Emotion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

207 John Deigh, "Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique," *Ethics* 93, no. 2 (1983).

208 Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni, *In Defense of Shame: The Faces of an Emotion*, 94.

209 Not all authors who work on shame follow suit here. There are several authors that we present in the following who see shame as related to self-esteem.

It is when these expectations are not met that shame kicks in: shame is the emotional reaction to "injuries, lack or loss of self-respect."[210]

> In shame, then, we assess situations in terms of their impinging upon our self-respect, where self-respect has nothing to do with having a favorable opinion of ourselves. Self-respect, we may add, cannot, unlike self-esteem, be fruitfully viewed as varying along a continuum; it has, rather, an all-or-nothing character: you either have self-respect or you have lost it. Providing a positive characterization of self-respect will, thus, allow us to see what is distinctive about shame.[211]

Here, Taylor links shame to a disturbance to that which constitutes the subject's central commitments, as these are in some way or another crucial to the life that he or she envisages him or herself as leading, and thereby to his or her identity. When these commitments are successfully realized, they not only result in self-respect. They may also be seen as manifestations of it. In other words, shame is the result of shortcomings regarding our central and self-defining commitments. "In shame, we evaluate ourselves as going against our central commitments" and experience our integrity as threatened.[212]

Deonna et al. recognize important elements in Taylor's approach that are in accordance with our previously presented understanding of shame. By connecting shame with self-respect understood as an all-or-nothing affair, we see how shame implies a severe evaluation, and not only a shifting or variable mood. Furthermore, Taylor's approach opens up to the culturally and socially relative conditions of shame, as it sees it as connected to the different values to which individuals may be attached. Thus, "Taylor's account is agreeably pluralist, in the sense that it acknowledges and accommodates the fact that different people, at different times and places, have different values that might all become relevant for shame."[213] What she does not seem to be able to take into account with this approach

---

210 Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni, *In Defense of Shame: The Faces of an Emotion*, 95. With reference to Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment*, 131.
211 Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni, *In Defense of Shame: The Faces of an Emotion*, 95.
212 Ibid.
213 Ibid., 96.

is that shame may not only occur when central commitments are jeopardized. One can also feel shame for scolding one's neighbor for not mowing his lawn often enough, or one's daughter for not doing the dishes as fast as one would like.

Deonna et al. also see similar problems as we do with relating self-respect (and its eventual failure as manifested in shame) exclusively to central self-commitments. They argue that Taylor's model fails to shed light on many episodic appearances of shame, especially the less dramatic ones. We may also feel shame concerning commitments that are not self-defining. Accordingly, they argue for understanding shame along a spectrum in which not all occasions for shame are constituted by a failure to live up to one's central commitments.

At this point, our suggestion for understanding shame may prove helpful. Instead of seeing shame exclusively as the result of one's central commitments, we can see such commitments as a subcategory of what we have called the intentional projects in which the person invests themselves to a greater or lesser degree. Some of these projects may be of greater importance than others to the individual's overall commitments. However, the failure of "smaller" or more limited projects may also cause shame, simply because one at a given time invested some of one's own desires, expectations, aspirations, or creativity in them with the hope of success or fulfillment. Then they were obstructed in some way. Thus, although Taylor has identified important relations between shame and self-respect, we still find reasons to maintain that shame needs to be seen as related to conditions of both self-respect and self-esteem, since there may be instances in which our self-esteem is affected by shame without it affecting our fundamental self-respect.

Deigh on conditions for agency and shame: shame is not necessarily the loss of self-esteem

John Deigh has also criticized the Rawlsian understanding of shame as the result of the loss of self-esteem in ways that are somewhat parallel to those of Deonna et al. Rawls "explains self-esteem in terms of the goals and ideals one incorporates into one's life plans." Although Rawls focuses

on the conditions of the moral personality, he identifies shame in general as the result of failure to achieve a goal or an ideal that is integral to one's self-conception. Shame thus involves a sense of personal failure, he holds. We would add: it is also caused by our perception of the vulnerability that affects and restricts our agency. This failure is conditioned by the personal investment which has been carried out and correlated with the strength or power of this investment.[214] According to Rawls, shame is felt over shortcomings, whereas guilt is felt over wrong-doings.[215]

Deigh expands and adds to the Rawlsian account in different ways. First, he claims that shame involves a certain amount *of loss of self-control,* a point that underscores the character of rupture and interruption of agency associated with shame. This loss implies an "experience of discomfiture, a sudden shock that short-circuits one's composure and self-possession."[216]

Moreover, Rawls seems to hold that shame affects one's sense of worth: In shame, the positive self-image is replaced by a negative one that implies a loss of self-esteem. Self-esteem is then correlated with the evaluation of one's achievements and with one's sense of success: high self-esteem is the result of a positive judgment of success, whereas low self-esteem is the result of one's sense of failure.[217] However, Deigh finds this approach unsatisfactory. He questions the central idea that shame signifies loss of self-esteem.[218] This Rawlsian understanding of self-esteem links it primarily to one's own mood and the given activity that one has undertaken within a given period, and which is then the basis for one's self-assessment. Furthermore, the relevant activities must be qualified as expressing a direction in order to be conditions for positive self-esteem. "They must be channeled into pursuits or projects and reflect one's goals and ideals," Deigh writes, thus underscoring the personal investment we have made part of our understanding of the conditions for shame.[219] This investment and its

214 Deigh, "Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique," 225. This correlation may not always be the case, though; sometimes one can feel severely ashamed without having made any investment at all!

215 Ibid.

216 Ibid.

217 Ibid., 226–227.

218 Cf. ibid., 226.

219 Ibid., 227.

relation to central goals and ideals is also highly relevant for understanding the conditions for what we have called coherent agency:

> Self-esteem is had by persons whose lives have a fairly definite direction and some fairly well-defined shape, which is to say that self-esteem requires that one have values and organize one's life around them. One's values translate into one's aims and ideals, and a settled constellation of these is necessary for self-esteem. […] Arguably, someone who has no aims or ideals in life, whose life lacked the direction and coherence that such aims and ideals would bring, would be neither an appropriate object of our esteem nor of our disesteem.[220]

Deigh introduces an essential distinction in order to understand the causes for lack of coherence and for the concomitant problems related to lack of self-esteem and shame for what one has done. His distinction between *ownership* and *authorship* makes it possible to interpret a situation in which one acts in conflict with one's aims and ideals. The agent may explain this lack of coherence with one's basic values for agency as the result of having been overpowered by some contingent desire. Thus, one's agency would be attributed to powers of which one is the origin (ownership), but one can distance oneself from these by rejecting these as something one would own as a basis for further agency (authorship). An example of this would be the case mentioned in Chapter 2, where nurses act against their best conscience due to a lack of resources.

Deigh employs this distinction to show how agency can generate subjective conditions for self-esteem in a way that allows for different types of self-relation. "When one has a settled constellation of aims and ideals, then one distinguishes between the acts of which one is the author and those in which one serves as an instrument of alien forces. Without any such constellation, one is never the author of one's actions, though many times the instrument of alien forces that act on one, triggered by external events."[221] Accordingly, authorship means having a settled constellation of aims and ideals as a precondition of self-esteem. It comes from "a good opinion of oneself as the author of one's actions, more generally, one's

220 Ibid., 228.
221 Ibid., 228.

life."[222] Thus, authorship may be conditioned by a positive development of the self in relation to stable and orienting values and ideals.[223] Or, to state it in accordance with G. Taylor: It is the distinction between authorship and ownership that allows for having self-respect even when one can occasionally have low self-esteem.

According to this analysis, self-esteem depends on two related factors, which both condition the agency that leads to the positive outcome it represents: it implies "a favorable regard for one's aims and ideals in life and a favorable assessment of one's suitability for pursuing them."[224] When self-esteem is not present, it is either because the aims and ideals on which one acts are considered base, or because of lack of "talent, ability, or other attributes necessary for achieving them. Either would mean that one lacked the good opinion of oneself that makes for self-esteem, and either would explain the dispirited condition that goes with one's lacking self-esteem."[225]

Hence, the conditions for what we have called coherent agency, of which shame is the manifestation of its impediment or interruption, require, first, that "one regards one's aims and ideals as worthy and, second, one believes that one is well-suited to pursue them."[226] The first of these conditions is a prerequisite for a sense of life as having a meaning, whereas the second relates to the "confidence one has in the excellence of one's person."[227] Together, these conditions can shape the direction and orientations of the projects in which we invest in a coherent manner. Referring back to the earlier discussions in this chapter, we would add that the extent to which one can develop such a positive orientation and direction is usually dependent on one's initial interaction with significant others.

These conditions are significant for the occurrence of shame insofar as they suggest that loss of self-esteem is caused by "a change in either one's regard for the worthiness of one's aims and ideals or one's belief in one's

222 Ibid., 229.
223 Cf. p. 121 above.
224 Deigh, "Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique", 229.
225 Ibid.
226 Ibid.
227 Ibid.

ability to achieve them." "The loss here is the loss of a certain view of one-self," Deigh writes.[228] Thus, here idealization and mirroring, as described by Kohut, seem to work in the negative. So far, we have characterized this loss by means of notions such as rupture or interruption. The previously held self-esteem and the good opinion one had of oneself become exchanged for an unfavorable judgment that destroys this view. Lack of positive self-esteem is the result. In the Rawlsian account,

> … shame is the emotion one feels when such loss occurs. Moreover, shame is to be understood as signifying such loss. Shame on this characterization is the shock to our sense of worth that comes either from realizing that our values are shoddy or from discovering that we are deficient in a way that had added to the confidence we had in our excellence.[229]

However, Deigh finds this view insufficient. He points to several examples that the Rawlsian account seems to have trouble covering in order to make his position clear in detail: "First, there are cases in which one can experience lack of self-esteem, but not shame, such as when one becomes aware of the limitations of one's capacities or skills. Then, we simply establish a more adequate assessment of our competences."[230] Thus, it is possible, for example, to have a low sense of esteem regarding one's skiing ability without feeling shame.

The second example is when shame is felt over something one did not believe affected one's excellence, because one does not regard it as a fault in oneself. Examples here cover everything from when one feels shame for one's accent or dialect or hair color when others ridicule it, to more severe cases where ethnic origin becomes a case for discrimination. From our point of view (not Deigh's) this may be a case in which the intentions one has for relating to and engaging with others are interrupted by their response. Thus, the response hampers one's intentions for full and equal participation with one's peers. In this sense, other people always matter to one because they are the ones in whose faces and in whose actions one can read one's own value as subjects.

228 Ibid.
229 Ibid.
230 Cf. ibid., 230ff.

Deigh, nevertheless, makes some important comments regarding such cases, which point to the conditions for shame in the social and cultural realms of experience. He points to how self-esteem depends to some extent on the esteem others accord oneself. Furthermore, the impact of their assessment is correlated with the dependency that the person in question feels towards them: "The greater that dependency, the more readily one will feel shame in response to any deprecatory judgments they express."[231] In other words, there are cases in which social action constitutes shame and in which it is not one's abilities or ideals that are the cause, but the interruption by others of one's agency and unproblematic self-assessment. Deigh considers this case as problematic from a Rawlsian point of view because sometimes one may feel shame due to another's criticism or ridicule, even when one does not accept the other person's judgment of oneself. Such cases show that shame is often more of "a response to the evident deprecatory opinion others have of one than an emotion aroused upon judgement that one's aims are shoddy or that one is deficient in talent or ability necessary to achieve them."[232]

Young children who feel shame represent another problem for the Rawlsian account. Children at the age of four or five usually do not have a well-defined self-conception, nor do they organize their life "around the pursuit of certain discrete and relatively stable aims and ideals" by which they measure themselves by the "standards of what is necessary to achieve them."[233] Accordingly, children at this age do not relate to the conditions that Rawls considers necessary for self-esteem – and we nevertheless consider them as subjects of shame. In other words, a child at this age, though capable of feeling shame, does not have self-esteem. The shame they experience must be attributed to other factors than the loss of self-esteem that Rawls talks about.[234]

231 Ibid., 233.
232 Ibid.
233 Ibid., 234.
234 Ibid., 234. At this point, Kohut's and others' descriptions of the child's need for recognition in mirroring may be a more adequate way to describe what happens: it is the project of acquiring self-esteem through the mirroring of one's achievements that is rejected here, not an already existing self-esteem.

The final case that Deigh refers to as a problem for the Rawlsian account of shame is related to a distinction between an achievement ethic and an aristocratic ethic. Thus, his remarks on this topic are relevant for the forthcoming chapter on ethics and morality as well. Rawls' position is based on the former, which emphasizes making something of oneself and achieving success. However, Deigh holds that "some experiences of shame reflect an aristocratic ethic; one feels shame over conduct unbecoming a person of one's rank or station." Shame that is a response to an achievement ethic is caused by the realization that one has not lived up to one's aims and ideals, or the standards of excellence one holds for oneself. However, in shame that occurs on the basis of an aristocratic ethic, "the subject's concern is with maintaining the deportment of his class and not necessarily with achieving aims and ideals that define success in life. He is concerned with conforming to the norms of propriety distinctive of his class and not necessarily with achieving aims and ideals that define success in life."[235]

Nevertheless, we need to ask: would not also the latter, that is, failed and unsuccessful conduct that falls short of given aims and ideals, be possible to interpret as causing shame? One way to get around the problem would be to say shame here occurs because one fails to conform to ideals instead of realizing them. However, Deigh argues that something gets lost in this re-description: there is a shift in focus here from the one who one is (identity) to the way one conducts one's life (agency) that is of importance. The Rawlsian account does not register this shift adequately: his view allows the person's membership of a certain group or class to recede into the background as a determinative factor. But it is not insignificant as such, which is the reason why we treat this case in the context of psychology and not ethics. Although membership or belonging is the source of the ideals, the Rawlsian account does not ascribe any further significance to it. But it has significance because it is this membership that is the cause

235 Ibid., 234. As the observant reader will see, the connections we make between shame and agency here place our treatment close to the topic of ethics, which is treated more extensively in the next chapter. Here, we just want to observe that Deigh's understanding of aristocratic ethics seems to have parallels with what Kohlberg calls the conventional stage. Thus, it need not only be based on a class-stratified society.

of shame, and since the person will have a sense of shame, or of having disgraced him or herself, due to his or her relationship with others. Rawls does not distinguish between questions of identity and questions of life pursuits.[236]

Accordingly, Deigh identifies nuances in the origins of shame that are related to more than the failure to realize one's commitments. Social and cultural features may be more involved in engendering shame than what the Rawlsian approach can account for. That account works mostly for people who answer questions about who they are by reporting about the aims or ideals that guide them:

> This makes it an attractive characterization of the shame felt by persons who are relatively free of constraints on their choice of life pursuits owing to class, race, ethnic origins, and the like. For such persons tend more to regard their aims and ideals as constituting their identity and their ancestry, race, class, and so forth as extrinsic facts about themselves. So the characterization explains the shame they feel as including an acute sense of who they are.[237]

Deigh's critique of Rawls' thus rests on how the latter ignores the psychological, as well as the social and cultural, conditions for shame. It is not only one's failure in the struggle to achieve one's aims and ideals through agency that condition shame. Rawls seems to focus too much on the active, modern person who is relatively free from the conditions set by their context, culture, and the history to which they belong. Deigh sees the limitations of this position as one that "restricts a person's identity to his aims and ideals in life," and therefore, "it fails to explain as including this sense the shame someone, living in a rigidly stratified society, feels when he does not act as befits a member of his class or the shame someone, living in a multiethnic society, feels when he acts beneath the dignity of his people." However, even when a person recognizes that he or she is not up to the cultural standards that he or she is expected to follow, these ideals do not constitute his or her identity. "Hence, we fail to account for

236 Ibid., 235.
237 Ibid., 235f.

such shame if we describe it as being felt over one's having fallen short of ideals that regulate one's life."[238]

Deigh's conclusion about the requirements for a definition of shame can, accordingly, be summarized thus:

- It must take into account the role that the concern for the assessment of others has for experiencing shame.[239] However, this concern is part of the conditions that cause shame and not part of the definition itself.[240]
- In Rawls, one's sense of worth has two sources. One is the person's conviction that he or she has a meaningful life, and the other is the assessment of his or her own excellence. This approach comes close to self-respect as defined by Taylor above. Against this backdrop, shame is, from his point of view, "felt either upon a judgment that one's aims or ideals are shoddy or upon a judgment that one is deficient in a way that makes one ill suited to pursue them."[241] This experience represents a shock to one's immediate sense of worth. Deigh nevertheless claims that the account of what causes this shock is insufficient. It omits important sources for our sense of worth, as is evidenced, for example, in the case of the child seeking recognition without having a clear set of aims and ideals for life guidance, or the aristocrat who feels shame over behaving like a plebeian. In these cases, the source is neither a conviction about the worthiness of ends, nor a belief about suitability to pursue them. Thus, aspects of our identity that contribute to our sense of worth independently of the aims and ideals around which we organize our lives are insufficiently taken into account.[242]
- Concomitant to the previous point, a sense of worth (or, to use G. Taylor's terms, self-respect) as well as shame may therefore have its origin in structurally different contexts: either the results

238 Ibid., 235.
239 Cf. ibid., 238.
240 Ibid., 239.
241 Ibid., 240.
242 Ibid., 240.

> of agency, or in the status, belonging and position that one holds in relation to others. One can, however, have different assessments of how one's conduct is, without it impacting on one's self-esteem, depending on to what extent one sees oneself as the author of one's actions or not.[243]

The author theory about shame relates the sense of worth to one's conduct, and sees agency as providing grounds for attributing that worth. On the other hand, a sense of worth that comes from status/nature reflects a concern with the congruency between one's conduct or appearance and one's real worth. In the latter case, it is the relation between appearance and reality that is important: behavior that is congruent with one's worth is an occasion for pride, and behavior that gives the appearance of lesser worth is an occasion for shame.[244] This approach also makes it easier to understand people's sensibility to shame, because it can explain why one "restrains oneself when one verges on the shameful and […] covers up the shameful when it comes into the open. […] Having shame, that is, having a sensibility to shame, can be understood here as self-control that works to restrain one from giving the appearance of lesser worth and self-respect that works to cover up shameful things that, having come to light, give one such an appearance."[245]

Accordingly, Deigh sees shame "as a reaction to a threat, specifically, the threat of demeaning treatment one would invite in giving the appearance of someone of lesser worth," and not as a reaction to a loss. Thus, it is a protective movement: "Shame serves to protect one against and save one from unwanted exposure,"[246] and accordingly, it is also self-protective "in that it moves one to protect one's worth."[247] Thus, he offers an additional element to the relationship between vulnerability, hiding, and shame to which we have already pointed. Furthermore,

243 Ibid., 241f.
244 Ibid., 242.
245 Ibid., 242.
246 Ibid., 242.
247 Ibid., 243.

> Shame inhibits one from doing things that would tarnish one's worth, and it moves one to cover up that which through continued exposure would tarnish one's worth. Less figuratively, we might say that the doing or exposure of something that makes one appear to have less worth than one has leaves one open to treatment appropriate only to persons or things that lack the worth one has, and shame in inhibiting one from doing such things and in moving one to cover them up thus protects one from appearing to be an unworthy creature and so from the degrading treatment such appearance would invite.[248]

To understand shame as a self-protective emotion explains two important features: first, the liability to shame regulates conduct, since shame inhibits one from doing certain things. Second, shame manifests itself in acts of concealment.[249] The Rawlsian approach to shame cannot explain the latter. Therefore, Deigh argues, it should be given up.[250]

Deigh makes a convincing case that shame need not be connected to self-esteem, and that a conception of shame that only defines it from that perspective is inadequate. However, it does not necessarily exclude the fact that shame as a phenomenon can affect both self-esteem and self-respect. But it is not only due to the loss of these. To the extent that self-respect and self-esteem are emotional phenomena, they are both affected by experiences of shame.

If we consider Deigh's proposal against the backdrop of our understanding of shame as a reaction to interruption of personally invested projects, shame is the response of a self which finds itself and its conditions for agency vulnerable in a situation where such interruption occurs. One way to react to this experience of vulnerability is to hide. Another can be to invest in a new, self-assertive project to regain control of one's agency and re-establish coherent agency (and concomitant self-esteem). The latter would concur with Deigh's proposal to the extent that it implies a regulation and adjustment of conduct.

248 Ibid., 243.
249 Ibid., 243.
250 Ibid., 244–245.

Preliminary concluding reflections

The analyses in this chapter take as their point of departure how the self's architecture is constituted relationally and conditioned by the interaction between the infant and the significant others in early childhood. We recognize that the development of the self takes place on vulnerable terms, to which the self is always potentially exposed. This recognition is an essential precondition for understanding the conditions for experiences of shame. As the social and material conditions for the self are themselves not stable or fixed, this fact exposes the self to various resources that have implications for its agency. Then intentions and projects through which it develops, articulates and affirms itself, are therefore also always marked by risk and vulnerability.

It is against this backdrop that we can see the mechanisms behind shame as evolved. Shame is an evolutionary product just as much as a psychological one. Shame's evolutionary process continues in the individual when he or she grows up and becomes an adult. The process (be it sound or bad) is itself exposed and vulnerable because our genetic makeup is always filtered through the individual's social and material conditions. Hence, social interaction and the various conditions for self-development and realization play a large part in the conditions for shame and for the extent to which the individual becomes prone to shame or not. It cannot be determined based on social or genetic elements only but is the result of the interaction between different variables. Similar things can be said about the self's capacities for trust, empathy, love, altruism, etc.

We can now, therefore, unfold the complexity of shame through a threefold optic. The mechanisms of shame, that is, the biologically and intra-psychological workings of shame, such as the biologically evolved sense of shame, and also the epi-genetical structuring of our mind that allows for genes to be activated or not, are developed under a set of defining conditions. On a scale, these range from oppressive to liberating, such as relational interdependency (for example, discretionary shame), societal structuring (for example, religious or ideological norms) and material conditions (for example, access to housing, food, cf. the shame of the poor, the hobos in American culture, beggars, etc.). Shame manifests itself phenomenologically in contextually dependent patterns. These patterns

allow for a retroductive argument that suggests how shame emerges out of the mild causality of the self's architecture in context.

Some examples may illuminate the above theoretical description:

- A woman is part of a cult where her freedom is taken away (ideological and material conditions). She is also frequently sexually abused by the leader/self-appointed prophet as part of the religious ideology (material conditions = rape, ideological conditions = religious ideology defending rape). Under such conditions, shame – as a biological and psychological mechanism regulating our mode of relating to others, may cause a permanent alteration in self-image and identity (through the shame of being nothing more than a sexual object).
- A child that grows up under social conditions in a nurturing (social) environment that fulfills the basic (psychological and material) needs may develop a sense of discretionary shame (mechanism of shame) that (as a consequence) both protects the fragile relations to others as well as fortifying the self through coherent agency.
- When a psychiatrist gives in to his or her sexual desires and turns the therapy into a sexual encounter, his or her professional integrity and ethical standards will, most certainly, be questioned by many of his or her colleagues and probably also by him or herself. Shame reactions, such as professional isolation, anger, or cover-up strategies may occur to offer protection from shaming by others.[251]

To approach shame within this multi-layered context is what makes it possible to see its profound implications for the individual's self-perception, projects, intentions, and social life. Moreover, it also means that we need to see shame within a context where the self's ability to make choices and to learn and unlearn ways of coping with shame provides a complex and dynamic understanding of how it expresses itself in human life.

251 See, for example, Terje Mesel, *Når Noe Går Galt. Skam, Skyld Og Ansvar I Helsetjenesten.* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2014).

Part II

Contexts Where Shame Is at Work

CHAPTER 4

Shame and Embodiment

Introduction

In this chapter, we will discuss how shame and the body are connected. After a general introduction and discussion of our framework, we will turn to specific topics. To address body shame adequately, we will widen our phenomenological description by underscoring the impact that the contextual social and material structures have on the phenomenon of shame. The primary concern of this phenomenology is to identify and analyze the hidden universal features, capacities, or essences of the lived body. Social theory, however, explores the dynamic between context and agent from a variety of perspectives, such as gender, power, religion, and politics. Thus, the theoretical resources of social theory add valuable perspectives to the analysis of the shame of the lived body in various contexts. We shall not discuss the structures as such, but rather see how they complement our phenomenological analysis of embodied shame. The reason for this approach should be apparent: the body, as both a social and material construction, is both visible in and part of the dynamics of constructed reality. Thus, in order to give an in-depth analysis of the experience of the shameful body, we need to understand the social and material premises for the presence and the visibility of the body in the world.

As we stated in the introductory chapter, our access to and perspective on reality is dependent on our interpretative resources and competencies. Thus, the shame phenomenon is articulated and experienced on many levels of human experience. It can be experienced as a psychological phenomenon, it can be articulated and interpreted in the social world through the signs and symbols of language, and it can be articulated and experienced both in the body and by the body. Thus, the embodied

character of shame is complicated, because the shameful experiences that people have are manifested in, or tied to, the body in different ways. The body can, for example, present feelings, desires, or arousals that are socially unacceptable or looked down upon and scorned or demeaned when they are displayed through the signs and symbols of the body, or by language or action.

Shame is related to the complex contextual situatedness of the lived body. As bodies, we partake in different and overlapping contexts and activities that may express complex normative expectations to the lived body, of which some may run contrary to each other or fail to fit with the social and/or moral hierarchy of expectations. Shame may also occur due to either the empirical or the logical impossibility of adhering to this complexity of bodily expectations. For example, being the mother of an infant and a toddler, and also being the CEO of a successful company, entails normative expectations that the lived body may not be able to meet. The disparate expectations presented to the body of the caring mother who breastfeeds her child, and being the tough female CEO, may result in an unwelcome interruption of shame when the woman falls short of meeting the expectations or objectives in any or both of the contexts that the lived body inhabits.

A short look at historical change

The history of the body, of bodily functions or displays of sex, gender or, more specifically, the female body, may help to outline the historical topography of bodily shame.[252] This topography also reveals the tight connection between the different philosophical, religious, political, and social constructions of functions and displays of the body. These are powerfully tied to both power and dominance, as well as to stigma, desire, arousal, and sin.[253] A telling example is the history of homosexuality. We need not go far back in our history to find that bodily articulated

252 See, for example, Hans Peter Duerr, *Myten Om Civilisationsprocessen: B. 2: Intimitet*, vol. B. 2, Intimität (Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposium, 1996).

253 See, for example, Clough, *Shame, the Church and the Regulation of Female Sexuality*. We will elaborate in further detail on this in subsequent chapters.

expressions of homosexuality were considered by most as deeply troubling and shame-generating.[254]

However, bodily shame is not tied exclusively to sexuality. The disabled body can also be perceived as shameful. Historically, having a child born with bodily disabilities could be shameful, especially if the child displayed bodily signs of intellectual disability as well, such as Downs syndrome.[255] In Norway, we have a history where such children were stowed away or hidden from exposure to avoid shame on the family. This shameful part of history is sadly not specific to Norway. The history of what was pejoratively called *freakery* is also an example of how fear, shame, but also curiosity, were tightly interwoven.[256]

In our own time, the postmodern emphasis on the complex and embodied social self has brought the experience of the visible and exposed body and body shame into a sharp and new focus. In contemporary society, body shame can, for example, be generated by disease or damage manifested on the skin, such as severe psoriasis, acne, or burn scars. But it can also be a response to lifestyle issues such as obesity. People can experience these bodily issues as shameful stigmas in a culture that cultivates ideals of the perfect, groomed body and a healthy lifestyle and diet.[257]

This renewed focus on bodily shame does not necessarily correlate to an increase in powerful and potentially shaming social expectations. It may also be tied to specific changes brought about by postmodern culture. The social predictability, stability, and protection of class, gender, and culture that were essential elements of modernity have been devaluated to a large extent. In modernity, the social, cultural, religious, and political disciplining was more explicit and more rigorously defined. Then, oppression and devaluation of those that did not easily fall into the defined categories, such as women fighting for equal rights, the disabled,

---

254 See, for example, David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, *Gay Shame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

255 See, for example, David Wright, *Downs: The History of a Disability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Michael Rembis, Catherine J. Kudlick, and Kim E. Nielsen, *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

256 See Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

257 See, for example, Amy Erdman Farrell, *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

the mentally handicapped and other undesirables, was practiced in ways that left them with the shame of being unrecognized outsiders. However, the emergence of a postmodern Western society entailed a critique of both social categorizations and cultural, religious, and social power plays, and the oppression inherent in these. New values, such as fluidity, change, and the freedom to construct and stage one's life according to one's own ideals, emerged alongside new ways of both constructing, conceptualizing, and evaluating, for example, sex and gender, the individual versus the collective, and of desirables and undesirables.[258]

However, the social disciplining of the individual has not disappeared. It has only shifted and changed into greater complexity and unpredictability. Thus, the experience of increased subjective freedom to stage the identity of the embodied self now comes at a price. In a fluid and shifting society, the many options for identification may become blurred. The flip-side of increased subjective freedom may then turn into an experience of an increased lack of belonging and identity. The complexity of different and potentially shaming expectations can also be experienced as more difficult to handle in a fast and fluid society. The outcome of this is that the potential for shaming increases when social unpredictability increases. This point is closely linked to how we have described shame as a clash of contexts of agency: the insecurity about the extent to which you share the context and conditions for agency with others in a way that can recognize the intentional direction of your own projects and aims may grow.

Furthermore, the virtual society renders the vulnerable self exposed through social media and without protection. Through channels on the internet, snapshots of a teenage boy or girl in a compromised bodily situation may be globally shared, without consent or the chance to be retrieved. In the virtual society, the possibility of being bodily exposed and shamed is an ever-present disciplining threat. The recognition that, for example, compromising photos are "out there" represents a global restriction of the resources available for staging and controlling the embodied self and

258 For an introduction to the fluidity of postmodern society, see, for example, Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005); *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

its place in the world. Social media represents possibilities for continuous exposure to social disciplining of the embodied self and renders it vulnerable to unpredictable and severe demeaning, behaviour degradation, and shaming. Thus, the shame of being exposed, or being under the continuous threat of being exposed, is very much present. Protective strategies, such as hiding from shame, are made more difficult in the virtual society.

Phenomenological characteristics

The movements of shame and the relational body

In the following, we will briefly discuss the phenomenological characteristics of different types of body shame. We will follow the optic presented above and distinguish between the mechanics of shame, the socio-cultural context of shame and, finally, the consequences of culturally embedded and embodied shame.

We have argued that shame is a part of a composite cluster of inter-related affective, emotional, and cognitive abilities that makes possible the complexity of human identity, interactions, and relationships. This evolutionally developed and socially constructed architecture of the self expresses its desires, needs, and orientations through embodied agency within a complex web of material, social, and relational structures. Shame may be our response when our intentional agency, our way of expressing ourselves in the world, is interrupted by, for example, being restricted, scorned, devaluated or labeled as unwanted. In such cases, shame appears as a culturally formed protective response when the vulnerable self-defining intentional agency is threatened in a specific cultural context. As such, it connects our personal, individual, and embodied experience with the social world in which we are embedded.

Accordingly, the formation of embodied selfhood and identity through intentional agency entails both an unescapable relationality and sociality through embodied interactions with others. As we stated above, shame is a response that reveals the embodied self as fragile, vulnerable, and exposed to others. We cannot avoid being seen by others, and their evaluation of how we intentionally construe ourselves matters to us. When met with devaluation or scorn, a subject may certainly isolate itself from

others in shame, thus protecting the vulnerable self from further devaluation. However, such responses only reinforce our point: a shameful retreat is necessary because the gaze of the other matters to us. If it did not matter, protective measures would not be necessary.

In other words, shame reveals dynamic and identity-structuring movements of the lived body.[259] As we have attempted to show above, the self is constituted and formed in a complex interplay between the subject and its relations. It is our way of becoming and being-in-the-world. Through sociality, by taking on different roles and partaking in different social groups, we seek to maintain and fulfil our basic need for relationality. The first movement revealed in shame responses reveals this need for relationality and sociality. The interruption of shame through the experience of falling short in someone's eyes reminds us that they are not indifferent to us. It is in this relation to the other that the lived body is constructed; we are because of the Other. Thus, shame is a reminder or an affirmation of the constitutive relationality and closeness of the lived body. The second movement entailed in shame is the sudden shameful interruption when we experience that our intentional agency somehow falls short under the gaze of those to whom we owe our existence. Here, the need for establishing a protective distance is predictable. By moving away and establishing strategies of projection, hiding, or isolation, or just by living through the experience of shame, the embodied self can reaffirm itself as a valuable part of the relational web to which it belongs.

The success of these movements of shame hinges, on the one hand, on the severity of the structural and social conditions that cause shame and, on the other hand, on the personal resources that a person has to cope with shame responses.[260] As shown above, sometimes shame responses may become altogether toxic and incapacitating, freezing a person in a movement that makes him or her unable to handle shame in a way that can remedy and re-situate the lived body within a valuable and supportive relational and social network.

---

259 See, for example, Luna Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, (Blue Ridge Summit: Lexington Books, 2015), xv f.

260 See on shame-proneness above pp. 88–89.

Preliminary position: body shame

Luna Dolezal's book *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism and the Culturally Shaped Body* gives a valuable contribution to the understanding of body shame.[261] Some of the themes she presents work well as a backdrop for the understanding of body shame we develop here. As a phenomenologist, Dolezal takes the lived body as her starting point. All forms of shame are manifested and experienced through the body. However, of particular interest to Dolezal are experiences of shame that explicitly arise as a result of how the body is perceived. This approach allows us to repeat an important distinction.

As mentioned above, shame can be experienced through the body in many ways. As embodied selves, deeply seated in a contextual web of relational, social, and material structures, the body is simply our only way of experiencing or – for that matter – being-in-the-world. That does not mean that we are shamed because of the body; we only experience it through the body. When we feel ashamed because our lack of parenting skills has become the talk of the neighborhood, it is not our body that is shamed, but our actions or skills. But as we meet our neighbor's gaze in the street, we may experience the bodily manifestations of shame through our avoiding gaze and burning cheeks.

However, shame experienced because of the body has an altogether different structure than the one just described. On the one hand, we cannot escape experiencing shame through our bodies as embodied selves. To be ashamed because of how our body is socially perceived drives a wedge between our subjective bodily presence and the body as an object that falls short of, for example, aesthetic or moral value. It is essential to note the push and pull forces at play in bodily shame. We are our bodies; to be an embodied being constitutes what it is to be a person present in the world. Thus, the subjective experience of being embodied negates the traditional conception of body and mind as separate instances or entities and pulls them together as one experiencing entity. We simply do not exist in any other way than as experiencing bodily presences; we are bodies among bodies.

261 Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*.

On the other hand, body shame singles out the body as an object for evaluation. Thus, body shame pulls the body as an object away from the embodied self in a variety of ways. Sometimes, it is the very separation and objectification of the body that is perceived as a shameful loss of the self, as in the objectifying sexual gaze. At other times, it may be the subject itself that objectifies its own body because the shame of the body threatens to rupture the self through deep and toxic shame. Thus, shame manifests itself in various movements. Suffice to say, at this point, the wedge between the body as subject and object puts the experiencing body in a situation of opposing needs and concomitant movements: the need to be itself as embodied, and the need for distance to the shameful objectified body.

Body shame and intersubjectivity

Our definition of shame entails that shame – including body shame – is an interruption or a full rupture of the intended objectives of the self. Such interruption seems to rest on at least two premises. The first premise is that someone or something interrupts us. Accordingly, body shame entails both subjectivity and intersubjectivity: we are bodies among bodies. As embodied subjects expressing our intentional objects through agency, we are therefore always under the gaze of the other (actual or not). However, a subject may certainly be hindered or barred from realizing intentional objects through agency without being bodily shamed. Thus, different contextual restraints may lead to a redefinition of agency.

The many years of imprisonment that Nelson Mandela endured on Robben Island made it difficult for him to exert agency according to his former objectives. But it is not likely that it led to shame. Although Mandela's body suffered imprisonment, his black body became a symbol of the oppressive racial apartheid of South African politics. But it was not the exposure of his black body that was at fault. In the eyes of his peers, his black body symbolized the fight for freedom and justice. Similarly, the widespread "Black Lives Matter" campaign in the United States also uses the black body as a symbol in the struggle for equality. There is also a parallel to the aforementioned "shameless Arabian daughters" who

stood proud on Norwegian national television and exposed their faces without traditional Muslim headwear. In all three examples, the black or the unveiled face symbolizes the fight against shame. So, even though Mandela's project had to be altered due to contextual restraints, his black body imprisoned by white men became a beacon of hope and provided motivation for continuing the struggle for equality and freedom in South Africa. Here, the lack of shame corresponds with the coherence between Mandela's agency and that of his peers. This congruence shielded his imprisoned body from shame.

In the case of Bill Clinton, however, the exposure of shame due to his sexual relations with the young intern Monica Lewinsky was something the whole world could follow on national television. His shame was, at least partly, tied to his bodily desires, as they were exposed and judged as leading to agency and actions not befitting a sitting president. The exposure of his infidelity, the unethical use of his power as president and, lastly, his lying on national television, stood in stark contrast to the commonly held expectations as to what kind of objectives are befitting for a person holding the most powerful office in the world. Clinton's acts revealed a gap between contexts of agency: his acts, values, and lack of virtue cast doubt about the moral integrity required of a president. Thus, by giving in to his bodily desires, Clinton revealed a character that suggested either a shameful lack of control over his bodily desires or simply that he did not adhere to common ethical standards of fidelity. Moreover, being exposed as a person who lied under oath and used power for his own pleasure enhanced the impression of incongruence. Being exposed on national television as a liar, in full contradiction with the values and virtues of his powerful office, released shame responses.

To sum up, the first premise of body shame presupposes that the agency of the lived body is always exerted in the context of other bodies within a network of normative frameworks. Shame emerges or appears when bodies exist in some kind of incongruence because intentionality is always embodied.

The second premise is that the interruption or rupture of the intended objectives of the lived body is caused by someone who matters to us in some respect. As we suggested above, shame entails various movements;

it recognizes that we need the other. Therefore, we avoid, withdraw, or hide our shame from the other when our bodies, lives, or acts fall short and are experienced as incongruent with those of others. However, as contexts may differ, so will the many empirical manifestations of the movements of shame. Examples of intense body shame can, for example, be found in narratives from concentration camps during World War II. They describe the shame of being bodily degraded by a tattooed number on the wrist, to be exposed to the unfathomable suffering of fellow men, or to be the body that survived among the many dead bodies of women and children.[262] For the victims of the Holocaust, it is probably absurd to claim that the Kapos and the soldiers mattered to them in a positive sense. However, it is in the identification of the others as lived bodies, no different from themselves, that shame can arise. If the abuse and brutality of Kapos and soldiers were the actions of “mad men” or “monsters,” shame would probably have had no place. Primo Levy struggled until his death with this question. In his final book, *The Drowned and the Saved*, he finally concludes, “They were made of the same cloth as we, they were average human beings, averagely intelligent, averagely wicked: save the exceptions, they were not monsters, they had our faces, but they had been reared badly.”[263]

Our point is that other people always matter to us because they are the ones in whose faces and in whose actions we can read our own value as lived bodies. Being reduced to undesirable objects that can be subjected to bodily punishment, torture, or death without consequence, is to be reduced to an object that holds no, or only negative, value. In this respect, being a body among bodies exposes both the vulnerability to be shamed and the power to shame. The acknowledgment of being a body among bodies, of sharing the faces of victims and oppressors, is, at the same time, an acknowledgment of the shameful possibility that the roles could have been reversed in a given context.

---

262 Todorov, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps*; Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*; Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*; Arne Johan Vetlesen, “A Case for Resentment: Jean Améry Versus Primo Levi,” *Journal of Human Rights* 5, no. 1 (2006).

263 Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 202.

Examples such as these raise an essential question: Is body shame always heteronomous, that is, does body shame always have its origin in the demeaning gaze of the other? We have already suggested that shame may occur even though the other is not present. Thus, the internalized gaze of the other may be felt even though there is actually nobody looking. We have further pointed out that late-modern society may represent a disciplining panopticon that renders the body in a situation of constant threat and uncontrollable exposure, and thus makes hiding from the gaze of the other very difficult.

Deonna et al. criticize the well-established hypothesis that shame is a heteronomous emotion.[264] They define shame as the feeling of our being incapable of honoring even minimally the demands entailed by self-relevant values.[265] To restore the moral relevance of shame, they attempt to redeem the emotion of shame from what they call the two dogmas that paint shame as both a social and an ugly emotion.[266] We shall not follow their arguments in detail here, as we will return to their argumentation in the chapter on morality and shame. Suffice to say, at this point, their analysis of heteronomous shame entails that such shame falls short as a moral response. At best, it may serve as a useful social sensibility.[267] Shame can only be a morally relevant response when we realize that we fall short of moral standards and values we have autonomously set for ourselves. Therefore, heteronomous shame falls short as a morally relevant response because it is caused by a recognition of falling short of standards that others have impressed upon us. Dolezal rightly comments that Deonna et al. seem to have forgotten that values are embodied in a complex web of relations and values:

> … there is no meaningful way to keep distinct what one feels and thinks in relation to oneself without reference to the intersubjective realm and the broader milieu. Even though shame can arise in one's own eyes, the primary locus of shame is social, as Charles Taylor argues. Values and norms do not appear out

264 This question will be addressed further in the chapter on shame and morality.

265 Julien A. Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno, and Fabrice Teroni, *In Defense of Shame: The Faces of an Emotion* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 125.

266 Ibid., 21–66.

267 Ibid., 35ff.

> of nowhere, they are constituted and continuously modified by relations of embodied social interaction.[268]

The aforementioned dynamic movements of shame indicate that shame is always a movement towards or away from someone that somehow matters to us. It is also a movement towards or away within a specific constitutive context that defines both the need for shameful movement as well as strategies for movement. The social value attributed to a specific body entails, for example, contextually defined and shared bodily ideals that a specific body is compared to, to which it is accepted as valuable or falls short. Hence, attempts to configure the body as an autonomous entity entail a reductionistic abstraction that loses sight of the complexity of embodied life.

One may, nevertheless, argue that being contextually embedded does not entail the impossibility of setting your own values, or choosing to act accordingly or not, and therefore being ashamed of not living up to your own ideals. The ability to create such a room for the autonomous self is parallel to Elisabeth Benkhe who calls for kinaesthetic awareness as a way of finding ethically sound ways of bodily presence in the context of the other.[269] Thus, it is not so much about finding an autonomous space of freedom between disciplining forces, such as nature and culture. Instead, it is about finding bodily awareness or ethical values to adhere to within the complex and heteronomous web of sociality. Accordingly, at this point, Deonna et al.'s claim about shame's moral relevance holds some merit. However, it is an autonomy well-established and qualified within the borders of a heteronomous context. This obviously entails a redefinition of the concept of autonomy that places it well outside, for example, the Kantian view of autonomy. Such a redefinition is not without merit and has been researched from several perspectives in the feminist tradition.[270] We will return to some aspects regarding this topic in the chapter on shame and morality.

---

268 Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, 5.

269 Elizabeth A Behnke, "The socially shaped body and the critique of corporeal experience," in *Sartre on the body*, 231–255, ed. Katherine J. Morris (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

270 See Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, *Relational Autonomy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Body shame: bodies among bodies

Experiences of shame, both in the body and because of the body, articulate themselves in the context of others (actual or not) within complex and normatively framed contexts. Experiences of body shame may, therefore, serve as a map of the relational and social topography between the embodied self and the context. According to Dolezal, reading the social manifestations of body shame may, for example, contribute to our understanding of how the phenomenological primacy of the lived body is shaped and formed into a social and political body by external forces and demands.[271] Thus a phenomenological discussion of shame does not need to take into consideration only the trivial insight that the shame of any lived body is experienced in a specific context. It also needs to take into consideration the contextual complexity and pervasiveness of the shaping push and pull forces within which responses of shame manifest themselves. As we will show in the forthcoming chapter on religion, we see in shame responses the body withdraw, avoid, buckle, and change because of external pressure from powerful social, religious, cultural, and institutional norms and expectations. Thus, an empirically adequate phenomenology of body shame must balance between two pitfalls. First, a one-eyed focus on the essence of human bodily experience that loses sight of the imprint of history, culture, and sociality, and, second, a position where the embodied self is locked in totalitarian contexts without opportunities to, for example, take back a body that is held hostage by toxic shame.

An exclusive focus on essential bodily experience does not offer the necessary resources to explain the variations in shame experiences. It is by taking the situatedness of the shamed embodied self into consideration that the experience may be analyzed, but also remedied. For a young man to both understand and solve his experience of body shame because of his lack of a muscle-toned athletic body, knowledge of both the normative ideals of the body as well as the social mechanisms of body shame are necessary. On the other hand, when the emphasis on the context becomes too heavy or is the only one available, we lose the resources to explain

---

271 Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, IX.

how even all-encompassing and toxic experiences of body shame can be resolved or worked on through individual effort. We believe there are ways out of body shame, even in the most toxic of contexts. It is the first premise of any therapeutic effort to support victims of abuse that have to deal with the experience of having a dirty and shameful body, that they possess personal resources that can help them cope with the situation. Overcoming shame is not only about facilitating shifts to more positive and liberating contexts. It is also about finding and believing in the transcending powers of the embodied self itself within the limitations and potential of contextual situatedness, and engaging these powers in an ongoing process of complex contextual self-embodiment that can transcend this shame.

Feminist phenomenologist Shannon Sullivan suggests a road between these pitfalls. She borrows the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey's term *transaction* to unfold this co-constitutive relationship between entities entering into an exchange or a relationship.[272] She aims to avoid atomistic and compartmentalizing conceptions that misconstrue the co-constitutive and mutual impact that humans have on each other. Human transactional corporeality includes the physical, the mental, the social, and the cultural dimensions of human life; it is open, permeable, and in constant shift. Thus, bodies are neither matter sealed off from culture or matter imprinted with the meaning of the surrounding culture. Bodies transact, they are activities co-constituted and co-existing in an open-ended and permeable dynamic relationship with context. Thus, there are no bodies and no corporeality in itself. What is essential in our context is her insistence on the co-constitutiveness and mutual influence of bodies in context – in all dimensions. Thus, there is always movement and change.

The abovementioned phenomenologist, Elisabeth Benkhe, holds that by strengthening the awareness of the body, we will be able to establish a position of critique and reeducation of bodily experiences, such as body shame, within the shaping forces of nature and culture. It is not so much about creating a room of freedom as it is about strengthening the internal

272 Shannon Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 1.

shaping forces within the embodied self as a counterweight against the external shaping forces. Thus, bodily awareness helps us to identify, take back, and strengthen the internal forces in our ongoing embodied self-formation. According to Benkhe, the body is neither a ready-made natural physical object, nor a culturally fully defined object, but "… an ongoing style of kinaesthetic self-shaping and situational engagement."[273] The way forward is to retrieve one's kinaesthetic life from its anonymity and take further responsibility for how our bodies are shaped; it is about reeducating and claiming new ownership of the body. Our habitual way of making our bodies known in the world may, for example, be restricted because of the experience of shame. Through the movement of shame, we may take protective or evasive measures to protect our vulnerable embodied self from further exposure. Shameful bodies tend to hide and become small or invisible, or to hide behind aggressive or tough appearances. However, through kinaesthetic awareness, one may be able to establish a position where one can both recognize and even reeducate the strategies of the shameful body. Thus, self-awareness may enable us to identify protective bodily habits that function negatively or add to objectification, either as a result of shame or as the reason for shame due to the inter-kinaesthetic dynamics between embodied selves.[274]

Benkhe's analysis of kinaesthetic consciousness and awareness may certainly play a role as a counterweight against the experience of embodied shame. You may, for example, become aware of your kinaesthetic presence, the way your body shrinks back, withdraws, or closes off the intersubjective space in shame, for example, when listening to a colleague talk about being bullied in your workplace, when no one – including yourself – tried to stop it, and through bodily awareness, you may be able to find other forms of bodily presence that do not add to the hurt and isolation of the one telling the story. However, in her tentative phenomenological analysis of the socially shaped body, she does not take fully into account how the varying powers of external shaping forces may, at least to some extent, support or work against bodily awareness. It is important

273 Behnke, "The socially shaped body and the critique of corporeal experience," in *Sartre on the body*, 233.
274 Ibid., 247f.

not to underestimate the specificity and complexity of the disciplining and shaping forces at play in body shame. The need for protective strategies may be both imprinted in our DNA and embedded in culturally shaped responses. For the person who has been a victim of continuous bullying or abuse since childhood, the neurological and social imprint on kinaesthetic presence may be far more substantial, protective, and challenging to become aware of. It may also be far more difficult to interpret as having to do with, for example, shame, guilt, and fear, and, therefore, ultimately more difficult to understand and eventually reclaim and take control of. Thus, there is a certain correlation between the disciplining force of the contextual imprint, the personal resources of the self and other available resources, and the possibility of kinaesthetic awareness and what Benkhe calls kinaesthetic self-control. Thus, although a given context may both confirm and support an agent's bodily awareness, intentions, and acts, another agent, with different intentions and acts, may find the same context as intimidating, oppressive and shame-inducing as his or her intentions and acts are deemed as being without value. In the complex interplay of agents and contexts, we are disciplined as well as disciplining.

The invisible flow of the lived body

The above discussion of shame and bodily awareness puts us in a position to elicit another helpful distinction: body shame is tightly connected to both the visibility and invisibility of the body. This topic is also discussed by Dolezal and will be further elaborated in our discussion below on different forms of exposed bodies. Dolezal draws heavily on both E. Husserl and M. Merleau-Ponty when she stresses the body as a "double-sided affair."[275] According to her, Husserl identifies four characteristic traits of the lived body in comparison to other material objects. First, the body is both constituted and limited through its sensitivity. We sense heat and cold through our bodies, and this sensitivity is absent in other innate objects. Secondly, the body moves as a spontaneous organ of the

275 Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, 118ff.

will. Thirdly, the body is the point from where all spatial movements are assessed. What is far away or close, large or small, has the spatial body as its point of reference. And lastly, the body is the organ of perception that makes the experience of the external world possible. Thus, through the body we experience the world as spatial objects in relation to our own bodies.

According to Dolezal, Merleau-Ponty adds significant insight into this Husserlian phenomenology of the body.[276] What the above description leaves open is how intentional consciousness moves the body. If the lived body is constitutional for perception, action, and movement in the external world, the lived body is infused with consciousness and intentionality and cannot be restricted to cognitive processes. In a sense, the lived body is intentional: it always holds a stance or a posture towards what is going on in a specific context. Thus, the body as subjectivity, according to Dolezal, is always geared towards possible action and engagement in the world. Furthermore, the intentionality of the lived body, or what Merleau-Ponty calls motor intentionality, perceives the world around not only in spatial orientation but also in pre-reflective sense as part of the former experience of body-defining engagement and acts. The trained mechanic does not scrutinize a ten millimeter nut and cognitively decide to reach out for a ten millimeter spanner. He just reaches out and grabs the spanner. His body knows what to do. Further, he does not reflect over the fact that he holds the spanner in his hand and needs to turn it counterclockwise in order to loosen the nut. He just reaches out, attaches the spanner, and loosens the nut. Thus, through repeated experience, the body has developed a body schema:

> The body schema is a system of motor and postural functions that are in constant operation below the level of self-conscious intentionality. In the most basic sense, the body schema is the subject's non-cognitive awareness of its position, orientation, and movement.[277]

276 Ibid., 21ff.
277 Ibid., 22.

Through repeated postures and motility, the lived body has developed tacit skills and techniques formed as habits in the body (habit body), that kick into action in a context where renewed engagement or action is possible. However, it does not only regulate actions. It also envelops and transforms external objects into extensions of the body. The spanner, an innate external object, becomes pre-reflectively an extension of the hand of the lived body. Thus, through repeated habitual action, the lived body not only forms schemes and habits that regulate posture, stance, and action towards external objects in the context. It is in constant relation to the external world and thereby dissolves the distinction between the subjective and the objective, between external and internal world, through the incorporation of objects as extensions of the subjective, lived body.[278] Dolezal underscores that this is not a layer of ability, habitually formed skills, or series of cognitive choices of actions. Rather, it is a necessary permanent condition of being an embodied self in the world. Thus, the lived body is both available and invisible. It is available in the sense that it is the center for sensing, perceiving, moving, and acting in the spatial world. Further, it is also invisible, or absent, or transparent, as the body is not noticed when it interacts successfully with the world. When a skilled athlete throws a javelin in one fluid and successful motion, there is no consciousness or awareness of the movement of the body nor the javelin. There is just the “flow of equilibrium” with the surroundings.[279] Or, in a more mundane sense, when we skillfully negotiate the morning traffic while we are thinking through our schedule for the day, the steering wheel, the clutch, and the brakes become extensions of the unconscious flow of movements of the lived body.

Body visibility as dysfunction

The habits of the lived body render both the body and its extensions invisible for the subject as they recede from awareness and into the automated

278 For more on the actual acquisition of habitual skills, se ibid., 23 f. and Hubert L. Dreyfus and Stuart E. Dreyfus, “The Challenge of Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Embodiment for Cognitive Science,” *Perspectives on Embodiment: The Intersections of Nature and Culture* (1999).

279 Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, 25.

body-flow of the skilled subject's unconsciousness. However, the body may become visible or attract awareness again for several reasons.[280] The first and most obvious is the long and arduous process in which we acquire different skills. A young aspiring javelin thrower is very much aware of his awkward gait, the unfamiliar heft of the javelin, and finally, the unbalanced throw that sends him off balance. The same javelin thrower must bring to attention the different parts of the art of throwing a javelin in order to enhance his skills: the steps, the heft, and the snap of the body as the javelin is thrown. Already automated habits of the body can also be interrupted and made visible, both temporarily or permanently. Temporary visibility occurs, for example, when the body becomes visible through some sort of failure to perform the habit in question. When the skilled javelin thrower feels the pain rip through his tendons and muscles, he certainly becomes aware of his shoulder not being up to the task until his injury is healed. Thus, body flow is interrupted as the body becomes a visible obstacle between the body and the external world.

Permanent visibility occurs when former body habits become impossible. Chronic illness leading to a loss of formerly automated bodily functions may serve as an example, although a change in body functions may, over time, lead to acquisition and automation of motor skills substituting the loss. However, permanent neurological changes severing and disrupting the possibility of former body habits, as well as the acquisition of new automated body habits, show how body fluidity is lost when one has to rely on cognition to control bodily motility. Thus, we can argue that cognition introduces an alienating objectification that separates the external world and the self, especially when it is introduced to compensate for the loss of habitual fluid motility.[281]

---

280 Ibid., 27ff.

281 Of course, there is much more to be said about the specifics of the interruption of the invisible body. For further reading, see, for example, Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). See also Debra Gimlin, "The absent body project: Cosmetic surgery as a response to bodily dys-appearance," *Sociology* 40, no. 4 (2006), 699–716. The athlete's art of working on the tasks at hand; to keep sharp focus on technique, body posture breathing, in other words separating the elements of fluid motion, necessitates a further differentiation of the concept of bodily visibility/invisibility. However, in this context, the above differentiation will have to suffice.

Anthropologist Thomas Csordas distinguishes between the *dis-appearance* and the *dys-appearance* of the body.[282] The intentional embodied self, is in a state of equilibrium with its surroundings, experiences, moves, and acts through automated responses – at least to a certain extent. In this state, the intentional body is not interrupted or hindered through lack of ability or sudden contextual restraints that impede or block expressions of bodily habits. The body and the external objects through which these habits are expressed remain in a state of available invisibility. But when the habits of the body are interrupted, temporarily or permanently, the automated equilibrium between the embodied self and the external world is lost as we become aware of the failure of the body to perform as usual. Hence, the body *dys-appears*: it becomes visible in its dysfunction, either through lack of bodily ability or because external factors in some way or for some reason hinder or delimit habitual action. According to Dolezal, the body seeks equilibrium with its surroundings by constantly trying "to avoid the intrusion of the body into awareness through discomfort and pain."[283] However, this equilibrium is basically a state of affairs between the motor-intentionality of the embodied self and the external world.

Body visibility and body shame

The above paragraphs about body awareness provide a necessary backdrop for understanding what is at play in body shame. The acquirement of skills and bodily responses is contextually tuned in order to reach the mentioned equilibrium. However, the dys-appearance and objectification of the body is not necessarily caused by a dysfunction of an acquired body-habit itself. It may appear because the actual body habit in a specific context no longer serves to enhance equilibrium. Thereby,

282 Thomas J. Csordas, "Introduction: The Body as Representation and Being-in-the-World," in *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, edited by Thomas J. Csordas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 8 ff. For a discussion of Csordas' Merleau-Ponty-inspired account of embodiment and an introduction to alternative accounts of the embodied self, see Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Identity: The History, Theory, and Practice of Psychological Anthropology*, revised and updated, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 187ff.

283 Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, 29.

the objectification serves to highlight the dysfunctionality of the bodily habit. Dolezal therefore claims, in our view rightly, that any phenomenological account of the body must take into consideration the context in which an embodied self is constituted and exists.[284]

We have previously underscored that the social shaping of the embodied self is constituted in a rather complex web of relations and social and material structures. As bodies, we are always seen or sensed by someone, and thus objectified, as we see, sense and objectify others. This objectification is part of our relational constitution as embodied selves; we are experiencing, perceiving, moving and acting bodies among other experiencing, perceiving, moving and acting bodies. This fact does not have to entail body shame, but it is a fundamental premise for being able to experience body shame.[285]

We have argued that body shame entails several movements – a movement towards as a realization that others matter to us, and a movement away as we need to protect our body from being seen because others matter to us. To this point, we can now add the above insight that body shame entails a dys-appearance and objectification of the body. Our bodies, or parts of our bodies, are not merely our way of being-in-the-world. In situations of shame, they are objectified and seen through the eyes of others as violating spoken or unspoken standards, norms, or rules of aesthetic, social or ethical value, comportment, or action.[286] Hence, it makes sense to speak of shame as related to the dys-appearance that is not tied to disruption of body flow only, but also to disruption of the social flow of the embodied subject.

Acute body shame as regulation

The tension between the need for both closeness and distance can be solved in various ways, depending on the severity of body shame. One

284 Ibid., 32.

285 We are aware of leaving out a far more detailed discussion at this point. Dolezal draws up a larger and more detailed map of these elements than we do here. For further references, see ibid., 35ff.

286 Ibid., 41.

can work through the experience of body shame and thus solve the tension and reaffirm and secure one's standing. One may also move away and protect the body and the self through protective strategies, such as disguise or distance. However, all solutions may come at a price: hiding through disguise or moving away may ameliorate the experience of shame. However, in a society where one is always under the threat of being bodily seen, such a strategy becomes less successful. Moreover, a strategy that disguises or removes the embodied self from the context where it belongs creates a protected gap between the actual self and the real self.[287] Thus, hiding may end up being a strategy that only partially fulfills the intention but, far more seriously, it also moves the embodied self into a position where the need to resolve and belong cannot be met. In order to hide, the subject ends up using resources to maintain the false self instead of developing the true self. Thus, the tension between the described opposing needs of closeness and distance is neither met nor solved. They are merely dealt with in a preliminary and possibly harmful way.

In this context, Dolezal, like many others, draws a line between acute and chronic body shame.[288] Acute body shame comes in many variations, often tied to how the body is comported or held, functions, or appears. Acute body shame may appear quickly and pass quickly. Losing your towel when changing to swimming trunks may, in some contexts and for some individuals, elicit an experience of shame over being seen in a compromising situation. An insecure teenager would probably experience it differently than a seasoned nudist. The shame experience may also vary due to context: if the unfortunate slip happened at a nudist beach, it would be different from the same thing happening by the swimming pool at your high school. Thus, acute body shame relates not only to the subject's vulnerability to shame but also to the varying values or norms embedded in varying contexts. Acute body shame may, as other forms of acute shame, serve a disciplining and regulating role in upholding the rules and norms of society.

287 Mesel, *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep*, 133ff.

288 Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, 7ff.

However, some factors may muddle the use of body shame for regulating bodily behavior. Experiencing shame under the gaze of the other swimmers as you walk into a public pool without swimming trunks, accidentally or as part of a bet with your school buddies, may remind you of having crossed a line for what kind of bodily behavior is expected in public pools. The chance is that you will adhere to these regulations in the future to avoid being shamed. Thus, it may serve to uphold the rules and affirm for the other guests that in a public pool, one does not swim naked. This example underscores our previous point about how contexts are deeply saturated with values and disciplining forces. Formal or informal regulations may, on the one hand, serve to secure both freedom and protection against, for example, shamelessness. On the other hand, they may be tacitly oppressive and hinder or interrupt bodily agency by promoting body shame. Thus, if we view body shame as a way of regulating bodily behavior, functions, and ideals, without exposing these regulations to extensive critique, we may easily end up by using body shame as a means to exert implicit or explicit power or domination. In order to accept such regulation, we need to both identify and discuss publicly whether we find these dimensions ethically sound. Let us exemplify: If a medical doctor or a medical student, due to religious regulations, is shamed by, and therefore refuses to treat, patients of the other sex, or patients with diseases related to sexual activity or substance abuse (such as gonorrhea, or cirrhosis of the liver), we find it unacceptable.[289] Such shame is not valid for governing professional behavior. Even though we accept that some religious groups have a right to uphold regulations concerning sex and alcohol as part of their autonomy within a Western democracy, it is not applicable in the context of public health care, as it serves to enhance the body shame of patients that are already in a vulnerable and possibly shameful position.[290] As citizens, we partake in many contexts, with both overlapping and contradicting rules, values, and regulations. These, both tacitly and more explicitly, exert a socializing power on our bodies within these

289 Sophie LM Strickland, "Conscientious objection in medical students: a questionnaire survey," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 38, no. 1 (2012).

290 Our point is not to discuss the right of health personnel to make conscious objections, but to offer a relevant example for discussion.

contexts. Michel Foucault uses the concept *panopticism* as a metaphor for the organization of power in modern society: We are always seen, and the possibility of always being seen does something to us.[291] The disciplining power of always being watched turns us into our own watchers. We are not only disciplined, but also tacitly carry with us the disciplining and internalized power of rules, regulations, and values. Foucault's point is not that the modern organization of power is good or bad. He merely makes an observation about the panoptic mechanics of power in modern society. In a postmodern society, contexts, values, ideals, and regulations are individualized, pluralized, virtualized, and embodied (and thus seen) at an increasing pace. The ability to identify, morally as well as politically, and evaluate the inherent powers at play in the contextual map of which the postmodern embodied self finds itself thus becomes increasingly complex and challenging.

As mentioned above, since the social construction of the embodied self is an ongoing process, provisionality and permeability are existential characteristics of the embodied self: We live, breathe, think, socialize, develop and exert agency through our bodies and our skin.[292] An embodied subject's vulnerability to this complexity of normative internal and external forces varies, due not only to their personal resources but also to the degree of formative and normative pressure these forces exert on the embodied subject. Thus, it is important to identify and evaluate these forces to understand the regulating functions of the experience of bodily shame. The often tacitly and inherently normative power struggle expressed through shaming has been a large part of the oppression of both the black body and the female body. In our earlier example, when the shameless Arabian daughters shed their veils on national television, it was a bodily protest against being shamed, because their unveiled faces did not adhere to the culturally and religiously defined Muslim rules for female bodily behavior in Norwegian society.

Thus, even though our evolutionary account of shame suggests that it may serve a regulatory function, both the complexity and the possible

291 Michel Foucault, "Panopticism" from *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, in *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 2, no. 1 (2008).

292 Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism*.

structural oppressiveness inherent in postmodern society force a broader examination of the phenomenon.

Chronic toxic body shame and the shamed body

We have earlier mentioned that both blushing and gaze avoidance can be understood as physiological displays of acute but passing shame. They may be examples of evolutionally developed and socially visible bodily manifestations of the shamed body. Such passing bodily manifestations may even serve useful social functions as they are signs revealing what is at play in a social group.

However, there is substantial empirical evidence supporting the claim that severe body shame over time sets its mark on the body itself.[293] Such chronic body shame is sometimes called pathological shame or pathological body shame. We prefer *chronic toxic body shame* for several reasons. First, pathological body shame suggests that the primary perspective is pathological dysfunction or maladaptation, either as a consequence of external pressure or as an inherent trait.[294] However, even though the perspective of pathology may certainly add to our understanding of certain modes of body shame, we should not reduce it to pathology alone. We have suggested that body shame is, as all forms of shame are, an embodied experience rooted in the architecture of the self and manifested within a complex contextual web of structures and forces. Thus, the individual experience of body shame may certainly be maladaptive and isolate and break down the self in the long run. However, it is certainly a point for discussion if it is the subject's emotional response that is pathological. It is also possible to analyze the consequences of the oppressive pressure of the subject's context as pathological, as it impedes human growth, flourishing, and sustainability.

---

293 van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*; Kirkengen, *Inscribed Bodies: Health Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse*; Joseph Spiegel, *Sexual Abuse of Males. The Sam Model of Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Mesel, *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep*.

294 Cf. Tangney and Dearing. *Shame and Guilt;* Stephen Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

In our view, the use of the concept chronic toxic body shame represents a broader and more precise frame of reference for the analysis of body shame. The word *chronic* suggests that this kind of body shame is firmly established in the embodied self. Rather than being a specific and acute response in a specific situation, chronic toxic body shame becomes a more permanent *modus* for how the body is experienced. Moreover, the word *toxic* suggests that this form of shame exposes the subject to an environment or a state of being that, over time, poisons and denies the subject the ability to realize chosen and intended objects through his or her personal agency. Thus, chronic toxic body shame does not merely interrupt agency through temporary interruptions, such as when acute shame suspends agency in a specific context for short periods. Instead, chronic toxic body shame invades the self. To some extent, it subjects the self to a state of rupture and inability to realize intended objects through voluntary agency. Such internalized and enduring toxic shame may send the embodied self into a more or less permanent exile through strategies of disguise or isolation. Thus, the concept of chronic toxic body shame does not only fit better with our initial definition of shame, it also opens up a broader analytical backdrop for our understanding of both the reasons for and the manifestations of toxic bodily shame.

Chronic toxic body shame may, for example, be observed in children who have been subjected to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA).[295] In severe cases, such abuse does not only leave its mark on the body through permanent neurological changes that exile the embodied self from the contextual and relational resources needed to readjust and develop into a healthy self. It may also render the embodied self to a zone of war where heightened *fight, flight and freeze* responses become the social and psychological default setting. Sexual trauma often imprints both fear and deep toxic and chronic shame over being sexually dirty and destroyed. These imprints or self-evaluations are not easily lifted. The

295 Mesel, *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep*; van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*; Kirkengen, *Inscribed Bodies: Health Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse.*

chance is, instead, that the threat of being exposed pushes the embodied subject into further exile. Thus, the more the abuse becomes the main frame of reference for the self-evaluation of the embodied self, the stronger is the chance that its consequences will manifest as permanent and universal traits. Such an embodied self is not a docile, disciplined body in a Foucauldian sense, but a fighting, frozen, or fleeing body: sometimes tragically disciplined – to the core of the central nervous system – interpreting and scanning any context as a potentially hostile and dangerous environment.

Thus, it makes sense to make a distinction between body shame and the toxic and all-pervasive shame of a shamed body. The shamed body is often experienced and perceived as being sexually assaulted, objectified, dirty, shameful, and always under the threat of being publicly exposed as damaged and morally corrupted. As such, child sexual abuse affects both the body and the self-perception of the body, inscribing this violent interruption of intentional agency not only as neurological imprints in the deeper layers of the brain but also in bodily responses such as body posture, reddening of the skin, eye movement, and fight, flight and freeze responses. Thus, the shamed body may be one of the manifested responses to pain or suffering when the body and the self are attacked severely. The experience and the memory of the other's violent break-in, and the concomitant interruption and destructive rewriting of the victim's original immediate agency as this rewriting is manifested in, for example, physical and psychological pain, dysfunctional sexuality, flashbacks or memories that generate fear, guilt, and shame, may in itself generate further shame, thus fortifying the already toxic environment of the victim's agency. Thus, within a phenomenology of the lived body, as mentioned above, bodily shame does not spill over to the self as if body and self were separate. They are intertwined entities in human life. Embodied life entails that we are bodies. Hence, body shame may develop into a shamed body.

Thus, in our analysis, we want to reserve the concept of the shamed body for the deeper and more troubling bodily imprint that chronic and toxic body shame may leave on an embodied self. In her disturbing book, *Inscribed Bodies,* Anne Louise Kirkengen describes the physical and neurological

imprint that CSA may leave on a victim.[296] These imprints do not only affect the interpretative framework a child has for both restoring and developing a healthy self. They also affect how the body may freeze in the continuous experience of being sexually dirty and scared, always objectified and exposed. These imprints, often forcing the victim into a tragic relational and social exile, not only affect somatic and mental health.[297] They may also freeze bodily posture through constantly downcast eyes and bent body posture – always in hiding, in flight, or in submission. Thus, the manifestations of the toxically shamed body are not responses to a specific experience of being bodily shamed in a specific context. They are, instead, automated responses that reflect the experience of always being under the gaze of the other and always being exposed in a dangerous world. If the world was a dangerous place where relational and social safety and trust were not possible, this response would make sense. This is how it is experienced by the abused child or the victim of violence. Due to the traumatic effects of CSA, the child is, therefore, left in an unsustainable war zone. The movements of shame manifest themselves here as well: the child is left *moving away* from relationality and sociality with scant recourses for resolving the need for flight and hiding. Thus, the possible healing in moving towards relational safety, trust, and openness, are tragically denied for some. As such, CSA is both a physical and a psychological attack on the fragility and dependence of bodily human agency, especially in a child where the need for safety is so paramount for the development of a mature self.

Body shame: differentiations

Bodies can be shamed for many reasons. First, one can experience body shame when the body does not meet standards of bodily perfection, for example, when the body displays features or forms that do not adhere to the prevailing trends and standards of a healthy and muscle-toned

296 Kirkengen, *Inscribed Bodies: Health Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse*.

297 See also Spiegel, *Sexual Abuse of Males. The Sam Model of Theory and Practice*; and van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, 143ff. for an overview of the extensive ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) study carried out by Robert Anda and Vincent Felliti.

body. As embodied selves, the body reveals who we are, and when our body falls short for some reason, our global self may fall short as well.

Second, as a variation of the first, body shame can be tied to the body as a visual manifestation of assumed weakness. As embodied selves, the state of the body may be interpreted as our ability to fulfill our personal objectives and ideals through action. The fat, the unclean, or the self-mutilated body may speak of a lack of self-control. Thus shame may be the response when the body is exposed and reveals a disruption between the assumed objectives that an agent supposedly holds – or should hold – and his or her ability to act accordingly.

Third, one can also experience shame when the body becomes an object for the sexual desire of a voyeur. Such a shame response seems to be tied to what may be called an objectification of the body. For the embodied self, the objectification of the body as a means of pleasure by the other may be experienced as a shameful loss of self, as the body is no longer under the subject's control and determined by aims and intentions chosen by him or herself. In the following, we will unfold these three main types of body shame. As the third differentiation is the most prominent cause of shame discussed in the research literature, we shall elaborate on this especially.

First differentiation: the lacking body as an existential reminder

The first form of body shame is, as mentioned above, tied to the exposure of the, for example, disfigured, the aging, the incontinent, the disease-marked, or the scarred body. These bodies are not the result of personal choices or lifestyle issues. They are the result of accidents, diseases, or the inevitable bodily deterioration over time. These bodily presentations do not meet the current trends in cultural standards of bodily aesthetic perfection. Instead, they symbolize the opposite: the vulnerable and timeworn body, the damaged body, or the body marked by disease. As such, they might remind us of our own vulnerability, imperfection and mortality. According to Dolezal, in Western culture we have

celebrated the human transcendence over our body, and repressed our animal bodily nature:

> As such, shame about the body is particularly powerful in that it disrupts our illusion of transcendence – the notion that we are more than *merely* animals – and reveals our undeniable and imperfect corporeality. The body symbolizes our vulnerability, neediness and ultimate lack of control over our own mortality. Hence it is not surprising that the body, especially when it falls ill or fails us, is a powerful source and site of shame.[298]

Thus, the presence of the vulnerable, timeworn or sick body reminds us not only of our vulnerability and mortality, but it also reveals the impossibility of current ideals of bodily perfection. It throws us back to the existential conditions of human life from which there is no escape and, at the same time, shows the futility of our attempts to escape. In a culture where these existential characteristics of being-in-the-world are shunned and stowed away, embodied manifestations of imperfection and mortality may undoubtedly be experienced as shameful.

Philosopher and trauma theoretician Ronnie Janoff-Bulman suggests that in order to protect our vulnerability from the horrors and tragedies of the world, we tend to uphold false assumptions of our safety in a world where accidents and violence may hit blindly.[299] We assume that even though disasters happen all around us, they will not happen to us. Car accidents, our house burning down, or sexual abuse of our children cannot happen to us because we are somehow protected. Therefore, when others become victims of violence or abuse, we tend to rationalize it by creating narratives that can save these false assumptions: the raped girl has probably been promiscuous, or there is probably some dysfunctionality in the family of the suicide victim. Thus, the price for our need to resituate ourselves in order to establish social distance to those inflicted is often paid by those who have

298 Dolezal, L. "The Phenomenology of Shame in the Clinical Encounter." Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy 18, 567–576 (2015), 569.

299 Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma* (New York: Free Press, 1992); "Assumptive Worlds and the Stress of Traumatic Events: Applications of the Schema Construct," *Social Cognition* 7, no. 2 (1989).

already suffered the loss. When social distance is created through body narratives, as in the example of the raped girl, increased body shame may well be this added cost.

The functions and consequences of this social and psychological phenomenon have also been described in studies of child sexual abuse, especially sexual abuse of boys and men.[300] It seems to be the case here that the abused victims that are already shamefully scarred are often the ones that pay the moral cost of our attempts to save our false assumptions of being protected in a dangerous and unpredictable world. Because being a male victim of sexual abuse does not fit the heteronormative narrative of male sexual dominance, the added cost of increased body shame may be experienced through the social distancing and suspicious watchfulness of others. In other words, the victimized body of male sexual abuse falls shamefully short of the social depictions of what the normal dominant male body is. Thus, the stigma of the abused male is subtler than the stigma of the scarred or burned body, where the imperfection is visibly exposed. Rather, it is an invisible stigma based on the assumption that male sexuality is active and dominant. Thus, being the passive victim of sexual abuse becomes somewhat suspicious, as it runs contrary to this assumption. The stigma of abuse suggests that the victim must be responsible – at least partly – for the abuse, and as such reveals a possibly flawed moral character that may turn them into abusers themselves.[301]

Hence, a moral component is added to body shame. As the victimized body reminds us of our existential condition, we may attempt to save our assumptions of being protected by morally staining the victim and both confirming and adding to the victim's shame of being sexually dirty, objectified, and partly guilty.[302]

---

300 See Mesel, *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep*.

301 Often referred to as the Vampire syndrome. See ibid., 124ff.

302 For further elaborations of this, we may point to studies that identify atrocities due to contempt for weakness and vulnerability, as in the work of the Norwegian philosophers Harald Ofstad and Arne Johan Vetlesen.

Second differentiation: when the body reveals the weakness of the will

As the human mode of being in the world is one of embedded and embodied presence, we assert, express, and define ourselves through our bodies as the expressive space we hold in the world. As we saw above, we are bodies that interact – or transact – in a complex web of other bodies, social and material structures, culture, and history.[303] We construe and experience our bodies through habits and actions, both forming and being formed by the environment of which we are a part. Thus, our bodies tell our story, both through the habits of the body and through bodily actions. As bodies, we sing or dance, and we discuss and gesticulate. The clothing of our bodies signals who we are. Some bodies are sculpted through intensive body-work or cosmetic surgery. Some use their skin as canvases of art, telling stories of identity, belonging, or personal history. The athletic and fit body dressed in a running outfit tells at least parts of the story the embodied self wants to be told. Hence, we interact, communicate, and interpret both our own objectives and the objectives of the other through our bodies. Our bodies are meant to be read because our bodies talk. But their talk is embedded, forming and formed in the social and material structures they are a part of. In this sense, the language of the body is articulated within liberating or repressing frames of context.[304] The black body, the female or the male body, the sexually assertive or the sexually abused body, the slim or the fat body are all expressed within a context of aesthetic, social, and moral evaluation and ranking.

This contextually and culturally determined designation of social, aesthetic or moral value to the different bodily representations opens up for this second differentiation of body shame. Bodies talk, and body-talk is interpreted within specific frameworks. However, someone's personal

---

303 Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism*.

304 In this sense, the language of the body is articulated within liberating or repressing frames of context. Emma Rees, *Talking Bodies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Embodiment, Gender and Identity* (Springer, 2017); Michelle Mary Lelwica, *Shameful Bodies: Religion and the Culture of Physical Improvement*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury, *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Farrell, *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture*.

objectives are not necessarily in accordance with others' interpretations of what the body signals. An example may be the obese or fat body that signals a lack of self-control over bodily desires (to control eating). Nevertheless, the interpretation of this as lacking self-control may be far from the objectives of the acting subject that has a severe weight problem. Thus, being bodily exposed as fat displays an interruption between the objectives of the self and how it is contextually interpreted through the display of the body. In the aesthetic, social and moral hierarchy of body talk, both fatness and lack of control over bodily desires are negatively evaluated. Thus, obesity signals a collapse of one's coherent agency. The ideals of slimness, healthiness, and self-control seem to be substituted with the opposite through overeating, lack of exercise, and lack of self-control, and so on. In other words, the shame of obesity is not only tied to aesthetic or social bodily undesirability. It is also tied to a negative moral evaluation of not controlling but giving in to bodily desires – and thus, to an assumed weakness of the will.

Third differentiation: in the eyes of the other in different contexts

Objectification as commodification

The extraordinary or abnormal body draws our attention through morbid curiosity.[305] One example is the oppressive and sad construction and history of what was called freakery. Earlier, hairy bodies, giants, and little people were displayed as anomalies of nature. Still today, otherness draws the eye. The fact that our gaze is drawn to uncommon bodily features presupposes both a certain kind of objectification and otherness. It is the very act of constituting them as anomalies of nature that makes them accessible to us as objects to be curiously gazed upon.[306] Such an objectivization loses sight of the embodied presence of the other as a person.

305 See Kevin Pinkerton and Shuhua Zhou, "Effects of Morbid Curiosity on Perception, Attention, and Reaction to Bad News," *The University of Alabama McNair Journal* (2008); Suzanne Oosterwijk, "Choosing the Negative: A Behavioral Demonstration of Morbid Curiosity," *PLoS ONE 12, no. 7* (2017).

306 Thomson, *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*.

Whether it is the abnormal or the scarred body that catches our attention or gaze, the mechanism of objectification is much the same. By construing it as otherness, these features are no longer a threat to our own vulnerability. The consequence, however, is that that the embodied self of the other is reduced to a mere object, exposed to the gaze of morbid curiosity or simply objectified indifference. Exposure of bodily otherness in a fluid, transparent, and unpredictable virtual society puts the exposed embodied self in a fragile and vulnerable position likely to cause shame.

The history of freakery also reveals a possibility for handling such body shame. The freak of the travelling circus, whether it was the midget, the giant or the hairy one, went on stage to earn a livelihood. It may well have been the only employment possible. But for the sake of the argument, let us assume that he was a free person choosing the circus life. Accepting a contract where he was to be part of the program alongside tamed animals, clowns, and other circus artists, he also accepted a contractual commodification of himself as a body to be gazed upon. Through his performance, he sells his best asset: his body. As an embodied self, he chose to objectify this asset as something of negotiable value. But when the circus lights died down and the spectators left, he walked back to his trailer no longer as a commodity but as an embodied self. Hopefully, he was treated as a person by his fellow circus artists, not as the commodified freak. One might ask when the vulnerability and possibility for shame would be most prevalent? It follows from the argument above that he would be more vulnerable to shame offstage, where his intended project was no longer posing as a commodified freak to be gazed upon, but rather to be himself.

The point of this little prelude is not to give a simplistic and misguided version of the problematic history of what was pejoratively called freakery. Rather, it is to identify and unfold a specific form of shame by linking the bodily commodification of the circus artist to a more present phenomenon: the bodily commodification of selling sex. What we have so far called the objectification of the exposed body is one of the main causes of body shame, especially female shame. Selling sex may exemplify one important strategy for handling objectification. However, it is essential for us to make clear that this is only part of the picture. We do not take

into account the abusive backgrounds, the trafficking, the street violence, and the traumatizing effects of prostitution in the following analysis. Our point is merely to draw up an example to elicit the above-mentioned shame strategy.

As already argued, objectification entails a reduction of the embodied self. In one sense, being objectified is to lose some control over the embodied self – or the self as body. When a young girl has her digital photo taken in the shower without her consent, and it is distributed on Instagram or other SoMe channels, she loses control both of who sees it and how they see it. Thus, the photo, as an objectification of herself, can be the object of ridicule by classmates or used as a voyeuristic object for persons unknown to her. Others can now define her body as an object of ridicule, sexual object, or of no interest.

Is it possible to take back control? Is there a strategy to reduce the shame of such objectification and self-loss? When a woman decides to – or is forced to – prostitute herself, she accepts/must accept that her body, as part of her embodied self, is commodified and commercialized as a sexual object. Then the buyer is given at least some control of her body within the frames of contractual boundaries related to what kind of sexual services he is offered. In other words, prostitution entails a separation of self and body through willing – or forced –possibly shameful objectification.

Maddy Coy addresses this topic in a research article that explores women's accounts of prostitution, especially how they narrate their lived experience of the body.[307] According to her study, there is great variation in how women selling sex manage the ownership over their body as well as the self/body relationship. This is predictable. One crucial premise for understanding these women's negotiations of bodily ownership is that it often takes place within a context of violence, abuse, and drug addiction. In a situation where corporeal ownership is already taken away through abuse and or/forced prostitution or addiction, the negotiation of the value of the body as a sexual commodity can be construed as one way

307 Maddy Coy, "This Body Which Is Not Mine: The Notion of the Habit Body, Prostitution and (Dis) Embodiment," *Feminist Theory* 10, no. 1 (2009).

of attempting to regain control over a body that is lost through earlier sexual objectification. To take control is to exercise a form of agency in which the embodied self accepts the objectification and commodification of the body. For many of these women, their living conditions have from early on been determined by child abuse, sexual objectification, degradation, and loss of control over the body. Within this oppressive framework, they have been treated and valued as sexual objects constituting harsh and restricted frames for exercising agency and forming habits of agency. According to Coy, many of these women have lost the perception of corporeal ownership through abuse and rape. By claiming some kind of control by being agents of sex work, they reposition, reassert, and exercise agency through the body as their expressive space. However, this attempt to reposition and reassert does not necessarily change either the oppressive framework or the habitual template from which these women exercise their agency. Exercising agency by taking control over the body and by negotiating its value still takes place within the oppressive context of the sex trade. Consequently, even though sexual transactions can be read as negotiations of ownership to the body, and thus may be perceived as acting meaningfully through the body by the woman selling sex, it still reproduces the oppressive framework of objectification and sexual commodification in which the woman fights for control.[308] Hence, the strategy for overcoming shame and regaining agency comes at a high price.

Body shame as disruption and the resources of context

Can the example of a prostitute's attempts to regain ownership of the body through negotiating value add to our preliminary definition and differentiation of shame as manifesting the rupture between the chosen objectives of the self and expressions of agency? We believe it can. However, one needs to bear in mind the initial premise for Coy's analysis: that the women attempting to take control over the body through selling sex do so within an abusive and violent framework that disciplines habits of both reflection and action. This comment underscores a more general

308 Wendy Parkins, "Protesting Like a Girl: Embodiment, Dissent and Feminist Agency," *Feminist Theory* 1, no. 1 (2000).

point: the chosen and intentional (bodily) objectives and the possible accompanying bodily actions of the embodied self are constituted and set within a broad and sometimes complex contextual frame. Thus, the experience of exercising embodied agency through acting in accordance with objectives is both constituted and informed by the given relational, social, and material framework. To repeat an earlier point, the extent to which shame can be overcome is dependent on the impact of this context, as well as the personal resources available to the subject.

Even though contextual embeddedness is a premise for any individual's choices and actions, the construction of frameworks differs significantly, as does their outcome. The contextual framework of a girl growing up in a home with a violent and sexually abusive father, and who later turns to prostitution and drug addiction, is qualitatively very different from a girl growing up in a nurturing and loving family, and who later on becomes a teacher. In this sense, the contextual frame of both choice and action can deplete or even deny the embodied self the necessary resources and expressive space to both choose and act on supportive and liberating bodily objectives as well as experience and handle body shame. Accordingly, the development of a stable and mature embodied self, hinges – at least to a certain extent – on the quality of the context. The strong disciplining power of dysfunctional and oppressive contexts of, for example, violence and abuse, will reproduce sexual objectification and shame, and offer scant resources that one can use to transcend such contexts. Liberating contexts, however, tend to give the individual bodily expressive space to freely exercise agency through chosen bodily objectives, without interruption and concomitant shame. Such contexts offer resources that support both the reproduction of flourishing contextual frameworks, as well as transcendence and further development. Thus, to overcome shame by regaining control is not only dependent on personal resources, but also on the accessible contextual resources.

Body shame as disruption in contexts with impossible ideals

Body shame is not only a response when disruption or rupture is caused by clashing contexts with different sets of values and norms, generating objects and actions with different and/or opposing bodily desirability.

The interruption of shame can also occur within the context of the person themselves, when the context is such that it makes it difficult – or impossible – to realize the choice of bodily objectives through action. As we have mentioned above, when the impossible bodily ideals of the trending culture become our objectives, the possibility of realizing these ideals becomes very slight. The gap between the chosen bodily ideals or objectives and the possibility of realizing these through bodily action, increases the possibility for disruption between objectives and action – and hence the possibility for body shame. Such shame need not originate from a context that reduces or impedes the possibility of realizing bodily objectives. When adolescent boys and girls are shamed because their bodies do not adhere to or match the bodily ideals they pick up from the popular culture and make their own, it is not because of lack of contextual support. On the contrary: whole industries thrive financially on dietary programs offering slim and healthy bodies. Cross-fit studios, gyms, and spinning centers offer toned muscles, and clinics offer surgery and injections as medical short-cuts to the ideal body. Hence, the contextual resources do not impede the ability to close the interruption between chosen bodily objectives and actions. It is the impossibility of the ideals themselves that leave many adolescents in a virtually exposed and shameful limbo between impossible ideals and exposed bodies that falls way short of expected bodily norms. As we mentioned above, in postmodern culture, this bodily limbo is always under threat of being visibly displayed, demeaned, and ultimately without the possibility of retreat to safety.[309]

---

309 For a sociological introduction to the transparency and fluidity of postmodern culture, see, for example, Bauman, *Liquid Life*; *Liquid Modernity*. For a narrower introduction to youth culture, see, for example, Ole Jacob Madsen, *Generasjon Prestasjon: Hva Er Det Som Feiler Oss?* (Oslo: Universitetsforlag, 2018); Jean M. Twenge, *I-Gen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood (What This Means for the Rest of Us)* (New York: Atria Books, 2017); *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Free Press, 2006); "The Evidence for Generation Me and Against Generation We," *Emerging Adulthood* 1, no. 1 (2013). For a discussion of Twenge's analysis, see both Madsen, *Generasjon Prestasjon: Hva Er Det Som Feiler Oss?*, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Kali H., and M. Brent Donnellan, "The Dangers of Generational Myth-Making: Rejoinder to Twenge," *Emerging Adulthood* 1, no. 1 (2013); Kali H. Trzesniewski, M. Brent Donnellan, and Richard W. Robins, "Is 'Generation Me' Really More Narcissistic Than Previous Generations?," *Journal of Personality* 76, no. 4 (2008).

Body shame as disruption in overlapping contexts

But can choosing objectives and acting in accordance with them within a given framework also generate shame? How can the chosen aims and actions of a woman selling sex generate shame when what she actually does is an attempt to transcend the limiting context and take some control over her body? One line of reasoning here is based on how we, as citizens, partake in a network of overlapping contexts where we take on different roles. When we seek recognition, our choice of objectives is tied closely to the normative expectations of the different roles that present themselves in different contexts. We have seen that role behavior that does not meet normative standards may easily be experienced as shameful. However, the complexities of human life may also present themselves as intersecting and normatively clashing role expectations, as well as in their moral ranking. One example can elucidate this point:

A woman selling sex is also a daughter or a sister to someone, and she may be selling sex to support both her addiction and her child, of whom she is desperately afraid of losing custody. In the network of overlapping contexts and concerns, she is woven into a complex web of relations and roles where norms and values differ in both content and moral ranking. Thus, to sell sex and commodify her body is a way of reasserting her ownership of the body and thereby attempt to close the gap between her experience of being an embodied self and losing the body through objectification. However, she is also a mother, a role in which expectations entail desirable objects that run contrary to the objective of selling sex. A mother selling sex will most likely be evaluated as unfit to take responsibility for the caring and upbringing of a child. It is not unlikely that shame may occur in this web of overlapping contexts. Thus, gaining control over her body through selling sex may be construed as a meaningful and even role-transcending action in a context where sexual objectification, abuse, and violence have defined her role behavior. However, the context and role of motherhood certainly entail normative expectations that run contrary to selling sex, even when this in itself allows her to overcome shame to some extent. The intersection between morally ranked contexts and role expectations can thus enhance the experience of shame, as one is bodily exposed and found morally lacking when the child welfare service discloses that the mother sells sex to

support herself. However, external exposure is not necessarily a premise for shame. The socially ingrained role expectations, as well as the desirable objectives of motherhood, obviously clash with the objectives of selling sex. Thus, the woman may experience a permanent rupture: the objective of providing her daughter with a relatively safe and nurturing environment is inconsistent with the objective of taking control over her body by relating to it as a sexual commodity.

As subjects with manifold roles in overlapping contexts there are differing norms and expectations as to what the body should be like, how it should act or behave. Thus, exerting agency successfully hinges – at least to a certain extent – on the degree of freedom and lack of oppression in the different context in which an embodied subject partakes. In late modern society, this is made difficult because the virtual *Argos Panoptes* seem to invade all contexts. Thus, shame as a reaction to interrupted agency may present itself more permanently and/or more suddenly as the contextual complexity develops.

Shame and the female body

In a fresco in the Brancacci Chapel in Florence, the Renaissance painter Masaccio depicted the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden (1425–1427). One interpretation of the fresco is that Adam and Eve hide their shame under the gaze of the almighty God. Thus, it may represent an important historical insight into the phenomenon of male and female body shame. They attempt to hide their shame differently. Adam holds his hands in front of his face covering his eyes. Eve holds one hand over her vulva and covers her breasts with the other. As such, the fresco depicts a central and historical phenomenological difference between male and female body shame. Adam is the active one, who is ashamed because he is exposed as the one who has seen. Therefore, he hides his eyes. Eve, the passive one, is ashamed because she is exposed – she is the one who is seen. Therefore, she hides her body.[310]

310 Claire Pajacvzkowska and Ivan Ward, "Introduction: Shame, Sexuality and Visual Culture," in *Shame and Sexuality. Psychoanalysis and Visual Culture.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

Origin: evolution and existential threat

This chapter will elaborate on the social construction of female embodiment, and the shame related to the experience of disrupted embodiment in different domains and contexts. As we shall see, feminist literature more than suggests – and rightly so – that the explanations for both past and present experiences of various degrees of disruption or rupture of female embodiment can be found in a plethora of disciplining power strategies. These are exercised to a varying degree of intent – promoting and securing male dominance and patriarchy.

However, this is not the sole frame of reference for the analysis of female body shame. The anthropologist and philosopher Hans Peter Duerr suggest that female body shame, including what leads to the covering of genitalia as in the fresco by Massacio, can be viewed as an adapted function in the evolved organization of human societies, for example, in couple relations, and the distinction between private and public.[311] Through shame, the sexual attraction of the female body is hidden from the public gaze and privatized. This hiding serves to reduce dysfunctional male rivalry and strengthens the couple's relation as the institution that has, historically, best secured the survival of offspring.[312] Other theories attempt to account for the historical development of apparent male power strategies that have secured dominance and inequality by using body shame as a tool.[313] The underlying assumption is that although death is unavoidable,

311 Duerr, *Myten Om Civilisationsprocessen: B. 2: Intimitet*, B. 2, 207ff.

312 His five-volume magnus opus *Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozess* is, above all, a sharp critique of the two-volume seminal work *The Civilizing Process* by the sociologist Norbert Elias. The dispute between Duerr and Elias, and the following rather vivid scholarly debate, has thrown important light on the influential civilization thesis of Elias. For further reading of Duerr's perspective on female shame, see volume 2 *Intimitet*. However, in this context we will not dwell more on the evolutionary topic of shame as we have briefly covered this earlier in the book.

313 For an introduction, see Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (London: Souvenir Press, 2011); Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*; Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski, and Sheldon Solomon, "The Causes and Consequences of a Need for Self-Esteem: A Terror Management Theory," in *Public Self and Private Self* (Springer, 1986); Brian L. Burke, Andy Martens, and Erik H. Faucher, "Two Decades of Terror Management Theory: A Meta-Analysis of Mortality Salience Research," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14, no. 2 (2010); Jamie L. Goldenberg and Tomi-Ann Roberts, "The Birthmark: An Existential Account of the Objectification of Women," in *Self-Objectification in Women: Causes, Consequences, and Counteractions*, ed. Rachel M. Calogero, Stacey Ed Tantleff-Dunn, and J. Thompson (Washington, D.C: American Psychological Association, 2011).

all beings are biologically programed to struggle for life, for survival. However, humans are the only species fully conscious of this basic fact of life. Thus, our awareness of the existential discrepancy between our mortality and our struggle to survive causes anxiety that needs to be resolved. Due to our symbolic capacities, we can deny or defuse the unavoidable consequences of our own corporeality through religious or philosophical strategies. Thus, we interpret these phenomena within cultural systems that render them culturally meaningful, regulated, and even idealized. These strategies often involve power-struggles to establish cultural fortifications that secure a meaningful symbolic distance to the existential threat of death.

It is in this context that some scholars suggest we should understand the repression and regulation of female embodiment. The underlying assumption is that female bodies, and the reproductive biological processes and parts of female bodies, represent a threatening reminder of the unavoidable biological cycle of life. However, the same body and body parts also serve as objects of desire and sexual attraction to heterosexual men.[314] The discrepancy between these two approaches to the female body is solved through various strategies of cultural objectification and subsequent self-objectification. However, we shall not follow this theoretical approach in detail here but return to it as we move into the specifics of female body shame.

We have emphasized the contextual embeddedness of the embodied subject and the disciplining structures within which a subject exerts its agency. We have also underscored the importance of overlapping contexts. The various theoretical accounts which try to explain the emergence and existence of disciplining frameworks along long evolutionary lines that over time discipline and regulate behavioral adaptations need not conflict with the close-reading of the disciplining powers at play in specific contexts. Both may be relevant for the contextual displays of shame and contribute to a more nuanced picture of female body shame. However, as our focus in this study is on the contemporary context, we shall treat both theories about the evolutionary context and theories of

314 "The Birthmark: An Existential Account of the Objectification of Women," 84.

existential threat only as part of the backdrop of current female body shame.[315]

Female embodiment: historical lines

Late modern society presents new challenges to female embodiment. According to Chrysler and Johnston-Robledo, women's relationships to their bodies are complex:

> The body should be a source of pleasure, the enabler of agency, and the mediator between the world and the Self. However, for most women, at least some of the time, the body is a disappointment, a source of anxiety, and a site of labor. The body is a self-improvement project for girls and women.[316]

The project of female embodiment – or the project of *doing gender* as West and Zimmerman called it in their seminal article from 1987 – has been and is a precarious project.[317] Developing a secure and positive experience of embodiment is made difficult, both at present and historically, by always being evaluated and often devalued. We need not make the historical account very extensive to emphasize this point. The female body has been treated as men's property. Hence, rape under Babylonian law was treated as a form of property damage. According to Rose Weitz, it was not until 1984 that a man in the USA could be convicted for raping a

315 A further discussion would hve to deal with the consequences of viewing female body shame as part of an evolutionary account of couple relations, and also what the distinction between private and public has meant for securing survival. In this context, it activates important interdisciplinary discussions between, for example, evolutionary biology, anthropology, feminist studies and ethics. However, the many difficult and contested topics of evolutionary ethics, such as the problem of what *is* and what *ought* to be (is – ought), cannot be taken up here. For an introduction to evolutionary ethics, see, for example, Michael Ruse and Robert J. Richards, *The Cambridge Handbook of Evolutionary Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Scott M. James, *An Introduction to Evolutionary Ethics*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

316 Joan C. Chrisler and Ingrid Johnston-Robledo, *Woman's Embodied Self: Feminist Perspectives on Identity and Image* (American Psychological Association, 2018), 11.

317 See C. West and D. H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," *Gender & Society* 1, no. 2 (1987). This widely cited article has become a classic study in both sociology and gender studies. For a short introduction to the discussion and development of the concept, see, for example, numerous articles from a symposium on Doing Gender published in *Gender & Society*, 2009, vol. 23, No. 1. See also Sarah Fenstermaker and Candace West, *Doing Gender, Doing Difference: Inequality, Power, and Institutional Change* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

woman to whom he was married.[318] In both Greek philosophy and medicine, the female body was viewed as an insufficiently developed male body where the sexual organs were located inside the body due to a lack of heat in the early developmental stage of the embryo.[319] The view that females are passive, fragile, closer to nature and inferior, but also more driven by sexual passions and, therefore, morally more dangerous, has been documented in a variety of ways throughout Western history. Thus, by being a reminder of the natural and the corporeal, as well as being sexually attractive, women pose a threat that men attempt to solve by imbuing a distance between the superior qualities of cognitive, moral, male agency and the more inferior and natural agency of female embodiment which lacks in both cognitive and moral capabilities. Such theoretical configurations of gender, mind, and body, and the definition of moral, emotional and rational qualities attributed to these, have been a central part of the oppressive framework that the feminist movement has had to struggle against. Shame has played a central part both in the construction and enforcement of gender roles and in gender definitions within these frameworks.

This mind-body split poses severe challenges to the very idea of embodiment in the current feminist discussions of gender construction. In principle, the idea of embodiment runs counter to the possibility of a split where the body is separated from the self and objectified as a separate entity. It also links up to our previously discussed topic of what we, in a preliminary sense, have called objectification, which we will unfold in greater detail here.

Objectification of the female body

Objectification has been put forth as one of the central challenges for both female embodiment and female shame, especially sexual objectification. Broadly defined, objectification implies that the body is being

318 Rose Weitz and Samantha Kwan, *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8.

319 Ibid., 3.

negatively used, controlled and owned through one's physical properties.[320] For example, many women experience it as extremely shameful to have their bodies reduced to sexualized flesh in the gaze of the other. However, we need to ask whether the different conceptualizations of objectification within feminist discourse offer an adequate framework for understanding shame in this context. To be treated as an object does not in itself necessitate shame responses. We call on physical therapists and plumbers because they have bodies and physical skills that are up to the task at hand, and they are not ashamed of it. Furthermore, when one part in a sexual relationship experiences desire because of the sexual attractiveness of the body of the other, it can be a source of pleasure for both. Thus, objectification need not be problematic in itself. Accordingly, it is questionable whether the broad definition above may be useful to elicit the specific connections between objectification and shame responses.[321] In our view, we need a more nuanced analysis of the concept of objectification and its role in shame processes. Timo Jütten draws up two main accounts of sexual objectification: the *imposition account* and the *instrumentalization account*.[322]

The imposition account

The starting point for our discussion of sexual objectification is the *imposition account*.[323] In her seminal book *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*,

320 Rachel M. Calogero, Stacey Ed Tantleff-Dunn, and J. Thompson, "Objectification Theory: An Introduction," in *Self-objectification in women: Causes, and counteractions* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2011), 5.

321 Ibid.

322 Timo Jütten, "Sexual Objectification," *Ethics* 127, no. 1 (2016).

323 For further reading, see Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Putnam, 1981); Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990). The development of a more formalized theory of objectification is an attempt to catch and conceptualize much of both the theorizing and the research on female objectification, in order to offer a conceptual platform for further research. For further reading into objectification theory, see, for example, Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts, "Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1997); Rachel M. Calogero, Stacey Ed Tantleff-Dunn, and J. Kevin Thompson, *Self-Objectification in Women: Causes, Consequences, and Counteractions*, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2011).

Catharine MacKinnon claims that to be sexually objectified means having a social meaning imposed on your being that defines you as something to be sexually used.[324] Accordingly, sexual objectification is always wrong because it always takes place within a context of male dominance and female oppression. It imposes a social meaning that undermines both equality and autonomy, as well as rendering the female body as an object to be instrumentalized and used. The cultural imposition of immoral values pervades the context and leaves no chance for the possible sexual objectification of male – female desire and pleasure to be played out in conditions of autonomy and equality. Thus, the many variations of being sexually instrumentalized and objectified produce – intentionally or not – variations of shame manifested within a wider frame of political and historical oppression.

Even though this account has been seminal in revealing the oppressive premises for female embodiment through both history and the present, it has been challenged for its sweeping analyses and lack of sensitivity to context.

The instrumentalization account

Martha Nussbaum's account entails the close reading of literary texts that reveal helpful distinctions between different dimensions of sexual objectification that are not equally objectionable from a moral perspective.[325] To elicit and understand what is morally problematic and shame-producing about sexual objectification – which Nussbaum calls a *loose cluster-term* – we need to be sensitive to the context in which the objectification occurs. The imposition account, where sexual objectification is always morally problematic, conflates the different ways in which different dimensions of objectification play together.[326]

As mentioned, sexual objectification between equal and consenting partners can, for example, be a rather pleasurable part of sexual life and thus not shame-producing. In her reading, Nussbaum distinguishes between seven ways of treating a person as a thing:

---

324 Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State,* 140.

325 Martha C. Nussbaum, "Objectification," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 24, no. 4 (1995).

326 Patricia Marino, "The Ethics of Sexual Objectification: Autonomy and Consent," *Inquiry* 51, no. 4 (2008).

1. Instrumentality: the objectifier treats the object as a tool for his or her purposes.
2. Denial of autonomy: the objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
3. Inertness: the objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.
4. Fungibility: the objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type, and/or (b) with objects of other types.
5. Violability: the objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into.
6. Ownership: the objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, that can be bought or sold, etc.
7. Denial of subjectivity: the objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.[327]

However, to identify these dimensions does not in itself answer the question of whether all forms of objectification are morally problematic. Thus, in order to analyze shame resulting from objectification, and specifically from sexual objectification, we need to analyze which of these dimensions of objectification that are present in shame.

Furthermore, these are not mutually exclusive dimensions. Often a plurality of these dimensions will constitute a shame reaction. For example, in a situation of persistent sexual abuse, more or less all of the above dimensions will be in play. Nussbaum herself does not answer what cluster of features would constitute a sufficient condition for a morally problematic objectification of persons.[328] The only dimension she seems to identify as always morally objectionable is *instrumentalization*, that is, treating others merely as tools for one's own purposes.[329] In relation to sexuality, this sort of objectification seems to be closely tied to other

327 Nussbaum, "Objectification," 257.
328 Ibid., 258.
329 Ibid., 289.

dimensions, such as adenial of subjectivity and autonomy, boundary violations, and ownership such as commodification. All these forms may be morally problematic and can be experienced as shameful within the cultural framework of male dominance.

However, Nussbaum's context-sensitive reading of literature shows that other dimensions do not always have to be morally problematic as long as they are based on consent. Even though she does not list up criteria for when objectification is morally acceptable, it does seem to entail a form of relational symmetry, mutuality, and some form of intimacy.[330] However, one may object that using literary examples – although picked from a wide range of sources from *Playboy* to D. H. Lawrence – entails a stylized reduction of the broader experience of human life. Thus, one may argue that this method of literary close-reading may be sensitive to the context of the chosen literary texts, but not to the context of the female experience itself.

Critical remarks

Although Nussbaum's differentiations have merit, they have been contested as well. It has been argued that in sexual objectification, only one morally relevant value is at stake: respect for autonomy.[331] Hence, there is nothing morally wrong with the sexual objectification implied in, for example, anonymous casual sex, prostitution, and pornography, as long as it is based on consent. In fact, Nussbaum's criteria of intimacy and mutuality only muddy the water because inherent relational ties and feelings may influence and even thwart a free and autonomous choice. But even though autonomy should be the only moral reference point, it is difficult to ensure autonomy and consent in a political and cultural context where female embodiment and female autonomy have had a history of being oppressed and undermined. Accordingly, in this respect, we are still no closer to a fine-tuned analytical tool that can separate shameful and non-shameful objectification of the body.

330 Marino, "The Ethics of Sexual Objectification: Autonomy and Consent"; "Philosophy of Sex," *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 1 (2014).

331 Ibid.

Another critic, Lina Papadaki, argues against both the imposition account and Nussbaum's differentiation between morally negative and positive objectification.[332] She criticizes the Kantian-based imposition account for being overly pessimistic and drastic in its description of the consequences of sexual objectification. Being utilized by somebody as a mere sexual object does not necessarily lead to serious harming of rational capacities or humanity. Objectification comes in many forms, with varying degrees of intent and with varying degrees of harm. Being the recipient of catcalls on the street is certainly different from being the victim of physical sexual abuse, even though both may imply some form of sexual objectification. Thus, Papadaki opts for a more differentiated concept that allows for forms of sexual objectification that do not lead to serious harming of the other. On the other hand, she criticizes Nussbaum's differentiated account for being much too inclusive. If objectification includes any form of consensual instrumentalization of the other, as Nussbaum seems to suggest, we objectify all the time. In short, Nussbaum's account does not give sufficient help in the struggle against shameful sexual objectification:

> Furthermore, once this concept's association with the negative and morally problematic is weakened, and it becomes, as in Nussbaum's case, something ordinary, widespread, and in many cases a positive and wonderful part of our lives, there is a further risk: the risk that the fight against (negative) objectification is undermined. The plea to end objectification, vividly put forward by Kant, MacKinnon and Dworkin will no longer sound so urgent and pressing; it might even sound misguided, if objectification is thought to be, in many cases, a positive and valuable part of our lives, something we are not willing to give up.[333]

Papadaki suggests a definition that covers what is morally objectionable in the imposition account, but also includes Nussbaum's account of what makes negative sexual objectification morally unacceptable:

---

332 Evangelia Lina Papadaki, "Feminist perspectives on objectification," in *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2010); "What Is Objectification?," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (2010).

333 Papadaki, "What Is Objectification?" 28f.

> Seeing and/or treating a person as an object (seeing and/or treating them in one or more of these seven ways: as an instrument, inert, fungible, violable, owned, denied autonomy, denied subjectivity), in such a way that denies this person's humanity. A person's humanity is denied when it is ignored/not properly acknowledged and/or when it is in some way harmed.[334]

Papadaki establishes four categories that may seem important for the analysis of female body shame. Above we have suggested at least two main categories of shame: acute and passing shame, and toxic shame. The main distinction between these two is the degree of harm shame inflicts on the self, especially over time. Of course, it has not only to do with the harm inflicted by objectification, but is also dependent on the fortitude and resilience of the self. However, as embodied agency is a precarious and vulnerable project, distinguishing between degrees or categories of potential harm at least establishes one helpful reference point for the analysis of shame. Papadaki distinguishes between reductive objectification that harms the individual's humanity (rational capacities) and non-reductive objectification that merely ignores or does not fully acknowledge an individual's humanity. Referring to the examples used above, to be the victim of physical sexual abuse is certainly to harm a person's humanity. It denies the person a right to ownership of their body, to free consent, and inflicts irreparable damage to both present and future embodied agency. But being the receiver of a sexualized catcall from a stranger in a bar hardly poses a threat to neither present nor future embodied agency, even though it is part of the structures within which the precarious prospect of female embodiment takes place. It may nevertheless be experienced as degrading and generate acute shame as it ignores that the body belongs to someone and is someone. Such disrespect and lack of recognition of a person's humanity is sadly the experience of many women.

Papadaki also distinguishes between intentional and non-intentional objectification. This is an important distinction for the analysis of female body shame. In cases where, for example, violent sexual abuse and rape are used as a military and ethnic strategy and weapon in war (as in the

334 Ibid., 32.

Balkans War), the intent to seriously harm is obvious.[335] This presence and acknowledgment of harmful intent have consequences for the experience of shame, how it is manifested, and why it occurs. Such shame is often tied to the violation itself; of being reduced to an instrument or an object without moral value or, as in the case of the Balkans War where Bosnian women were raped by Serbian soldiers so they would carry the children of the enemy, as part of a strategy of ethnic cleansing. The emotional conflicts of these women, where shame certainly played a large role, are hard to imagine.

However, when the possible harm is a consequence of tacit and unacknowledged objectification, shame is more difficult to pinpoint. When both the objectifier and the objectified harbor no ill will towards each other and there is no intention to overlook or seriously harm, the inherent and potentially objectifying attitudes and values of the social topography become more difficult to identify. Thus, in such instances the presence of unexplained body shame may be an important identifier of challenges that need to be met or addressed. When young girls experience body shame that keeps them from partaking in PE activities in school together with their friends and peers, similar shame and hesitance may not be seen among boys. Thus, it seems crucial to search for tacit and unintentional disciplining mechanisms as they may seriously hamper and interrupt the natural flow of embodied agency and not allow for equal opportunities to develop and flourish into healthy embodied selves. Such unidentified and tacit disciplining frameworks are, in some ways, a more significant challenge than those that are obviously violent and oppressive: the latter is easier to fight against because we know who or what is the enemy. But the unidentified, unintentional, and unacknowledged remnants of a gendered past may still reside as tacit disciplining frameworks in our value systems, habits of role interpretation and – not least – the regulation of the space in which we allow ourselves and others to exert bodily agency.

However, Papadakis does not solve the unavoidable Kantian mind-body split inherent in the concept of objectification. Thus, she fails to

335 Vetlesen, *Evil and Human Agency: Understanding Collective Evildoing*, Chapter 4.

take fully into account the role that the body plays in human experience. The phenomenological experience of being an intersubjective body in the world implies both being looked at as well as looking at. It implies bodily sexual attraction, and it implies objectified materiality. This fact is not in itself a problematic human experience, as suggested by the other accounts. Instead, it is constitutive for human experience, especially sexual experience. Sexual attraction, bodily pleasure, and erotic encounters may even serve to enhance or fulfill the potential of human experience and subjectivity. Hence, framing such experience solely in negative terms, as in the imposition account, serves to restrict the experiential potential of human embodiment regarding sexual experience. The question is, rather, how to determine what makes some forms of bodily sexual experience morally problematic. We argue that bodily shame is not described adequately within the framework of a phenomenology of the body that sees objectification as the main culprit.

To help us further here, we turn to Ann Cahill. She takes as her starting point the phenomenology of (sexual) difference. Our human condition is that we are bodies among bodies, contextually and precariously exposed, and vulnerable to others. Being objectified, gazed upon, and treated as a material body does not entail losing ownership of our bodies, being denied subjectivity, or being pushed into passivity and shame, and losing the capacity for active consent. Bodily agency presupposes primarily being acknowledged as a body. So, according to Cahill, objectification is not the problem as such. She suggests that what is morally problematic is when we are gazed upon or acted upon in such a way that we lose our ontological distinctiveness and specificity. She claims that the problem under such circumstances is that we become derivatized:

> To derivatize is to portray, render, understand, or approach a being solely or primarily as the reflection, projection, or expression of another being's identity desires, fears, etc. The derivatized subject becomes reducible in all relevant ways to the derivatizing subject's existence …[336]

336 Ann J. Cahill, *Overcoming Objectification: A Carnal Ethics*. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 32.

Thus, derivatization is different from objectification. Being made into a derivative of the other is when our bodily ontology is denied its distinctiveness and specificity, and is reduced to sameness. What is morally problematic, according to Cahill, is, therefore, not so much that we are bodily objectified – gazed upon or treated as objects, but that our bodies are reduced to an object *in a specific, reductive way*. When, for example, a young woman is gazed and acted upon as the mirror image of the other, her bodily distinctiveness – herself – is lost in the eyes of the other. This experience of loss or discrepancy between her bodily self and the reduction to the mirror image of the desire of the other may be one that interrupts her self-actualization and causes shame.

This conceptualization provides a better starting point for understanding female body shame. It is a common human experience, not only a female experience, that there need not be any shame in being acknowledged as a material body. We precariously assert and develop our embodied agency in an intersubjective context of bodies. Thus, being acknowledged in our bodily distinctiveness can be a self-affirming experience. But shame may also be the response when our bodily presence and our material body is not recognized as part of a natural and positive way of expressing embodied intentional agency in the world. A preset norm of objectification as morally problematic may thus serve to thwart such a positive experience of sexual bodily pleasure as part of the active flourishing of human agency.

Female self-objectification or self-derivatization

Our next step is to briefly sketch how the concept of sexual derivatization can be linked to the concept of self-objectification. This is an essential tenet in the understanding of the continuous societal reproduction of body shame. Within mainstream feminism, self-objectification has been one of the critical theoretical constructs that aim to explain how the oppressive order of patriarchy has been upheld not only by men, but also by women through self-policing. The basic feminist position is widely acknowledged, and rather succinctly put by the feminist Sandra Lee Bartky:

> In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the conciousness of most women: They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other.[337]

The sum of the daily experience of being under the gaze of the male other, of being Eve hiding from the gaze of Adam as in Masaccio's fresco *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, leads to an internalization of this objectifying gaze. In this sense, the female experience is not only one of sexual objectification through the eyes of the male other. It is also an experience of both viewing and treating oneself as a sexual object. This colonization of the mind, as Roberts puts it, leads to a self-imposed objectification of docility and passivity where power and control are lost.[338] First unfolded in the seminal work of Simone de Beauvoir, it threatens the female self and female authenticity.[339] This external and internal defining frame has obvious consequences for how females construct their bodies. In most feminist accounts, it is about social regulation and control.[340] It defines, for example, the social and physical space for movement and agency, and the ideals by which an agent is evaluated. It also defines what proper and improper behavior are. The result, however, is disrupted or thwarted agency and shame, such as when subjects are scorned or negatively evaluated because they cross these established borders.

Consequently, the frame of agency for female embodiment is not only challenged by external and internal restrictions, it is also pushed towards an agency of sexual objectification and docility in which shame is permanently a tacit possibility. We have earlier pointed to the fact that the bodily ideals that define this successful female embodiment are unattainable for most. Thus, it renders the female body as a constant "work in progress" through inner monitoring and self-surveillance. According to Calogero et al., for some women, this external vantage point of bodily

337 Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, 72.
338 Tomi-Ann Roberts, "The Woman in the Body," *Feminism & Psychology* 12, no. 3 (2002).
339 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1st American ed. (New York: Knopf, 1953).
340 Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn, and Thompson, "Objectification Theory: An Introduction," 8.

self-scrutiny and self-objectification becomes a persistent trait.[341] For others, self-objectification becomes a state one falls into and out of. These traits or states reflect the subject's way of attempting to express agency within the restricting ideals of female embodiment, and it correlates, to a certain degree, to body shame as either a constant possibility where self-policing is a persistent trait or as a possibility related to on/off states of self-policing.

Thus, as Beauvoir claims, authenticity is at stake, as the view of the body that is the goal of agency belongs to someone else. In the words of Frederickson et al., "Far beyond the idea that adolescent girls simply do not like the size and shape of their maturing bodies, girls learn that this new body belongs less to them and more to others."[342] The others to whom she then "belongs" may interrupt her agency at any given time and cause shame to appear. To avoid the risk of shame appearing, she may develop an inauthentic lifestyle in which she constantly tries to conform to ideals or hide her failure to achieve them. Thus, the threat of shame determines life and agency.

As a girl matures into womanhood, her body also matures into the public domain – but not solely as her own. By becoming the target of increased sexual objectification – not only by men but also by her female peers – the realization sinks in that it is not so much herself but her body that is evaluated. Although the objectification and self-objectification are present earlier also, it is in puberty that the girl integrates with the objectification/self-objectification framework of society. Throughout adolescence, attention and focus double: she both becomes an object and sees herself as an object. This doubling – combined with an increasing tendency to self-police – may seriously hamper or disrupt former cognitive, emotional, and bodily flow processes. The normative (and oppressive) borders and conditions of

341 *Self-Objectification in Women: Causes, Consequences, and Counteractions* (American Psychological Association, 2011), 10f.

342 Barbara L. Fredrickson et al., "That Swimsuit Becomes You: Sex Differences in Self-Objectification, Restrained Eating, and Math Performance," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75, no. 1 (1998): 193.

embodied agency become all the more visible, both from the outside and from within the subject. They render the subject in a double bind situation; on the one hand, bodily lacking as compared to the norms set, and on the other hand, with stolen agency by being rendered passive, docile, and objectified. Hence, self-objectification can be a female way of participating in the flight from the corporeal body. However, it comes at a price. In the discrepancy between positive and life-affirming embodied agency and the external/internal normative mechanisms of objectification and docility, shame appears as a response to disrupted or thwarted embodied agency.

Is it possible to link this analysis to the concept of derivatization? To do so, we need to draw up a few rough and intersecting lines as a backdrop for shame. First, as we saw above, to speak about derivatization is better because it allows us to draw a line between positive and negative experiences of being seen and treated as both having and being a body in the world. Against this backdrop, shame may be the result of interruption of bodily agency through not being recognized and acknowledged as an ontologically distinct body. Then, we are made into a derivative, a mirror image of somebody's dreams and desires. Moreover, shame may also be the result when a positive, self-affirming bodily experience of being a sensual/sexual object in the gaze of the other is thwarted and labeled as negative and dehumanizing.

Self-derivatization may be constructed along the same lines. To self-derivatize is to internalize and police an ontologically reductionistic bodily image mirroring the desires and needs of the other. This result is the same double-bind situation as in self-objectification. The precarious and potentially self-constituting and self-affirming situation of being a specific embodied subject among other embodied subjects is restricted, denied, or interrupted. It is so because the bodily image policed both internally and externally is ontologically not our own. Thus, the discrepancy between unaffirmed body-self and affirmed body-image is easily perceived as both lacking and shameful. If this reduction to sameness implies docility and passivity, it also negatively disrupts any positive and self-affirming experience of being a material body in the world.

Niva Piran: The experience of female embodiment in context

Five dimensions of experience

So far, we have attempted to sketch a position that allows for both an active and self-affirming, as well as a negative and derivatizing, experience of being a visible and attractive body in the world. However, we have sketched neither the conditions nor the dimensions of experience. Thus, the next important question to ask is: what kind of structuring conditions seem to promote either a positive body experience or a negative experience of body shame that reduces the ability to exert agency within the boundaries of a given context?

As shown by Davis, there is a need for more empirically based knowledge to understand both the specific structures and conditions under which female embodiment takes place, as well as the dimensions of how female embodiment is experienced in late modern society. Studies show that the intersection between body and culture is complex and far more difficult for girls than for boys, and it comes at a price.[343] As mentioned, late modern virtual society also presents new structuring conditions that may well be novel to both the understanding of male and female body shame.

In her recent and well-researched book *Journeys of Embodiment at the Intersection of Body and Culture: The Developmental Theory of Embodiment* (2017), clinical psychologist Niva Piran analyzes the results from a rather comprehensive empirical multi-method research program that aims to explore critical dimensions of the *experience of (female) embodiment* (EE) across the lifespan. What emerges in the analysis are five related dimensions where the quality of the experiences are graded from positive to negative.[344] These five dimensions are:

343 For the link between experiences of embodiment and well-being, see, for example, Niva Piran, *Journeys of Embodiment at the Intersection of Body and Culture: The Developmental Theory of Embodiment* (Waltham: Elsevier, 2017), 8ff.

344 Ibid., 4.

1. Body Connection and Comfort versus Body Disconnection and Discomfort
2. Agency and Functionality versus Blocked Agency and Restraint
3. Experience and Expression of Desire versus Disowning Desire
4. Attuned Self-care versus Disrupted Attunement, Neglect, and Self-harm
5. Inhabiting the Body as a Subjective Site versus as an Objectified Site

We shall not expound on all the different dimensions of the experience of embodiment. Suffice to say, these dimensions provide a broad and complex dimensional map for understanding female engagement in the world. The chance for an overall positive and constructive experience of embodiment rests on a comprehensive set of dimensions. These dimensions map the possibilities and the routes to a positive experience of embodiment. However, the possibilities for negative and disruptive experiences are plentiful, as well.

Disruption of agency, for example, through blocking, carries consequences for the other dimensions of embodiment. The experience of positive embodiment and agency hangs precariously in the balance between two factors we have already stressed several times: a) The degree of repression or freedom – or as Piran would call it – risk factors or protective factors in external structures that provide pressures and opportunities; and b) The maturity or fortitude of the embodied subject. As shown in the analysis of Benkhe mentioned earlier, the internal forces of the self may serve as a counterweight against external shaping forces. Piran's dimensions show both the severe and complex consequences of the loss of positive experience of embodiment, and manifest the comprehensive context in which body shame is situated:

> In this process of disruption, the body becomes an uncomfortable "other" site – agency is dampened, ownership of desires is challenged, and compromises to self-attunement are frequent. Moreover, the carefree lack of self-consciousness found in early childhood – "I did not care about what I wore or what I looked like" – is lost as well. These compounded losses, associated with inhabiting a docile, feminine body, markedly change the way adolescent girls engage with

> the world. Further, examining social processes that shape embodiment during adolescence clarifies that in creating docile bodies, all domains of the EE are concurrently targeted. As girls are initiated into owning and inhabiting women's bodies, their bodies become less safe, their embodied agency gets penalized and negatively labeled, their appetites problematized, and acting in attunement with their needs is questioned. Simultaneously, the body becomes an objectified site.[345]

In our context, the above analysis is important because it suggests clearly the external-internalized context that causes shame. Previously, we have argued that shame may be seen as resulting from the clash of two different contexts of agency: the subject's immediate and uninhibited self-realizing agency clashes with the (imagined) context of the other. The present analysis suggests that such a clash and the accompanying shame not only occur as the result of specific, particular instances but are conditioned by deep and tacit structures that are embedded in the socialization process of the female self.

Accordingly, imagine a young and fragile teenage girl working to establish a positive sense of self. The norms and expectations of the youth culture she belongs to are basically bodily in character. They evaluate her success through bodily standards that she, in her view, will never be able to meet, no matter how much she works out or diets. Thus, the fullness and potential of her human experience may, sadly, be evaluated through reductionist and barely attainable bodily ideals that are bound to cause shame unless she can liberate herself from them.

This reduction to the body also implies a definition of what it essentially is to be a young teenage girl, as it focuses on the evaluation of the docile and objectified – or more precisely the derivatized – body as the measure of success. Thus, she may experience a shameful gap between these impossible ideals and her appearance as her body becomes the material site where her lack of success is measured. This derivatization or reduction may lead to *dysappearance*, that is, she loses her natural self-awareness in which the body is the non-objectified extension of the

345 Ibid., 11.

self. Instead, the body becomes disconnected, being reduced to a derivative object under constant scrutiny, as it does not meet cultural standards. Thus, the reduction to solely body and the impossibility to conform may easily end up in an experience of being blocked, restrained, or losing the possibility of following your dreams, goals, intentions, and projects. The result may well be profound and toxic body shame, self-harm, as well as anxiety and depression, when an overall positive experience of embodiment is denied or made too difficult. This underscores the severe moral dimensions at play in the social context of female embodiment.

A social theory of embodiment

The second aim of Piran's research program is to develop an empirically based social theory or model that explores the relationship between social processes and embodied experiences.[346] The Developmental Theory of Embodiment (DTE) that emerges through her empirical analysis suggests that:

> … the multitude of social experiences described by girls and women shape their body experiences via three core pathways: experiences in the physical domain, experiences in the mental domain, and experiences related directly to social power. The theory contends that both protective and risk factors are organized along these three pathways, with the positive and negative aspects being conceptualized as Physical Freedom (vs. Corseting), Mental Freedom (vs. Corseting), and Social Power and Relational Connections (vs. Disempowerment and Disconnection).[347]

According to Piran, in the transition from girlhood to womanhood, disruptions are common in all of the above domains. The empirical findings also show that experiences in all domains are essential for a positive experience of embodiment. A context may, for example, offer opportunities for freedom of movement. Thus, it enhances the possibility of positive experiences of embodiment. At the same time, it may be characterized by discourses that expose the positive experience of embodiment to risk.[348]

346 Ibid., 10ff.
347 Ibid., 17.
348 Ibid., 21.

Positive experiences in the physical domain reflect the quality of the experience of physical engagement with the world. Such engagement is defined as the freedom to move and participate freely in activities without any constraints, being safe from violation and coercive body alteration practices, and also freedom and support to express natural desire as attunement to bodily needs. According to Piran, girls' and women's experiences of physical freedom or physical corseting are crucial to how they construct or shape their experience of embodiment. The societal structures that serve to discipline girls and women's sense of physical freedom hold critical keys to a positive experience of female embodiment. One prominent example is to be able to exert agency through physical activities, safe from harassment, abuse, and rape. However, the statistics of female abuse, rape and harassment show that girls and women are still at risk in society. Thus, they are constantly exposed to the risk of shame resulting from a disrupted agency – or corseting of agency – because they are denied protection to exert agency according to their intentions or desires.

A subtler example would be safety from cultural expectations and coercive pressure to engage in unwanted body modification practices (such as dieting, cosmetic surgery, etc.) that disrupt the ownership of the body and portray it as deficient, shameful, and in need of upgrading instead.[349] As we saw above, even though different practices of bodily alteration can be the choice of the subject themselves, it does not alter the fact that it is a way to manage the shameful gap between the ideal body and the experience of a body found lacking.

In the *mental* domain, an experience of being able to exert oneself in critical discussions without being corseted by constraining and regulating social discourses that simply reproduce the gender status quo is crucial to a positive experience of embodiment. Piran identifies two main clusters of such restraints: appearance-related discourses where one portrays the female body as a deficient object, and comportment related discourses that portray it as a passive body. Both clusters of discourse hold the potential to disrupt the experience of the body as a powerful and

349 Ibid., 19.

worthy site from which to engage with the world.[350] The appearance-related discourses – the body as a deficient object – include two well-known discourses: the discourse of the objectified body and the discourse of the female body as an object for the male gaze. The comportment-related discourses – women as docile – include four separate discourses. The first discourse, women as submissive/demure, has a long and documented history. The second, engagement in feminine activities, is – according to Piran – so powerful that girls and women tend to think it is part of their wanted self-expression. The third, woman as desired but desireless, portrays females as an object to be desired. Here, women, in their desirability, hold the responsibility for male desire. Thus, the regulation of female desire does not only mentally corset women's agency, but it also reinforces the continued supremacy of the male gaze. The patriarchal shaping of relational patterns shows how the heterosexual structuring of relationships disrupts the relational connections between young girls when they reach puberty and turn to in-fighting and policing among themselves.[351]

Accompanying these corseting discourses, Piran also finds linguistic dichotomies and labels that further regulate female embodiment.[352] These are crude reflections of the discourses. Dichotomies such as *tomboy – girly girl*, *slut/prude*, *nice/loser*, or expressions like *bitch*, *dependent*, and so forth, all regulate the different social dimensions of female embodiment, whether it be freedom in the physical domain, such as freedom to move or to express desire, or in the mental domain, through the right to freely exert oneself through voicing your opinion in your arena of choice. In Piran's words:

> … different social constructions limit diverse girls' and women's possibilities of embodied engagement with the world. These possibilities can be expressed through widely disseminated molds of social expectations, dichotomized constructions, or labels. These mental molds are entrenched in individuals' lives and are therefore mistaken as natural or inevitable. Toward the goal of positive

350 Ibid., 21.
351 Ibid., 22.
352 Ibid.

> embodiment, the varied forms of Mental Corseting need to be named and contested, to allow for passionate and meaningful engagement with the world.[353]

The impediments that follow from such limitations are likely to contribute to experiences of shame. For a girl struggling with embodiment, both discourses and linguistics may offer rather scant or limited resources for finding a language and a story in which she can find support for a free and positive experience of embodiment. Instead, she may find herself in situations in which she repeatedly struggles to avoid or overcome the shame that is caused by such constraints. According to Piran, there is also an apparent lack of supportive discourses that facilitate female embodiment on its own terms:

> The research program on embodiment highlights missing discourses related to women's embodied worth, power, passions, or their right for safety. Through this absence, girls and women of diverse social locations learn about their compromised worth within social structures of power.[354]

Discourses do more than discipline or set the parameters and norms for how one can exert agency. They also define worth, both in measure and kind. A teenage girl that needs a safe, protective, challenging, and constructive discourse and a narrative in which to interpret or experience her embodied life may easily end up mentally corseted within discourses and narratives that limit, devalue, and even internalize interrupted agency.

The third core pathway along which girls and women shape their embodiment experiences is through experiences of social power and relational connections. The quality of these experiences influences significantly the possibility for a positive experience of embodiment. This pathway includes four categories: Freedom from Prejudice and Harassment, Freedom from Appearance-based Social Power, Empowering Relationships, and Membership in Equitable Communities.[355] As in the other domains, the resources for positive embodiment are decided by the degree of freedom and support given.

---

353 Ibid., 24.
354 Ibid., 22.
355 Ibid., 24.

As stated above, the intersection between body and culture is complex, and the task of embodiment is far more difficult for girls than for boys – and it comes at a price. It affects well-being and may, negatively, for example, produce isolation, shame, negative self-esteem, and depression, and predict severe conditions such as eating disorders and substance abuse.[356]

Conforming to the ideals of the marketplace? Cosmetic surgery

The female body has, to a large extent, been objectified through commodification in the late modern marketplace. In a consumer culture, we are literally bombarded with film, pictures, and text displaying female body ideals of both slimness, curviness, sexuality, and attractiveness that are unattainable for most bodies.[357] These idealized body-displays promise success, health, and happiness. Thus, the exteriority – the skin – talks. It symbolizes the degree of success in the body-project. In the words of the feminist Sandra Lee Bartky:

> We are presented everywhere with images of perfect female beauty – at the drugstore cosmetics display, the supermarket magazine counter, on television. These images remind us constantly that we fail to measure up. Whose nose is the right shape, after all, whose hips are not too wide – or too narrow? The female body is revealed as a task, an object in need of transformation.[358]

However, the difficulty of succeeding in this transformation may leave a gap between, on the one hand, the normative ideals and, on the other hand, as a body among bodies, the inevitable display of a body that does not conform to these ideals. The shameful experience of being flawed not only becomes the mirror through which, for example, a teenage girl sees her body. It also structures her identity, her interactions, and the way she exerts her agency in the world in a profound sense.[359] The gap mentioned has proved to be fertile ground for the grooming industry, especially for the industry of cosmetic surgery that promises bodily alterations

356 For an introduction to the possible consequences of struggling with embodiment, see ibid., 1.

357 Sarah Grogan, *Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women and Children*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 65ff.

358 Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, 40.

359 Kathy Davis, *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 63.

according to the ideals of the day. Thus, the increasing popularity of cosmetic surgery has contributed to a medicalization of the female body, as well as contributing to further commodification through a tendency to reduce the female body to alterable body parts.[360] The female body, as a work-in-progress, has become a marketplace for big money.[361]

Feminist philosopher Kathryn Pauly Morgan claims that those who undergo cosmetic surgery conform to beauty ideals set by males and their exploiting and colonizing heterosexuality. Although the choice of undergoing cosmetic surgery may appear both empowering and liberating, it implies an acceptance of the female body as raw material to be formed and molded into the recognized norm of male supremacy. The choice is willingly helped along by highly priced cosmetic surgeons full of promises of a better life.[362]

Others, however, suggest that cosmetic surgery is not always about adhering to beauty standards. In a rather personal study, Kathy Davis takes on her earlier feminist views on cosmetic surgery along much of the same lines as Morgan and others.[363] She points to several empirical studies conducted in the Netherlands that suggest a more nuanced picture. Here, women did not have cosmetic surgery because they wanted to become more beautiful, but because they wanted to be normal like everybody else:

> … cosmetic surgery stories are presented as a trajectory of suffering.[6] They begin with the woman's realization that something is seriously amiss with her appearance and follow her through a period of several years during which she comes to regard her body as an insurmountable constraint – a condition which leaves her "uprooted, at least to a certain degree, from the mundane common world and its normal course of affairs" (Riemann and Schütze 1993: 345). She describes her hopelessness and resignation as she discovers that there is nothing she can do about her problem. Her story takes on a quality of impending doom, becoming

360 Chrisler and Johnston-Robledo, *Woman's Embodied Self: Feminist Perspectives on Identity and Image*, 51.

361 For an introduction to the feminist discussion of cosmetic surgery, see Jane Megan Northrop, *Reflecting on Cosmetic Surgery: Body Image, Shame and Narcissism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 31ff.

362 Ibid., 46.

363 Davis, *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery*, 2ff.

> a "downhill path" or vicious circle (Riemann and Schütze 1991: 348–349). The stage is then set for cosmetic surgery as the event which interrupts the trajectory. It allows her to take action and regain a sense of control over her life.[364]

As a conclusion to her survey of these studies, Davis points to how such surgery may, in fact, be a manifestation of female agency. Therefore, she claims, it is possible to see:

> cosmetic surgery [as] an understandable step in the context of an individual woman's experiences of embodiment and of her possibilities for taking action to alter her circumstances. They show that while the decision is not taken lightly and, indeed, remains problematic, it can be the best course of action for some women.[365]

Hence, if we ask why women desire and decide to undergo a practice that is both dangerous and oppressive, the answer is found in their need for developing another and different self. According to Davis, if you sidestep the few surgery-addicted females displayed in American reality shows, undergoing cosmetic surgery is not predominantly a capitulation to the norms and wishes of friends, husbands, or others. Instead, it mirrors the self's need to change in order to overcome a feeling of shame that has locked a person in a negative life trajectory. However, Davis does not refute the broader context – that the female body is always under the gaze of others, as we pointed to above. Her point is that the choice to undergo cosmetic surgery made by the women in her study is not characterized by succumbing passively to external pressure, as Morgan seems to suggest. Instead, it is a voluntary choice in a challenging setting. Davis describes it as an act of opposition for many females. It takes courage, especially because many have to confront objections from both family and friends.[366] While still objects of critical scrutiny, they have taken steps to alleviate the pain of being found lacking.[367] However, herein lie the dilemmas for women deciding to undergo cosmetic surgery; on the one hand, they hope to alleviate pain, secure a positive experience of embodiment

---

364 Ibid., 160.
365 Ibid., 162.
366 Ibid., 133.
367 Ibid., 173. For further discussion on the findings and analysis of Davis, see 172ff.

and create a more extensive space for agency within a gendered social order and, on the other hand, they also recognize that the same oppressive order produces both the pain and the restricted agency.[368]

Hence, cosmetic surgery may serve a shame-reducing function as it conforms the body to prevalent bodily ideals. Through surgery, the body is modified; breasts are augmented, chins lifted, or noses straightened out. Thus, the shameful gap between the ideal and the actual display is nullified, or at least lessened, to the degree that shame is manageable. However, the women in Davis' study are well aware of how they also confirm the oppressive gendered order by undergoing such surgery. This fact may also produce shame – at least when confronted with the many objections from friends, family, and themselves – also when they still choose to go through with it. According to Davis, this explains both the desire for and the problem with cosmetic surgery. It is desirable because it holds the promise of a more positive sense of embodiment and may create a wider space for exerting agency. But it is also problematic because it preserves the social order that produces the shame, negative bodily experience of embodiment, and restriction of agency. Hence, the analysis of female embodiment is like holding a mirror to culture that may well serve to shed light on the different forms of shame.[369]

We have attempted to show that the responsive movements of body shame, and more specifically female body shame, must be understood as a contextual phenomenon as circumscribed in earlier chapters. The different manifestations and responses, and their severity, are not only closely linked to the degree of freedom or oppression these contexts provide, but also to the maturity and development of the embodied self as described in Chapter 3 on shame and psychology. None of these things can be separated in order to understand body shame: we are bodies among bodies in an unending transaction with both structures as well as other embodied selves. Our ability to find strategies to handle shame adapts to the same contextual framework.

---

368 Ibid., 179.

369 Piran, *Journeys of Embodiment at the Intersection of Body and Culture: The Developmental Theory of Embodiment*, 257.

CHAPTER 5

Shame and Religion

Religion is a deeply ambiguous phenomenon. It may enrich the life of believers, but it may also cause severe damage to the self and injure capacities for human flourishing, social interaction and personal development. Religion is not an independent variable, but works on the social, political, and psychological conditions that contribute to shaping peoples' lives. To those for whom religion becomes an ultimate authority, it encompasses life and sets the stage or defines the resources for self-realizing agency, be it liberating or oppressive. For some, religion is not only a vital part of life or a specific area, but an all-encompassing reality. Religion can, under given circumstances, have a strong impact on the capacity for self-realizing agency, and sometimes impede it with shame as a result.[370]

Religions relate to all the dimensions of human experience that we identified in the introduction: religions are not only about cognitive beliefs in peoples' minds. They have to do with social and cultural components, as well as psychological ones. We consider religions from a *pragmatic* angle. They are symbolic resources for orientation and transformation in the different dimensions of experience. They provide resources for order and stability in a world that is constantly on the threshold of chaos, as well as for personal transformation. Religions offer a way of life, and they provide humans with resources for a specific mode of being-in-the-world where life is seen from the vantage point of what one considers as ultimate. As such, religion constitutes a whole way of being that not only relates us to what befalls us in different ways, it also shapes our world, our experiences of ourselves, and the world we live in. Accordingly, we cannot separate the modes of being-in-the-world that religion shapes and

370 Cf. this with Tomkins' understanding of shame as the impediment and interruption of enjoyment, in Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness,* (New York: Springer Publishing, 2008), 388.

conditions from the symbolic contents of that religious tradition. This content expresses itself in identity-formatting elements, in rituals and stories, in beliefs about morality and the "afterlife," and so on. A mere functionalist approach to religion that views it as a social phenomenon like any other, without taking into account these internal and internalized dimensions and how they shape actual human experience, may consequently fall short of being able to describe what religion is and what it does. Therefore, we need to address contents in specific religions that may engender, contribute to, or reduce shame.

Concerning religion's positive aspects, in a postmodern, hyper-technical society, religion offer elements that still help people to identify significant values, to orient themselves, and to partake in practices for personal or social transformation. Perhaps religious elements do not serve a disciplining function so much as previously, at least not in all parts of the Western world. We have seen, for example, how attitudes towards homosexuality have changed considerably over the last decades, with the consequence of less shame for sexual orientation, and how interest in religion has shifted from an interest in doctrine and behavior towards attention to the aesthetic dimensions of religion. So, although in new forms, religions and spiritual practices still contribute to many peoples' personal and social development. Moreover, as we will argue, the continuing presence of religion also means that religious practices and elements of shame are nevertheless sometimes still interwoven – in familiar and not so familiar ways. Because religious elements based on pre-modern traditions live side by side with more personalized and individualized modern modes of religion, the role of religion in the present world is complicated. In this chapter, we will identify some religious elements that contribute to the emergence of shame. It is so because the symbolic world of religion provides a multitude of chances for a clash between contexts of agency and, concomitantly, chances for shame.

Shame within the porous parameters of religion and spirituality

In his *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James argues that under every religious creed, there is the foundational experience or sense

that there is something wrong with us as we naturally exist and that the solution to this predicament is that "we are saved from the wrongness by making proper connection with the higher powers."[371] As long as religious practices and symbols contribute to such experience, shame will potentially be interwoven with religion in a variety of complex ways.[372] The consequence of what James claims here is, namely, that the realization of something being wrong with one is part of what constitutes religious experience. Thus, religion, in his view, articulates what we have previously addressed as the clash between contexts of agency. Religious beliefs entail the constant presence of something that makes me aware that I need to change. The clash is even more predominant since religious beliefs are more or less internalized in the agent, and do not require a real other to be present. The most profound way to instigate the non-present other in the consciousness of an agent is to employ the symbol of God as the one who sees everything and judges all that humans do, according to God's standards of perfection.

From a religious perspective, everything that is is a sign of something else: of good or bad, of God's way, of being on the narrow path or not, of being clean or unclean, devout or infidel, pious or not, etc. Against this backdrop, religious standards may constantly contribute to the interruption of agency in ways that go beyond what is usually the case in secular contexts. Thus, religion may easily become oppressive. Nevertheless, shame in the context of religion works according to similar rules as those we find elsewhere.

James' claim above points to how religious symbols and practices can contribute to identifying, articulating, and even enhancing the sense of

---

371 Cf. Jill L. McNish, *Transforming Shame: A Pastoral Response* (New York; Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2013), 125–26. Referring to William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York; London: Penguin Books, 1985), 508.

372 The dynamics described by James here are also the reason why Lelwicka can see contemporary practices of eating and diet as parallel to more traditional religious practices, but also as enforced by central Christian narratives: "Elements of these three Christian narratives – the body's pivotal role in salvation, women's association with the sin-prone flesh, and the anticipated perfection of bodies in the resurrection – were recycled for centuries, inspiring practices and attitudes toward food and eating that reflected dominant concerns and beliefs in their historical contexts." Michelle M. Lelwica, "Losing Their Way to Salvation: Women, Weight Loss, and the Religion of Thinness," in *Religion and Popular Culture in America,* 3rd ed. edited by Bruce David Forbes; Jeffrey H. Mahan (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 269.

there being something wrong with us or what we are doing. This contribution may work in relation to already established senses of shame, but it may also engender shame where it was not present previously. Moreover, shame may also play a role when it comes to the possible access to solutions to this predicament: the connection with higher powers that is necessary for solving it is never established directly but is always mediated by practices in which others are involved. Hence, the individual who wants to overcome religiously mediated experiences of wrongness that lead to shame must still relate to people who either help facilitate such overcoming or contribute to its further existence. Thus, agency based on intentions and desires guided by religious conceptions to improve or change is exposed to the risk of further interruption in ways that may continue to allow for shame to be present.

Religion and spirituality provide quite specific contexts and conditions for coherent agency.[373] According to Ryan, they provide chances for the "experience of conscious involvement in the project of life integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives."[374] This definition is broad enough to apply to most religious traditions. Furthermore, by pointing to something beyond the individual, religions suggest an ultimate standard against which one can assess oneself, and this standard can provide guidance for a conscious decision about the direction of one's life.[375] Ryan, accordingly, sees spirituality as being about attentiveness to life, "an attentiveness which contains within itself a certain desire, a certain hopefulness, a certain anticipation."[376] Thus, spirituality and religion establish distinguished contexts for agency that are constituted by what is considered as ultimate. He writes, "Spirituality is attention combined

373 We occasionally juxtapose religion and spirituality in the following in order to visualize that our analysis is relevant for more than what is often called "traditional" or "institutional" religion. It also relates to less organized forms of spirituality. In all cases where there is reference to a (more or less) authoritative tradition, stewarded by a (large or small) community of believers, the potential for individual shame caused by the normative ideals, rules or expectations that emerge from the combination of tradition, community and individual conditions are present.

374 Thomas Ryan, "The Positive Function of Shame: Moral and Spiritual Perspectives," in *The Value of Shame – Exploring a Health Resource in Cultural Contexts*, edited by Elisabeth Vanderheiden and Claude-Hélène Mayer (Cham: Springer, 2017), 101.

375 Cf. ibid.

376 Ibid., 102.

with intention. Attention animated by desire, or attention become intention, awakens within us the awareness of a deepened relationship with ourselves and with others, with the world and with some greater sense of meaning."[377] This is the reason why religion and spirituality can intensify modes of living. Everything gains increased significance. Against the backdrop of this understanding, it is not at all surprising that religion and spirituality may also cause experiences of shame: whenever the actual context of agency constituted by this attention/intention/desire clashes with a different context, or the prescribed project fails, shame may be a likely result – although admittedly not a necessary one.

Spirituality and religion represent traditions and practices that are among the potentially most influential, relationally shaped contexts of agency in which a person can engage. Not only are religious groups places for feedback, socialization, moral formation, and discernment, but most religious contexts also provide the individual with the notion of an all-seeing eye and a constantly present deity which can be imagined as present at any given moment, and not only as present in clearly delineated contexts of agency. With regard to shame, that fact is important because it means that in any given context of agency there is a potential for being interrupted by one's own consciousness of how the divine considers who one is and what one does. Such interruption may not only cause shame, of course, it can also cause pride and joy, depending on what one does and what type of self-esteem one can maintain concerning one's being or doing. This double function testifies to the ambiguous role of religion: it generates joy, pride, and a deep sense of meaning, but it also mediates strong experiences of oppression, failure and shame.

We can look at some examples that show how shame and religion may be intertwined, and which can contribute to exemplify the formalized description that we referred to by William James above:

- A speaker in the church academy talks about how faith in God allows believers to see everything, including themselves, in a new

377 For a thorough analysis of the role of such ultimacy, cf., for example, Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Representation and Ultimacy: Christian Religion as Unfinished Business* (Münster; Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2020).

light and also enables them to see other dimensions of reality than those that would be possible without faith. He elaborates on the conception of "God as light" in order to convey this message. After the talk, there is a Q&A session. A woman in the audience responds like this: "I think this idea about God as light is terrible: it means that he sees me, and I feel so shameful for who I am!"

- A devout and pious teenage boy realizes that he has sexual feelings for other boys. His imam has told him that in Islam, homosexuality is considered a sin. Although he is not "practicing" his sexual orientation, he feels that there is something fundamentally wrong with him, and experiences increasingly more that it is difficult to relate positively to Allah: he feels shameful for his feelings and has a growing fear of Allah's rejection.
- One of the prominent leaders in a congregation divorces after many years of troublesome marriage. Suddenly, he realizes that he is not eligible for positions in the church anymore and that people are not inviting him home any longer. He feels that people are avoiding him and he is not sure if he is shameful himself, or if people are shameful on his behalf. His sense of belonging to the congregation starts to deteriorate.[378]
- A pastor preaches about how the death of Jesus on the cross atones for all the sins of humanity, and that the listeners can rest assured that their sins are not an obstacle for being accepted by God and receiving God's grace any longer. However, several of the people in the pew feel that her message is of no help to them: they still feel ashamed in the eyes of God, because Jesus had to die for their sins.

The above examples are sufficient to illustrate some of the various ways in which shame and shaming can interact with religious traditions – at

378 This example shows how shame is backward-looking and does not necessarily offer guidance for future agency: one is ashamed of something in the past, and there is no obvious constructive way to use shame or shaming in such contexts. The only exception would be if one was able to contemplate future actions and what they may imply in terms of shame: "I will not divorce again if it leads to this shame that I am now bearing." However, this use illustrates another problem with shame in this regard: shame may then prevent one from doing something that, in the long run, is healthy and important for one's well-being (namely, to get out of a destructive relationship).

least negatively. They are mostly taken from a Western, Christian context, but some of them, at least, should also be possible to recognize in other cultural or religious contexts. They also display the many factors that may be involved in shame and shaming: religious individuals, doctrines, symbols, practices, and communities are all possible candidates for being part of shaming practices that are intimately and insolubly tied to experiences with religion.

Our initial description of how shame is the result of an interruption of the manifestations of the self through an intentionally directed agency can illuminate the ambiguous ways in which religion may play a role for the self. It can also illuminate the possible relationship between religion and shame: religion contributes essential elements for self-esteem, values, and orientation in human life. It provides crucial ego-ideals with which the person can identify, and on which basis the individual can develop his or her sense of self.[379] By understanding oneself and acting in accordance with these (religious) elements, the self develops important features in its identity. Religious resources shape emotion, social behavior, and self-perception. It is important to note here that these religious elements (self-symbols, in a Kohutian sense, parts of which serve as ego ideals) become an integrated part of the self and are not easily exchanged for others. When people act based on such religious resources, it is because they find them meaningful, contributing to their agency in some way and to their long-term sense of well-being and social belonging. That point, however, does not exclude that religious imagery may also have been internalized in ways that sometimes conflict with these positive contributions.

For people to whom religion (as symbols, narratives, practices, social interaction, imaginaries and conceptions) is a part of their identity formation, it becomes a vital part of what guides their ways of being-in-the-world, their interpretations of experiences, and themselves. How

379 Cf. the description of the idealizing pole in our description of the self according to Kohut in Chapter 3 above. Ego ideals are understood here as more or less conscious ideals of personal excellence, which are based on a composite image of the characteristics of people with whom the individual identifies, initially the parents, but later on also other authority figures. Such ideals are crucial because much of shame that is elicited in a religious context comes about as a result of an experienced dissonance with these ideals, be it real or not, *and the concomitant desire to hide from this experience.*

deep religious resources go in terms of contributing to a person's sense of self and personal investment in orientation and transformation[380] may vary considerably. People who are religious can interact with religious resources in a wide variety of ways, both positively and negatively.

The relationship between religion and psychological conditions should not be underestimated either. How individuals interact with religious imaginaries, practices, etc., and their possible experience of shame most likely depend on their experiences with caretakers in early childhood. To what extent interaction with parents or significant others has made them prone to feeling shame or not will most likely have an impact on how religious elements interact with the self. If the relationship has been good, resilience with regard to shame and shaming may be more robust than if their upbringing made them more prone to it. The most clearly negative or positive effects of religion are when religious resources are employed in and entwined with the development of the relationship to the parent/s.

However, as we shall return to, people may also turn to religious resources to overcome negative childhood experiences and conditions and use religion in ways that work against experiences of shame. Then they use religious resources in the way that James describes positively. Accordingly, we need to balance the above-mentioned examples and take into consideration the ambiguity of the relationships just mentioned. We will return to these positive features in the last section of this chapter, but need to make aware of it from the outset since much of what we are going to present in the following chapter deals with the negative aspects of religion and shame. Therefore, the following may contribute to a mainly negative picture of religion – which is not our sole intention.

Understanding religion to understand shame

How can we think of the relation between religion and shame more concretely? We can start by considering the following options:

---

380 On the understanding of religion as practices of orientation and transformation underlying this analysis, see Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Religion as Orientation and Transformation: A Maximalist Theory* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

- Religion (through practices, rituals, symbols, teaching) may engender or produce shame
- Religion may enhance already existing shame or cause people prone to shame to feel ashamed
- Religion may reduce shame or offer a means to overcome it, for example, by providing resources for self-experience and participation in a community that run contrary to shame experience.
- Religious counseling, as with other types of counseling, can offer opportunities for distinguishing between shame and other feelings (such as guilt), or for conflating and confusing such feelings, making it harder to deal with them separately.

In principle, there is nothing exclusively distinctive or special about religion when it comes to how shame appears within its context. Religions do not work on a basis separate from the other conditions of human life. Therefore, the general conditions for (dealing with) shame come to the fore in religion as well. Moreover, since religion is an important part of many peoples' lives, it is useful to look more closely at how the relationship between religion and shame works. This approach may, in turn, allow us to see some of the more generic traits of this relationship in a new light. It may also be necessary for those who practice religion to become more aware of what may be at stake in this relationship.

Religions relate to all the dimensions of human experience that we identified in the introduction: religions are not only about cognitive beliefs in peoples' minds but have to do with social and cultural components, as well as psychological ones. When we consider religions from a pragmatic angle, it entails that we approach them as symbolic resources for orientation and transformation in the different dimensions of experience. They provide resources for order and stability in a world that is constantly on the threshold of chaos, as well as for personal transformation. Religions offer a way of life, and they provide humans with resources for a specific mode of being in the world where life is seen from the vantage point of what is considered as ultimate. As such, religion constitutes a whole way of being that not only relates us to what befalls us in different ways; it also shapes our world, our experiences of ourselves, and the world we

live in. Accordingly, we cannot separate the modes of being-in-the-world that religion shapes and conditions from the symbolic contents of that religious tradition. This content expresses itself in identity-formatting elements, in rituals and stories, in beliefs about morality and the "afterlife," and so on. A mere functionalist approach to religion that views it as a social phenomenon like any other, without taking into account these internal and internalized dimensions and *how* they shape actual human experience, may, accordingly, fall short of being able to describe what religion is and what it does. Therefore, we need to address contents in specific religions that may engender, contribute to, or reduce shame.

Religion is, nevertheless, rarely addressed in the growing literature on shame in present-day scholarly and scientific studies. In the literature we have reviewed while writing this book, religions and their role in relation to shame is, with a few exceptions, only mentioned in passing, if at all.[381] The cultural context, of which religions are a part, provides the environment in which shame and shaming are possible. Since shame implies a tacit or explicit evaluation of a person or their conduct, shame cannot be determined as a mere individually based phenomenon – it does not simply exist in the relation between the person and their deity but is always mediated through a third instance – the social world. Leeming and Boyle point to how the

> … evaluations are often achieved jointly with others and are shaped by available discourses that may construct failure or wrongdoing in ways that inevitably imply shame. Any continuity in these evaluations may arise from social rather than intra-individual processes. For example, within some religious communities unmarried mothers may find it difficult to avoid making attribution of failure to the whole self, leading to a continuing sense of shame. This would be likely where there is no image of acceptable single parenthood, and sexual activity on the part of single women is not only deemed unacceptable but is also considered a sign of a flawed moral character. This means that continuity of shame might depend in part on the particular social and cultural niche the person occupies. Evaluations of the self and attributions of responsibility that

381 The only exceptions to this claim are the few studies we can find about shame and sexuality in an Islamic context. However, in these studies as well, religion is not foregrounded.

> show some degree of consistency cannot, therefore, be assumed to be simply characteristics of the individual, nor should they be assumed to be set in stone and entirely explained with reference to early family functioning.[382]

We will have ample opportunity to develop the points mentioned in this quote in the course of the present chapter. Among other elements, it is important here to note how Leeming and Boyle point to how it is the social context that constitutes the acceptable images of different states of affairs, as well as the continuity of such evaluations. Thereby, they indicate that shame in a religious context is predominantly a social and cultural phenomenon generated by the accessible and inaccessible social roles or conditions. Thus, religions, as providers of repertoires of orientation and evaluation, and as reservoirs of interpretative resources, contribute in different ways to either engendering or hindering shame.

Shame for being and doing in a religious context

Religions not only determine how we may perceive and understand the "outside world" as well as our embodied condition, but they also provide the means for understanding oneself in a social and cultural context. They offer motivations for some types of agency and warrants to abstain from other types of acts and practices. Hence, religions provide symbolic resources for interpreting what the world is, how to act in it, and what it should be (normatively). In other words, religions provide ontological as well as moral orientation.

Sometimes, the combination of ontological and moral elements contributes to a special form of predicament in religion and spirituality: the shame that follows from quite natural conditions, like being a woman, gay or lesbian, or feeling anger when one is treated badly, or experiencing sexual desire. The normativity at work in religion may sometimes run up against these natural features, and the consequences can be devastating.

382 Dawn Leeming and Mary Boyle, "Shame as a Social Phenomenon: A Critical Analysis of the Concept of Dispositional Shame," *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* 77, no. 3 (2004), 385.

The lack of positive recognition of the workings of these fundamental features of human life contributes to religion and spirituality being at odds with conditions in human life that are inescapable. Thereby, a clash with normative contexts is not only unavoidable, but it may be perpetual as well, and shame may therefore be close at hand.

Martha Nussbaum's work on shame points to some features that are highly relevant in the context of religious life, and which are related to this point. She acknowledges the ubiquity of shame: "Shame is a permanent possibility in our lives, a constant companion."[383] Furthermore, when she defines shame as "a painful emotion responding to a sense of failure to attain some ideal state,"[384] this point is relevant for religion as well, since religion provides humans with ideals and chances for the idealization of the self, others, and personal behavior to a large extent. Religious symbols or ideals thereby offer chances for experiencing self-worth through the relation to and fulfillment of these ideals, whereas they may also provide chances for experiencing shame when conditions for experiencing self-worth are not present, or when the relationship to these ideals is compromised. The actual articulation of such ideal standards and the employment of them in relation to how people are and what they do creates the potential for shame and shaming in religion.[385] As Silvan Tomkins points out in one of his phenomenological descriptions of shame, "there appear to be a multiplicity of innate sources of shame, since there are innumerable ways in which excitement and enjoyment may be partially blocked and reduced and thereby activate shame. Man is not only an anxious and a suffering animal, but he is above all a shy animal, easily caught and impaled between longing and despair."[386] Religious resources fit in well in the picture of what contributes to such processes.

The above suggests that religions may not be reduced to morality only and to a self-perception that tells you that something you did was right or wrong. Religions also point to how some states of affairs may be right or

383 Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, 173.
384 Ibid., 184.
385 We will return to some of Nussbaum's reflections in the conclusion to this chapter, where we address the more constructive features of religion's understanding of the human condition.
386 Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, 387.

wrong, be it in the individual's physique or inner life, in their moral disposition, their presence in the community, or in the cosmic order. Religion rests on ontological definitions and expresses ontological qualities. Hence, we can make a fourfold distinction between how religions *may* contribute to, or may impede, the development of shame (or guilt).[387] It may be for reasons of agency, or for reasons related to who you are. Then we arrive at this figure:

	Ideals for agency	**Ontology**
Engendering shame	Doing wrong	Being wrong
Impeding shame	Doing good	Being good

Of course, the above should not be taken as strictly delineated categories, as they may interfere with each other, for example, when permanent guilt for doing wrong leads to shame. They can be applied to other elements in human life than religion, as well. We nevertheless argue that in a religious context, these different options may serve to amplify each other because of the strong intertwinement of agency ideals and ontological elements in religion. For example, when young couples engage in sexual acts because they are attracted to each other, those who have had a strict religious upbringing may not only feel good about such practices. They may also feel that what they are doing is shameful, and may also feel ashamed about who they are, what they feel, and what they are reminded of having done. This example is not relevant in the area of sexuality only, though. It is similar to other cases where what you feel and what you do are intertwined in ways that are not deemed acceptable by peers or recognized as the good way to be and the right way to feel and act.

The intertwinement of religious symbolism and ideals for agency makes it even harder for people who are prone to shame to separate between these two dimensions. If someone has done something that they feel is wrong in the eyes of God, their experience of God may not only be negative in relation to the actual conduct, but they may feel permanently condemned when they think of God, because of God's omnipresence in their life from which they cannot separate themselves. Moreover, some

387 Cf. how this setup may correspond with our previous elaborations on shame and guilt, in Chapter 2, pp. 47–51.

types of religious imagery may perpetuate negative self-experience in ways that may hinder religious people from overcoming their shameful status. We analyze some of these later in this chapter.

Furthermore, other modes of power may operate in religious circles than those we usually reckon with in a modern Western context. To understand how shame works in a religious context, the relational focus that we argue for throughout this book applies even more here. The problem with shame in a religious context is that one must locate it in systems and situations in which the social exercise of power is involved. Only then can we also understand more about how and why individuals are susceptible to institutional shaming.[388]

Fundamental features: the past and (its) authority

Most religions have emerged out of traditional societies and cultures where shame was (and still sometimes is) part of what constitutes and regulates normative features of the society. Their origin shapes their content, also with regard to shame. The fact that religious traditions are dependent on references to the past and to authorities in other periods of history makes it hard to leave shame behind as a feeling, and shaming as a practice, as something that belongs only to the past. The past still plays a vital role in many religious contexts, not least in the appeal to religious authorities that require respect and obedience. Shame and shaming is, therefore, always a possibility since shame often belongs to the reservoir of resources on which religions rely.[389] It is used in different ways: either as a disciplining element (as in the shameless Arabian daughters) or in rituals that expose it with the aim of overcoming it.

Religious resources that can lead to the development of shame may tell us something that is not always obvious about what it is to be human: as relational beings, humans are interwoven with, guided by, and connected

---

388 Cf. Clough, *Shame, the Church and the Regulation of Female Sexuality*, 35.

389 There are clear references to shame in the texts of the major religions, and some of these religions also have obvious practices of shaming.

to history. Even though we may think we live in a society in which shame is not the most obvious feature (and many modern Western humans may tend to think so), the fact that the roots of religions in most cases go back to historical periods in which shame was an integral part of the societal order, is of relevance here. When the individual develops his or her identity with the help of these resources, he or she taps into ways of thinking about the self that may not be obvious to the modern mind. An obvious example is how some Christians sometimes learn to think about their sexuality in terms of being clean or unclean, or how other religious traditions understand certain types of food as unclean or some types of clothing as more appropriate than others. Such evaluations go back to a time when those categories represented acceptable and widely shared ways of thinking. But hardly any person who grows up today with no link to ancient religious resources for self-understanding will think, for example, about their sexuality or dress code in terms of such categories.[390] However, for those who do, the link back to traditional categories of self-assessment can be debilitating and shame-producing.

Within a religious framework, topics related to morality, discipline, social belonging, acceptable feelings, and desires, as well as acceptable thoughts and values, are amalgamated into a unity.[391] It makes it tempting to say that religions, with regard to shame, do not add much to our identification and analysis of shame in contexts that are not shaped by religion. However, even postmodern secular contexts carry the implicit values and frameworks of our shared past. Thus, unarticulated remnants of a cultural-religious past may still manifest themselves through current shame responses. Accordingly, it makes good sense to analyze the specific mechanisms of shame inherent in religious traditions.

390 The underlying premise of this example is that shame is related to that which is impure. For how this notion of impurity remains the case in religious contexts, one only needs to search for "Shame, impurity" on the internet – and see how Catholics struggle with it. Cf. also Burrus, *Saving Shame*, Introduction.

391 This amalgamation has profound and complicated consequences for how to address the relationship between religion and morality. For an interesting comment to the relationship between religion, morality and shame from the point of view of elements not thought through sufficiently in the so-called "new atheism," see Tony Lynch and Nishanathe Dahanayake, "Atheism and Morality, Guilt and Shame: Why the Moral Complacency of the New Atheism Is a Mistake," *Philosophical Investigations* 40, no. 2 (2017).

Due to the amalgamation just mentioned, religious traditions sometimes give the features of shame a stronger impact on personal life and the collective order. Therefore, we cannot and should not neglect or pass over too quickly the role shame has in religion or reduce it to features that we can detect in similar ways in other contexts. Religions often do go to the roots of personality development, and the combination of religion/spirituality and shame may, therefore, be of crucial importance for understanding how religious traditions influence a person's identity.

The fact that religious traditions are exactly that, that is, traditions, therefore exposes their adherents to possible experiences of shame in ways that are not so obvious in other contexts. That the past has an authority to which one is expected to be obedient, and which is the basis of more or less constant self-scrutiny, is an unfamiliar thought in a modern context. Failure to live up to standards, and, accordingly, opportunities for shame, are already present here. Similar mechanisms are at work in the explicit and implicit codes of conduct and requirements for conformity that shape religious communities and groups; to not know these codes, or to go against them, or not to conform to the expectations of your religious peers, may also cause shame.

A specific condition for shame is the relation to religious authority figures who often serve as substitutes for parents. Their role is to provide religious adherents with a necessary feeling of safety, recognition, ideals, and guidance. Religious authority figures, many of whom have a designated role as members of the clergy, never have a mere individual role but represent the stability, the normative framework, the trust, and the guidance that everyone needs to become socialized into a religious community. They are stewards of the past and guides to future practice. To be in opposition to them, question their authority, or not obey their guidance, may cause responses that lead to shame or shaming, as when an individual does not live up to the standards that she or he recognizes as the right ones. Since the past is stewarded by authority figures on whom one is dependent for being recognized and accepted by, religious leaders and authorities are in a position of power: they can easily shame people or exploit their position in ways that lead to shame in adherents. Religious adherents with low self-esteem are dependent on their positive

evaluations, and the greater their need for recognition, the easier it is for authorities to take advantage of them – which, in turn, can lead to exploitative practices and abuse that produce even more shame.[392]

Religion and idealization

The person who feels shame experiences that he or she is not living up to the ideal standards he or she thinks apply to him or her. Religion delivers such standards efficiently. The words of Jesus, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew, 5;48), are words that set high, if not impossible, standards for religious believers. No one is perfect, and one of the preconditions for becoming a mature person is to realize that this is the case. However, religious teachings and practices may often conceal this fact and contribute to an idealization of adherents, authorities, or, of course, God or the divine. Thus, the impossible standards become "the norm" against which one measures oneself. What does it mean for the understanding of shame in religion?

One main point is that religion contributes to the double perspective on oneself and one's agency that we have outlined earlier: thus, agency rooted in immediate interests, intentions, and desires is always at risk of being interrupted by standards of perfection. When religion manifests impossible standards, it also contributes to the clash between contexts

392 The ways in which the clergy has sexually abused children and others, and hidden behind a veil of silence, and used the shame of the victims as a way to shield themselves, offers an appalling example of how such authorities, considered as representatives of God by their peers, have misused their position for such purposes. The power at play in such abuse should not be seen as an isolated phenomenon, though. Miryam Clough, referring to the Roman Catholic Church, argues that "in a church whose symbolically constructed reality is based on the denial of both the natural human drive for sex and of innate human fragility, yet which conveys its core tenets through rhetoric and ritual that make mortality salient, it is perhaps no surprise that men's abuse of women and children is proving to have been extensive. Neither are we to be surprised that studies have identified that high numbers of Roman Catholic priests suffer from emotional immaturity or psychological disturbances and that many have unresolved psychosexual problems. Whereas for many Catholics marriage buffers the death threat associated with sex, this is not available for priests and religious. Further, by emphasizing independence and self-sufficiency for males, gender-role norms have limited the ability of many men to comfortably experience intimacy, thereby restricting emotional development and provoking shame when these ideals are not met." Clough, *Shame, the Church and the Regulation of Female Sexuality*, 124–125 (references excluded).

of agency, since the immediate and actual context of agency is measured against the perfect one.

Idealized states do not only present impossible ideals. According to psychoanalytic theory, individuals who have trouble facing difficult feelings of failure or incompleteness mobilize so-called "splitting" as a defense to overcome what they feel is an unbearable situation. The polarization that results from such splitting leads to viewing events or people as either totally bad or good. At this point, religious imagery comes in as relevant because it allows individuals to see something as exclusively good. This strategy is called idealization. This strategy attributes exclusively positive qualities to one's religion, the group, the individual, the authority or teacher, or to the divine, as well as to oneself when one is part of this group or is recognized by this idealized teacher.[393] Such idealization contributes to ignoring problems and prevents criticism of the idealized instance and maintains one's positive self-esteem and pride in oneself. However, the problem is never solved in full, since the negative or harmful elements that cause the need for polarization remain present although split off from where one places one's identity and focus.

Idealization can also provide the means for further shame – as when one is ill or not able to display the signs of success that are expected of believers, as in the so-called prosperity gospel religion. Here, shame may also increase because the responsibility for lack of success or health is placed on the individual – as someone who does not conform to the expectations of belonging to the community.

The opposite of idealization is devaluation. Religious imagery offers sufficient means for the strategies of both idealization and devaluation. The more clear-cut the distinctions are between good and bad, insider and outsider, the more religion may (but need not) contribute to the idealization that is quite natural at an early stage of childhood development. However, such dichotomization is usually overcome and replaced by the capacity for experiencing ambivalence if the child's development has not been interrupted by trauma or neglect. If the latter is the case,

393 Note how this then also allows idealization to play a role in the narcissistic efforts to feel good about oneself.

idealization may be a working strategy also in adult persons – and contribute to the unrealistic self-perception that makes one's imperfections causes for shame.

Here we can relate our understanding of religion to elements that were developed in the previous chapter on psychology and shame: Not all idealization is problematic. Kohut sees idealization in childhood as a healthy mechanism. It is the task of parents to provide appropriate opportunities for idealization and mirroring in the child. Then the child can overcome the natural, initial grandiosity that makes him or her dependent on others to provide his or her self-esteem. When this is done appropriately and provides the child with what Kohut calls optimal frustration, the child's idealization of self and of others can gradually diminish, and more realistic perceptions of the self and the world can emerge. If this grandiosity is not overcome, the chances that shame will appear remain more likely.

James W. Jones has developed these insights with specific reference to religion. He underscores that all religion contributes to the idealization of everyday objects. Such idealizations provide much of the transforming power of religious experience and are central to religion in general. Jones underscores how the dynamic of idealization can account for the ambiguity in religion.[394] To what extent religious imagery, resources, and practices contribute to a healthy and realistic perception of self, others, and the world, or simply underpin already existing patterns in the self that manifests arrested development, lacking the capacity for ambivalence, is, therefore, an open question. It may do both – although seldom at the same time.

As already indicated, idealization is closely related to the capacity for tolerating ambiguity, and to the phenomenon of splitting. Since religious imaginaries are employed in a way that "divides the world into completely opposed black and white camps in which things are either all good or all bad," splitting the world thus can only be dissolved by developing the capacity for ambiguity, in which that which was formerly understood as perfect or ideal becomes perceived in a more nuanced light.[395]

394 Cf. James W. Jones, *Terror and Transformation: The Ambiguity of Religion in Psychoanalytic Perspectives* (Hove: Brunner-Routledge, 2002), 6.

395 Ibid., 58.

Against this backdrop, idealization, as promoted by religious resources and practices, can be seen as the result of the need for certainty in an insecure and precarious reality. A religiously diverse situation contributes to such insecurity. The presence of other religious views and orientations makes it harder to perceive one's religion as the sole or accepted alternative.[396] Jones holds that the remedy for idealization is to acknowledge one's finitude.[397] Thus, he provides an important corollary to Nussbaum's argument for the realization of imperfection as a remedy for shame.[398] Interestingly, some religious imagery provides opportunities for such acknowledgment – perhaps most distinctively expressed in the Jewish and Christian understanding of humans as created in the image of God – which is a combination of a high evaluation of humanity that can prevent shame and a more realistic attitude (I am not God, but a finite being called to make the infinite present in the world since I am created in God's image). Thus, religious imagery or conceptions linked to shame may enable movements in different directions: away from the community and the self one feels shameful for, and towards community and self-acceptance. We can see the distinctiveness of religion in the fact that the experienced shameful action is explained and placed within a broader frame of reference where the movements are required, and secured, due to divine intervention. This frame of reference is fraught with the policing strategies expressed in religious communities.

Identity in religious groups – and shame

For most people, to be religious is to have some kind of belonging to a group. We stress the notion *group* here, since it seems more relevant to our topic than "congregation," "community," or other notions that depict a larger assembly of people. There can be many different groups within one congregation or community, and even more when we speak of the

396 This point is analyzed well in Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, Anchor Books (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1980).

397 Jones, *Terror and Transformation: The Ambiguity of Religion in Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, 168–169.

398 See below, pp. 264f., 343.

members of a denomination. What interests us here is how the interaction between the group and the individual shapes the religious identity of a person.

To a large extent, how a person develops the religious dimensions of his or her personality depends upon the combination of social practices in which he or she partakes (including those that reflect specific psychological patterns and conditions) and what we can call religious imaginaries. Social practices – including religious ones – can build on, reinforce, supplement, or provide a substitute for (or an alternative to) the psychological patterns that the individual developed during his or her upbringing (by their parents). Sometimes these conditions may merge in ways that are hard to separate from each other, as when the parents or caretakers are themselves strongly invested in the religious group and bring their children with them. Thus, there may be various possibilities concerning how shame can emerge in a religious context. These are important to note because they suggest that shame's contextual conditions are, also in religion, of crucial importance for its development:

a) For someone who, as a result of their upbringing, is prone to shame, and has developed a strong psychological dependence on peers, religious resources may work in the following ways. For example, if he or she is part of a religious shame culture, his or her participation may enhance his or her shame. However, if he or she finds a more positive and affirming religious community, this community may add new and positive features that *supplement* his or her original shame-proneness. In some cases, a different community may even allow him or her to participate in practices that overcome shame and enable the development of a new identity that draws on and utilizes other relations and resources than those from which he or she originally came.
b) For someone who, as the result of their upbringing, has developed high self-esteem and relative psychological independence from peers, religious resources may work in the following ways: On the positive side, a religious community may contribute to maintain

> their positive self-esteem and improve it further. However, a religious community which uses shame as a disciplining or controlling element may also shape a more ambiguous self-relation that includes elements of shame as well as self-esteem. Then, community participation may give rise to conflicted feelings. In the worst negative cases, participation in a community of religious practices where shame is involved and actively used may destroy the earlier feeling of self-esteem or independence.

The alternatives sketched here suggest two things: First, we should consider how shame works in the context of personal identity that employs religious resources as dependent on, or at least related to, the conditions for the individual's psychological development. Religious resources (understood as symbolic elements, doctrines that shape self-perception, ritual practices, social interaction, and other elements of identity formation) may nevertheless not only work on the premises of these psychological conditions. They may also, to a greater or lesser extent, themselves be part of the (psychological) resources that determine to what extent, and in what way, the individual experiences shame. Second, the setup also indicates that one cannot speak about the role that religion takes on regarding shame independently of the contexts of upbringing and of the actual religious practices in which the individual takes part. Concerning shame, the content of religion becomes a dependent variable – a fact that makes generic statements about the role of religion in relation to shame difficult, and which underscores religion's ambiguity in the development of the self.

A religious context is often (but not always) marked by voluntary participation and concomitant high personal investment. Here, the emotional bonds that reinforce shame may do so in ways that would not be similar to cases where such bonds did not to the same extent determine the relationship between the individual and his or her peers. The group is the community to which the individual feels that he or she belongs and with which he or she shares a common cause. In a group, the chances for deep and personal relationships are stronger than those possible in a larger setting with weaker bonds – and this can bear much positive

fruit for the individual's development of self-esteem. But the personal and emotional elements that are involved in group belonging also make the individual more vulnerable to misconduct or failed relationships with others.

The religious context may allow the individual to come into closer contact with him or herself and to learn more about his or her vulnerabilities. Thereby, he or she may also develop strategies for how to deal with shame, and even find help and resources to overcome (at least, some of) it. However, the group context may also be the place in which these vulnerabilities are exposed. It may leave him or her hurt or shamed – not least because this context is the place in which his or her basic value orientations, values and commitments may be grounded. If the group functions ambiguously, it may create an atmosphere of both belonging and of vulnerability, which can make the individual more prone to shame. A group that expresses such ambiguous traits may also be harder to leave. Since religion almost always exists as a community, to leave the group may be difficult without also leaving behind your religious loyalties. On the other hand, if you leave religion behind, this may be a cause for shame in the face of your peers; people may, therefore, sometimes continue to attend a church to avoid shame when they have stopped believing because of their emotional belonging to the group. But they may also stop visiting their religious group because of the shame they feel when they do not any longer maintain their religious commitments. In both cases, shame engendered by the conflict between commitments and the actual agency is dealt with.

Conformity and compliance

Religious groups have rules of conduct to which they expect their members to conform, to a greater or lesser extent. To express dissent is not always possible without the risk of being marginalized or ostracized. The smaller and more tightly knit the group is, the easier it is to make sure that members act in accordance with normative expectations. Thus, shame is a constant risk, since it means that the individual may have to create a barrier to his or her individual aspirations, desires, or projects

to comply with or conform to those of the group.[399] Rules usually need not be policed but are often simply internalized by members. Thus, when members do not live up to the expectations of the group, it is their own, self-appropriated potential for shame through self-policing that regulates their behavior. Accordingly, shame results from incoherence between actual conduct and internalized ideals. Such incoherence manifests a certain lack of autonomy. Hence, to avoid shame, heteronomy is here expressed in the self-restraint and compliance that shapes the individual's agency. This agency, nevertheless, is built on internalized virtues that make sure that the requirements for belonging are met. Identity as a consequence of belonging to the group is then secured. However, in many religious contexts, belonging is not secured once and for all. Because religious groups require the adoption of certain doctrines and conformity to specific practices, belonging to the group can be in jeopardy all the time. The more extensive or encompassing, clearly stated, and strongly practiced the norms are that guide the group, the easier it is to become subject to shame or to become shameful. Two examples which can illustrate this point are described in the following paragraphs.

In some strongly conservative and tightly knit religious groups, if one questions the authority of the leader or deviates from accepted doctrine, these would be instances that could subject someone to shaming. One would then, for example, be told that this is not something that one had expected of him or her to say, and the expressions of disappointment by the authority would not only make the individual ashamed. It could also activate memories of childhood experiences in which he or she had provoked similar reactions. Such shaming furthermore makes it clear that the individual is not considered equal to the other members of the group any longer, as he or she has not lived up to the taken-for-granted norms that bind the group together. Group membership may be in jeopardy. This example also points to a factor we have touched upon in the Introduction: how shame may emerge out of the conflict between two contexts of agency that are not possible to bring in consonance. In the above case,

399 Cf. how Tomkins in *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, 389, sees shame as dependent on barriers to excitement and enjoyment. A consequence of this view is that the pluralism of desires must be matched by a pluralism of shame – it is not only experienced as one "thing".

one's context of belief deviates from the accepted one, which is taken for granted by the others. In the following example, agency that belongs to private and intimate contexts conflicts with more public contexts that provide a negative normative interpretation of the conduct in question.

In earlier times, mothers who had children out of wedlock (and, accordingly, in another context than the accepted one) were often shamed in different ways, both in churches and in society. It could taint them for the rest of their lives. But we need not gofar back in history to find similar examples: Not so many decades ago, a couple with whom one of the present authors was acquainted had to stand in front of their congregation in a small town in the south of the then highly secularized Norway. They had to confess to everyone that they had been sleeping together before they were married.[400] It is hard to consider this practice as anything other than shaming, and the shame was caused by the confrontation of two different contexts of agency. The example can, nevertheless, illustrate more than the often-observed religious preoccupation with sex. We can use it to illustrate some of the options that are in play when shame and religious belonging work together: Consider first of all how this shaming practice makes sex a matter of public interest. It brings something that belongs to the most vulnerable and intimate dimension of life to the attention of every member of the congregation. Consider then the shame that not only the couple themselves but also their families may feel.[401] Besides them, this practice probably makes every other member of the congregation that has been involved in similar conduct without being exposed shameful. Thus, this shaming practice reinforces the idea that the actual behavior, in general, is of interest to the whole congregation (and belongs to a broader context than the private domain). Moreover, this behavior in question is especially shameful, since it leads to the need for a public confession, which may not be required in the case of other "transgressions."

Then, consider two more elements: First, what if the couple rejects the demand to confess in public? Then they run the risk of being subjected to an

---

400 It is striking to the authors, as it probably is to the reader as well, how much religion is concerned with the regulation of sexual behavior. *Why* this is so is not the topic of this book, but examples of this are multitude, also in relation to our topic here.

401 This is shame by association, a topic which we do not discuss in the present book.

even more shameful practice: they may be excommunicated from the congregation and the community that has fostered their religious identity. Alternatively, they may simply say that they will not do it and leave the congregation, regardless of the consequences they have to bear. How these options appear depends on how strong their ties are to the congregation or the group. If they do not think that what they have done is so serious, this can be an indication of their lack of socialization into the group and the accompanying lack of internalization of its normative requirements. But if they have internalized these norms and nevertheless fallen for the temptation that sexual pleasure presented to them, they may have a greater problem deciding what to do.

In any case, the only option this couple has to avoid public shame or shaming is to adopt other norms and give up their membership of the congregation. But even if they adopt other norms, shame may still prevail, since the impact of the view of others may still be persistent.[402] If they want to maintain their relationship with the group, shame is unavoidable. Thus, shame is the cost of continued belonging.[403] In addition, when we know from empirical studies that restrictive norms concerning sexual practices are something that cause many young people to withdraw from religious groups or communities, it is easy to see that shaming practices negatively impact adherence to religious communities.[404]

On the other hand, though, religious groups can also contribute positively to the overcoming of shame. Many children and young people who have had a problematic upbringing and have never been given a chance to develop a robust feeling of self-esteem have experienced religious youth groups as places where they are accepted and recognized as valuable in themselves. Thereby, they are given better chances to develop resources for self-acceptance than they were given at home. The sense of belonging to a group like this can, therefore, be crucial to the experience of being something more and different to what one has experienced about oneself

402 Cf. above pp. 227f.

403 We have deliberately used this example because it provides a vivid example of something that we know is presently happening much more often, but in ways that are more hidden: to "come out" as gay or lesbian in many churches is still hard to do in many cases. The dynamics in the example above may not always be the same, but the restrictive attitude towards homosexuality in many churches leaves the members involved with only two choices: either to conform, or to leave.

404 Cf. Åse Røthing, *Sex, Kjønn & Kristentro* (Oslo: Verbum, 1998).

earlier. We have earlier seen how a lack of care in early childhood can make children prone to shame and dependent on others than parents for recognition and safety. When religious groups offer opportunities for self-esteem and recognition, for safety and for developing new and more positive roles in which one is not always dependent on the moods of others, they, therefore, serve an important positive function. However, the role that the religious group can play in this regard is nevertheless compensatory, and it continues to work on the premises of childhood development. It is, therefore, important to be aware of elements in the practices, symbols, and teachings around which the group gathers, since these can contribute to further experiences of shame or reinforce childhood patterns. For example, the teachings that God is wrathful because of one's sin may easily reinforce childhood patterns that say that "I am accepted by God as long as I am not a sinner," which is structurally parallel to "Dad only loves me as long as I do what he says."

Below, we will further develop some examples of how religious imagery can interact with group dynamics in ways that have a profound impact on shame and shaming.

The risk of shame in the context of religious practices

Theologian Graham Ward writes, "Shame exposes that which is most intimate about the embodied self, but it also exposes sets of values and levels of interest. We can only be ashamed if we care about something. So, shame is both a very personal experience, but also a highly socialized event in the sense that it is saturated with social and cultural investments. Body, self and society meet around practices of shaming and experiences of being ashamed."[405] Not least is this expressed in religious contexts where the ambiguities of shame may be easy to detect. Religious practices relate to, articulate, and shape some of the most important features and events in human life. Most obviously, they provide rituals related

405 Graham Ward,"Adam and Eve's Shame (and Ours)," *Literature and Theology: An International Journal of Religion, Theory, and Culture* 26, no. 3 (2012)307.

to childbirth, death and mourning, and for marriage, to name the most obvious. Many religious contexts also provide opportunities for counseling in times of crisis, or simply for life-guidance to provide better chances for self-development and human growth. But the flip-side of all these practices is the risk of shame.

We want to identify two main points when we look at shame in the context of religious practices. First, as already pointed out by Ward above, such practices are often (but not exclusively) social: they involve the individual in a context where he or she potentially interacts with others. Therefore, to think of religion as something that people merely believe is misleading: it is also about how the individual practices specific types of agency and interacts with and relates to other people. Thus, in cases where such practices are related to shame, it is not only because of what people think or the content of their minds: it is about what people do and how they interact with and communicate with others. Second, religious practices sometimes involve people when they are at their most vulnerable. Not only in times of grief or bereavement, or in times of personal crisis, but also in times of joy and expectation. The latter situations may also make people prone to shame, as we shall see in the following examples. We restrict ourselves mostly to examples from the Christian tradition.

When parents bring their child to be baptized, it is an occasion of joy, pride, and excitement: the rite gives them a chance to stand before the congregation and display how they are themselves and how they want their child to be, as a part of that community. The baptismal rite can serve as a way to recognize parents and the child as worthy of belonging, and as recognized in the eyes of God. When this happens, there is a correspondence between the joy and the expectations of the parents, and the actual function of the rite. This is the positive backdrop against which such rites can also work negatively, for example, when clergy previously – under given circumstances – denied children baptism, be it because the parents were not married, or because the witnesses were gay, or for other reasons. As Christine Park points to, "for Christians, baptism is associated with the bestowal of a new identity and entrance into a spiritual family. In addition, baptism is a cleansing ritual that removes stain and impurity, conferring cleanliness on the shamed person who may suffer from a sense

of dirtiness or defilement."[406] Imagine then the shame that the blocking of the agency that desires to obtain these values may cause.

To be denied participation in a religious rite is, therefore, a strong manifestation of someone considered not worthy. It may not only occur in cases like the above: it could also happen when someone is denied partaking in the Eucharist, or when pastors refuse to perform weddings that involve remarriage on the part of one or both of the prospective spouses. The people in question are then not accepted as belonging to the group or as living up to the standards for membership, belonging, or participation. Their justified sense of shame and resentment may feel especially strong because of the positive feelings invested by all of those who were intending to have a celebration or gain access to something considered valuable and important. Here, the clash between contexts of agency is further enhanced by the combination of positive investment and intention on the one hand, and the religiously charged rite to which their access is denied by others, on the other hand.

Because rejections like these actually contribute to shaming people, they also more than suggest that people have done something wrong, which would then be a likely reason for making them feel guilty. It is not something they have done, but something they are (or are not) that makes these instances of shaming so severe. As long as religious authorities have the power to accept or reject peoples' requests for rites like these, shame is a possible option. The very fact that life events like birth, marriage, etc., are at the center of many peoples' lives and are reasons to celebrate makes it even more imperative to be aware of this point. The risk of shame is at the heart of these events in life when religious rites are the most usual way to celebrate them. When the intentions, desires, expectations, and anticipation that guide agency in such cases collide with practices of rejection that do not recognize them at all, shame is a possibility.

Many people expect the Church or their religious community to be a place to experience something good and beyond the ordinary. Religion and festivity have always belonged together. So have the expectations of

406 Cf. Christine J. Park, "Chronic Shame: A Perspective Integrating Religion and Spirituality," *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 35, no. 4 (2016), 366.

finding something good or valuable in times of trouble and/or bereavement. When this expectation is not met or met with rejection, anger, frustration, and shame are likely results. Thus, the very ways in which religion is organized create expectations about the good to which the self can link up with, but they may also involve the risk of shame.

Feelings of shame or inferiority (which are closely connected) can also occur in rituals and practices that do not necessarily address the individual in question. One example of this is how some churches still only ordain men to the clergy. In such situations, women are not excluded from participating because they lack qualifications or because of something they have done. The exclusion is because of the gender to which they belong. Accordingly, the struggle for the ordination of women is not, as often portrayed, a question of equality only. It attempts to overcome a situation in which people are excluded simply because of who they are. Women who invest in studies and preparation for the ministry and are then turned down are likely to feel shame.[407]

But women cannot stop being women or acting like women. However, for another group, the problem of shame in ecclesiastical circles may appear as different (even when we would argue that it is not, in principle): gays and lesbians may be met with an articulated acceptance of "who they are," but told, "not to act on it." Thus, they find they have a double status: they are accepted in principle, but not in practice. Accordingly, they are subjected to other rules of compliance than those of heterosexual orientation, and are therefore also in a more complicated situation concerning their relation to the religious group to which they belong.[408] The fact that

---

407 Actually, similar patterns may still prevail with regard to race in some contexts. The case of race is even more problematic, though, since there is less acknowledgment of this being a problem in church circles because many may respond that "this is not an actual problem in our context", and thereby allow political correctness to cloud the vision to the lack of equality in matters of participation, education, authority, etc.

408 For a more extensive analysis of argumentation in relation to homosexuality, see Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*. 154ff. Churches handle what they see as the challenges of homosexuality in different ways: some accept homosexual clergy when celibate, some not at all, and some as equal to heterosexuals. One of the reasons why the Catholic Church is not willing to open the discussion on celibacy is probably that such a discussion would immediately lead to the concomitant discussion of what opening to a non- celibate clergy would mean for gay priests.

religious doctrines sometimes define or designate people according to their gender, sexual orientation, or even race, makes religious practices of orientation powerful tools for shaming.

Our universal human propensity to feel shame leaves those who experience marginalization especially vulnerable to exploitation for the purposes of power and control. Such abuse of power cannot and should not be addressed simply as the product of individual limitations. Such an approach would mean that one ignores the fact that in many churches there is still outright oppression and denigration of the marginalized groups present. Paul Goodliff writes, "The paternalistic theology which views women as less human, and more sinful, than men is an obvious structural source of shame (and this despite the evidence that men contribute far more to the sum of human misery than women), as is the exclusion of those whose sexuality is deemed heterodox (homosexuals and bisexuals). If history is written by the victors, then such theological shaming is clearly written by the powerful as a means of maintaining their grip upon power."[409]

Rituals that can be seen as contributing positively to feelings of belonging can lead to shame as well. The Eucharist is, among other things, also a celebration of community. Many churches practice an "open table," which allows for everyone to feel included – and thus, it can be a practice that works against shame. But as long as some are not considered as eligible for participation, and even sometimes outright rejected as potential participants, the risk of shame is present. There is sufficient evidence that the celebration of this rite still serves as a "defining" moment for separating insiders and outsiders – not only in parts of the Roman-Catholic Church but also in Conservative, Reformed, and Lutheran churches.

Since many religious groups also strongly emphasize moral issues, shame can be evoked concerning issues that are not necessarily

---

409 Paul Goodliff, *With Unveiled Face: A Pastoral and Theological Exploration of Shame* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2005), 101. He continues, "The Christian church, if it is to be a community which alleviates shame rather than arousing it, needs to take a careful look at the practices whereby it seeks to ensure conformity of behavior and attitude on the part of its adherents."

considered religious: instances of divorce, substance abuse, or alcoholism can be met with either outspoken criticism or, often just as effectively, the silence treatment. Because of the strong bonds that are often developed in religious groups, these reactions may be felt as powerful – as they may also be when, instead of being shamed, one is met with understanding, acceptance, and recognition.

Confessional practices: shame perpetuated or overcome?

Confession is a special type of religious practice that should be discussed in connection with shame. Confession can be individual or public. In the public form, many churches have a common confession of sin during their worship services. Though for many it may be related to guilt, some members of the congregation may experience that this confession elicits feelings of shame as well. However, shame cannot be dissolved by the proclamation of forgiveness in a way that is similar to forgiveness of guilt. Concerning individual confession, it can enhance the feeling of shame even more, as this practice often requires one to confess specific things for which one feels ashamed. As forgiveness by itself cannot obliterate shame, this practice may appear ambiguous: on the one hand, it may contribute to the perpetuation and enhancement of shame, since one has to confess to a person who can see and hear one. Confession is then a manifestation of the shortcomings or disruptions of agency that lead to shame, or for which the individual already feels shame. On the other hand, absolution may engender an experience of inclusion and acceptance, which in turn alleviates shame on a longer-term basis.

Confessional practice may contribute to the perpetuation of shame insofar as it causes continuous self-scrutiny. Shame plays a vital role here, since such scrutiny sustains contrition, need for repentance, and desire for conversion. Thus, it simultaneously generates a double perception of who you are, and what you, ideally, should have been. Virginia Burrus critically remarks that confession does not provide the longed-for catharsis, “but an ongoing responsiveness – a painfully unrelieved

openness" which implies an infinite responsibility.[410] In confession, one is also exposed to the risk of acting shamefully again, since it requires the veracity of the confessor. Burrus argues that "the shame of confession arises not least at the point of the undecidability of veracity with regard to intentionality, where intention always exceeds our consciousness; it points, then, to the unresolvable hauntings of intentionality as such. Guilt in the face of specifiable injury may most effectively announce responsibility, yet shame bears the awareness of the mysterious and uncontainable depths of our culpability."[411] Thus, to partake in the practice of confession always implies the risk of perpetuating shame.

In her book on shame, Burrus nevertheless also makes some critical observations about confessions that are worth referring to because they provide an opportunity to consider in more detail whether confession represents a useful means for dealing with shame or not. Not surprisingly, she points to the composite or complex situation that the practice engenders. In confession, the confessor measures him or herself according to a given standard and brings to light what is construed as hidden or secret. Only then can a conversion take place. Both losses and gains are implied here. "The truth about the self that is produced in confession is also renounced in confession as if one discovers who one is – a 'sinner' – only in order recklessly to relinquish an identity that is less illusory than all too real."[412] In other words, the confession implies that one has to accept oneself as not being up to the standards one recognizes. Such acceptance may, in turn, also lead to the alleviation of shame. Thus, we may also see confession as a practice that entails several of the movements we have claimed that shame causes: the movement away from the self that one needs to distance oneself from, the movement towards a more realistic self-perception, and the movement that has the specific aim of leading

410 Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects*, 115. Note here how the reference to Levinas' notion of infinite responsibility serves to obliterate the boundaries between self and other – another element that causes shame or makes one prone to it.

411 Ibid., 115. Cf. 145: "That the truth made in confession is fabulous and fictional, both exceeding verifiability and eluding finality, may itself seem a source of shame. Surely it is, at the very least, cause for humility. It is also the reason why we cannot stop confessing, must not refuse the shame of our own inevitable failure ever to get the account of our shameful culpability quite right."

412 Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects*. 111.

the shamed back to the community and ultimately to God. Confession is a way of ritualizing these movements.

The ritual of confession thus contributes to ambiguity in relation to shame. On the one hand, it confronts the confessor with things that he or she experiences as shameful, and thereby, he or she has to relive the experience that causes shame and take part in that shame again. On the other hand, in the very act of confessing, and thereby recognizing the standards against which he or she is failing, he or she is also given a chance to renew his or her ego-ideals, as well as gaining a more realistic understanding of him or herself. The practice of confession can work against the narcissistic self that lives in a delusion of being perfect. If the confession is wisely received, this ritual can then lead to a more mature and realistic self-assessment. Burrus formulates it well in the following passage: "The act of confession is, then, at once assertive and yielding, a willful appropriation of the (divine) power of judgment that is at the same time a deliberately mortifying submission of will and self to judgment, and thus also – perhaps – to mercy. It is neither simply coerced nor simply voluntary but rather sits necessarily on the border of what is coerced and what is offered freely."[413] She goes on, "One must want, at least a little, to be broken, to be exposed, or the confession is sterile: it makes no truth; worse still, it forces stillborn lies. One must also resist, at least a little, being overcome by this desire, or the confession, rendered glib by the promise of cheap grace, is equally fruitless."[414]

Furthermore, against this backdrop, we can see how confession not only exposes the dividedness of the subject – it actively produces it. Shame fragments the subject's self-experience. "It splits again (and again) along the fault lines of its performative ambivalence: I accuse myself; and in the same breath, I excuse myself, I beg pardon, I court forgiveness."[415]

413 Ibid., 111.
414 Ibid.
415 Ibid., 112. Burrus quotes J.M. Coetzee: "in the economy of confession … the only appetites that constitute confessable currency are shameful appetites."

Burrus' analysis sheds important light on the widely adopted practice of confession. However, in a way that surpasses analyses of shame that are oriented towards psychology but ignore religion, she adds an important dimension, by connecting shame to the desire to tell it all:

> If the self who is confessed and thereby alienated is necessarily marked by shame, so too is the self who confesses – marked not only by the shame of the temptation to hide but also by the shame of the desire shamelessly to tell all. […] The self-exposure of confession is desirable, and thus shameful, largely because the act of confessing is entangled with the act of excusing oneself, of laying claim to absolution: it is as if the very suffering of shame audaciously promises to atone for the shameful thoughts or acts exposed.[416]

We see in this analysis how shame that is involved in the practice of confession also implies the movements away and towards that we have identified in our earlier analyses. The practice of confession thus makes it clear that the complexity of shame is not reduced when it is involved in practices of religion. On the contrary, we would argue that the complex interweaving of shame with religious practices in some cases contributes further to the problems that shame creates in human life.

The body as a religious problem

In the Hebrew Bible shame appears early, expressed in Adam and Eve's realization of their own nakedness. It is not their nakedness as such that causes shame, but the fact that they can be seen by others, to whom they are not ready to appear as naked and vulnerable. The other here is not just anybody, but God. However, God is never present as such – God is always represented by others, and in the gaze of other humans.[417] This is also testified to by the fact that religion is a social phenomenon. The presence of this other changes the context of agency and elicits shame. The Genesis story is, therefore, not a story with exclusively religious significance. It is a story about shame in relation to the human condition, and especially how

416 Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects*. 112.
417 Cf. our previous reference to Masaccio's fresco.

this condition expresses itself in humanity's desires and the concomitant vulnerable embodiment. Accordingly, shame is, in this context, depicted as about how the naked body is perceived and experienced as a sign. A sign of vulnerability, exposure, and desire: all involved in the agency that is interrupted by the perception of God's sudden presence. Thus, we see in this story many of the features we have developed in our previous analyses of body, vulnerability, intentionality, self-policing and agency.

Miryam Clough develops these points further from a feminist point of view when she points to how the patriarchal shape of much religion defines the natural (embodied) states and conditions of women as religiously problematic:

> Once sin is associated with the body – hence the feminine – the masculine is virtuous, and the feminine can only attain virtue by rejecting those embodied characteristics that most distinctively define that gender, notably sexuality (*jouissance*) and motherhood. Within the framework of patriarchal Christian discourse, the individual who adopts an ascetic lifestyle with the goal of achieving religious piety in the ultimate hope of salvation (the alleviation of the fear of death) adopts a subject position of masculinity and superiority. For women as well as men, this discursive position was also regarded as a masculine one; only by the denial of feminine biological attributes (sex, mothering and feeding) could women become "spiritual".[418]

Much can be said about how religious traditions have tried to keep women away from the public sphere and positions of power. It happens not only for the sake of maintaining male power and domination, but also to render sexuality, vulnerability, and other challenging features invisible. We have already suggested some of the elements in play in this regard in the previous chapter. The ordering of the body, and of what counts as acceptable bodily desires, functions, and features, has contributed to religious imagery in which the body is placed in a situation of predicament or challenge for those who are not male. Female bodies, sexed bodies, or homosexual bodies are obvious examples of that which is deliberately or subconsciously marginalized in ways that cause shame.

---

418 Clough, *Shame, the Church and the Regulation of Female Sexuality*, 164.

We have already claimed that religion is different from morality in the way that it does not only emphasize what you do but who you are (identity) and what you believe (belonging and faith). Whereas what you do is something from which you can distance yourself, stop doing, or admit was wrong to do,[419] it is not so easy when it comes to what you believe (which is often part of your identity, the underlying orientational structure that guides your agency) or who you are. This fact comes to the fore in the way religions are often socially structured according to one's status as belonging to a specific category: man, woman, child, lay, ordained, etc. As Woodhead and Heelas have pointed to, these modes of being, which sometimes are closely related to one's embodied status as well, make it possible to see some types of religion as organized around difference. They therefore, identify them as *religions of difference.* Although not always relying on markers that have to do with one's embodied status, this type of religious organization or structuring may also contribute to shaming, for example, when one does not find oneself belonging clearly to one or the other category.[420]

Authority (and thereby also normativity) is mainly shaped, sustained, and expressed by an emphasis on, and identification of differences in this mode of religion. Attempts to destabilize differences may be met with skepticism or rejection, and one, therefore, also risks being shamed if one questions the way they are defined. Furthermore, blurred or unclear gender roles may create uncertainties and shame as well, for example, when a woman finds it necessary to take on a leading role without any support, or when gender roles become impossible to differentiate clearly, as in the present controversial issue of homosexuality. An important component of this type of religion is that religious authority is externally based and that humans have to be obedient to it. It is so even when this authority conflicts with personal interests or convictions. The neglect of personal convictions or feelings that are not in accordance with established authority can make individuals even more dependent on the authorities'

419 Cf. Deigh's distinction between authorship and ownership, as developed in the chapter on the psychology on shame above, pp. 123–124.

420 Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas: *Religion in Modern Times. An Interpretive Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

acceptance and recognition, and accordingly, also more prone to shame since it does not allow for a self-reliant psychological base. Hence, this type of religion does not contribute much to a social environment in which individuals can learn to trust themselves and their judgments – a precondition for developing lasting and positive self-esteem.

Furthermore, in religious imagery, one is led to think of one's own body as either God's creation, or as not in accordance with God's will. In either case, religious self-interpretation can reinforce feelings of worth or shame, respectively. Because one cannot distance oneself from one's bodily condition, be it in terms of health, sexual orientation, or simply how one looks, a religious person may find it harder simply to say that "it is what it is." Since religion makes everything into a sign, an expression of something beyond the apparent, dispositions or actualities that would have no specific significance outside a religious realm may take on strong significance within it. Due to being unable to distance oneself from one's own body, the body's religious status is not only ambiguous but sometimes also precarious. Thus, the power of religion manifests itself in its ability to shame a human's bodily status as well. Graham Ward writes:

> Because shame is so visceral and embodied an affect, it is the body involved in the act bringing shame that is the first object to be abjected. This inner rejection is the source of shame's extraordinary power over human beings. 'In contrast to all other affects, shame is an experience of the self by the self … Shame is the most reflexive of affects in that the phenomenological distinction between the subject and object of shame is lost'.[421]

Hence, Ward makes it clear how hard it is to overcome experiences of shame: it would entail having to distance yourself from yourself.

In his analysis of Adam and Eve's shame because of their nakedness, theologian Ward furthermore emphasizes how authors from Augustine to Tomkins speak of the 'ambivalence' of shame. His analysis at this point may not add so much to our understanding of religion and shame as it does to how religious imaginaries actualize and make apparent more

421 Graham Ward, "Adam and Eve's Shame (and Ours)," *Literature and Theology: An International Journal of Religion, Theory, and Culture* 26, no. 3 (2012), 310.

generic traits. Furthermore, Ward's analysis underscores the element of frustration or interruption of the expectation of being good that shame displays. He writes:

> What makes it ambivalent is that it results from a certain incompletion or frustration of a positive affect. In the beginning there is an interest and a promise of enjoyment. Eve sees the fruit as good, a delight to the eyes, and desired that it should make her and Adam wise, and, gnomically, the Scriptures tell that when she offered Adam the fruit 'he was with her' (Gen.3.6). […] In the response to shame, 'the self remains somewhat committed to the investment of the positive affect [there is] a continuing unwillingness to renounce what had been or might again be of value.'[422]

The other, generic element in the Genesis story that Wards points to, and which has to do with embodiment, is Adam and Eve's need to hide – be it their bodies, their faces, or their genitals. Shame, writes Ward, engenders a new self-consciousness, where they are thrown back at themselves, and realize that this is "their nakedness, their vulnerability" – a realization that implies that they have to do something about it – they have to hide their shame.[423] Thus, the religious context contributes to similar shame as we analyzed earlier in the chapter on body shame.

The hiding of the body may also interrupt or impede further communication: "In part, this is because the face is turned away; in part, this is the silence that is self-imposed by the one who is ashamed."[424] We argue that this is one of the examples that point to how shame arises from the constitution of a context that is different from the one in which agency originated, and in which it tried to articulate and realize itself. This change of context may be seen as the backdrop for the different movements it engenders, because actions such as hiding and being silent entail that the original intentional agency is no longer possible to articulate as previously assumed.

The body, the flesh, remains a problematic element in many religions, not least because of the idealization of the spiritual in contrast to the

422 Ibid., 313. The quote within the quote is from Tomkins.
423 Ward, ibid.
424 Ibid.

material or mundane. Although religious strategies and symbols exist that can provide the means to balance out this fact, the body itself remains a problem for many. Virginia Burrus reports succinctly about her students:

> Armed with the doctrines of divine creation and incarnation, desiring to affirm the goodness of materiality, the poignancy of transience and finitude, the gift of sentience, my students still often seem to fight a losing battle against a theological tradition that remains to this day marked by its shameful shame of the flesh. Sometimes they are ashamed of their failures to resist the force of tradition, are ashamed even of the passion conveyed by their very strength of conviction; but most of them continue to struggle nonetheless, shamelessly, against the weight of shame, in the face of their own shame.[425]

This is a well-articulated testimony to the complicated and complex fact that even in a religion that confesses the resurrection of the flesh, the problem with shame and the body is not dealt with once and for all. This is so also because the body can engage us in projects and relations over which we initially may have no command, and which require that we become transparent to ourselves to gain control and see if this is an acceptable self-investment or not. It is so not least because the body harbors desire – and desire is a major component in our self-projects and investments, and simultaneously something that allows us to be in touch with our vulnerability. Because many religions, including Christianity, often associate desire with a negative state, as long as this is the case, the body continues to be a problematic element in religion.[426] Desire furthermore manifests how the agency it engenders runs the risk of going beyond the accepted contexts and norms. Therefore, it needs to be kept in check.

Religious doctrines and shame

Religions offer an extensive repertoire of symbols and imaginaries. These provide humans with extraordinary opportunities for self-expression,

425 Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects*, XI.

426 For more about this, see F. LeRon Shults and Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Saving Desire: The Seduction of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

self-interpretation, self-assessment and self-perception, as is also the case in the example of confession just mentioned. The imaginaries and notions at work in religion becomes realities to reckon with for believers. They function as self-objects in the psyche, that is, internal objects on which the psyche develops, orients, evaluates, and into which it also invests libido, creativity, commitment, and hope. Self-objects are not only the workings of the imagination, they also are charged with emotion. They affect human self-perception, emotion, behavior, intention, and agency, irrespective of the existence or non-existence of that which they represent. This fact means that religiously charged self-objects, such as "God," can have a profound impact on humans, even if God does not exist.

Against this backdrop, the reference to William James at the start of the chapter can be seen in a new light: religious self-objects contribute not only to the realization or acknowledgment of "wrongness," but may also contribute to the experience that it is overcome. However, the religious individual and/or the group always inhabit a world in which doctrines and imaginaries shape self-perception and may interrupt the ordinary flow of activity in ways that may cause shame, or allow shame to emerge even when the individual is not engaged in action but merely listening to preaching or teaching.

The following subchapter will analyze some religious doctrines or imaginaries that are relevant to understanding the possible shame-engendering effect of religious doctrine. We will continue to concentrate on examples from the Christian tradition – thereby also making it visible that shame-effects do not only belong to religious traditions from which it is easier for people in the Western world to detach themselves.

Atonement

Christianity in the West centers around two crucial doctrinal *topoi* that have significance for its ability to deal with shame. These are the understanding of the human being as a sinner and the understanding of the crucifixion of Jesus as something that atoned for this sin. The combination of these two mirrors well what William James described as the conditions for a religious experience. How can these doctrinal elements

have an impact on a human being who is prone to shame? What happens if someone who is prone to shame is confronted by the traditional understanding of God's grace as offered in the reconciling act of Christ's substitutionary death on the cross for the sins of all humans?

The notion of the human being as a sinner implies that humans are fundamentally under God's judgment. Jesus, on the other hand, is the one who takes on the punishment that humans deserve, and thereby frees them from it. God and humans can, therefore, be reconciled because of Christ's voluntary suffering on behalf of all humans. Christ procures the grace of God that humans are offered and which implies the forgiveness of their sins. Norwegian pastoral theologian Berit Okkenhaug has problematized this approach because of its inability to address the problem of shame adequately.[427] We agree and illustrate our arguments for this in the following example.

If a person prone to shame is urged to believe that Jesus had to die in order for her to be reconciled with God, her understanding of her relationship with God might, in fact, enhance the problematic role that shame already has in her life. To tell her about the sinner's lack of self-worth, on the one hand, and about how much Jesus' sacrifice is worth, on the other hand, may prove to be the opposite of liberating. Instead, it may lead her to self-perception according to the following destructive dynamics:

1. I am a sinner, and for this reason, I am not worthy of the love of God. I am a sinner in the eyes of both myself and God. (This expresses the shameful self's self-rejection as motivated by religious teaching.)
2. Despite my lack of worth, God nevertheless loves me and loves me so much that God sent God's son in order to die for my sins. (This is "the gospel" which is intended to serve as a solution to self-rejection and a lack of self-worth.)
3. The very fact that God's son had to die because I am a sinner makes me feel even more unworthy and shameful. Because I am the cause of God's son's unjust suffering and sacrifice, this fact *enhances*

427 Berit Okkenhaug, *Når Jeg Skjuler Mitt Ansikt: Perspektiver På Skam* (Oslo, 2009), 123ff.

> feelings of shame and guilt. (For someone who is already carrying deep-seated feelings of shame, this is the result of 1 and 2).[428]

Although point 1 and 2 in the above sequence correspond with James' analysis, the outcome is the opposite of what he suggests. We see here that one of the central religious doctrines in Christianity may, given a specific interpretation, contribute to the feeling of *being wrong* in a way that enhances personal shame. For those who are prone to shame, this doctrine may contribute to sustaining the shameful position instead of liberating them from shame.

Eleonore Stump addresses these problems from a distinct understanding of what it is that engenders shame.[429] Stump approaches the problem from the point of view of philosophical theology – the discipline that tests the coherence of theological propositions to see if they are defensible. She, too, discusses whether the notion of Christ's suffering can be interpreted in order to alleviate shame. The reason for this discussion is clear: Christ's atonement is traditionally supposed to reverse the bad effects of the so-called fall of humanity, and since shame is among the afflictions of humanity in its present state, it is an obvious thing to ask if the atonement provides a remedy for shame as well.[430] Her argument is worth analyzing in detail, because it shows how different elements and conditions for shame, and for lifting shame, are similar within the context of religious doctrine as in other cultural or social contexts.

Stump distinguishes, importantly, between shame and guilt. Both are interpreted against the background of two desires that emerge out of love, as defined by Thomas Aquinas. According to his position, love consists of two mutually governing desires: the desire for the good of the beloved, and the desire for union with the beloved. Stump goes on, writing:

---

428 Another version of this criticism, which closely examines Eleanore Stump's claims that the cross of Christ eliminates human shame because it shows that Christ wants to unite with us, can be found in E. J. Coffmann's paper "Stump on the Nature of Atonement" (web.utk.edu/~ecoffma1/SNA.doc).

429 Eleonore Stump, "The Atonement and the Problem of Shame," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 19 (2016). Here Stump develops what Brad A. Binau claimed that no-one had done in his earlier article "When Shame Is the Question, How Does the Atonement Answer?" *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 12, no. 1 (2002): 89–90.

430 Stump, "The Atonement and the Problem of Shame," 112.

> A person who is and feels shamed and a person who is and feels guilty each anticipate a repudiation, on the part of real or imagined others, of both of the desires of love as regards himself. But a person in the grip of guilt will tend to focus more on the first desire, and a person suffering from shame will tend to worry more about the second.[431]

That she points to this fact is essential since it relates shame to the interruption of the desire for communion and belonging – which has been a central point in our previous analyses of shame's various movements.[432]

Shame, then, may lead people to despise who they are as much as what they have done, claims Stump.[433] Such strong shame is ultimately complete only when it is internalized, which emphasizes both the degree of self-loathing that shamed people can experience and, at the same time, the relative freedom, such that they could possibly choose to live otherwise than with this shame.

However, shame is more ambivalent than guilt precisely because it is less objective. As guilt has its opposite in forgiveness, shame has its opposite in honor. Stump argues that, "the most salient difference between shame and guilt is that, on the face of it, the alienation from the self produced by shame *does not have its source in the will of the shamed person*," and thus "seems to stem from an involuntary suffering forced on a person by things that happen to him, outside his control."[434] This is a point that is also emphasized by Martha Nussbaum – shame is often reinforced by societal factors, and is used by society to try to enforce an order of things. Shame is the result of something outside our control – and therefore outside the initial scope of our agency.

Stump points to two different elements in the subjectivity of the person feeling shame: firstly, one has to imagine some repudiation from others, and secondly, this imagined repudiation causes the feeling of shame. Thus, she makes the obvious point that the subject's imagination is a

431 Ibid., 113.

432 Furthermore, it is notable here how both these desires resonate with the psychological features implied in our earlier chapter: if we think of these desires as that which shapes the parent's relation to the child, in allowing her to be herself (what is good for her) and affirming, and not rejecting her (union), these features fit well with our previous analysis.

433 Thus, in Stump's view, shame seems to dissolve both self-respect and self-esteem.

434 Stump, "The Atonement and the Problem of Shame," 148. Our italics.

necessary condition for feeling shame. Thereby, she can also address the complexity of shame and its conditions, since this approach means that shame does not need to emerge from the attitudes of real peers. Moreover, shame has an element of anxiety in it as well, which is related to the human desire for love. Stump writes:

> … a shamed person anticipates warranted rejection and abandonment on the part of real or imagined others, and consequently, he is anxious about marginalization or isolation. His anxiety is directed towards a distance, an absence of union, forced on him by others with whom he himself desires some kind of closeness. His worry is therefore that real or imagined others will be warranted in lacking for him the second desire of love, the desire for union with him.[435]

Stump here points to how the anxiety is related to the desire for recognition – a desire that presumably is behind much of human agency in the social sphere, and to the second element in what we have called the double movement – the movement towards others. It can help explain the shame felt in being ill, diabled, poor, unemployed, or lonely. In all these cases, the shameful can experience shame as a manifestation of the anxiety for being someone with whom others will not want to stand in an affirmative relationship.

What, then, causes the imagined or real repudiation? Based on a long and interesting analysis, Stump argues that we need to distinguish between four different kinds of shame, all of which she then subsequently discusses with regard to the effects of atonement. These four are:

a) Shame resulting from one's own wrongdoing
b) Shame stemming from being the victim of someone else's wrongdoing
c) Shame following some impairment or depredation of nature
d) Shame attached to being a member of the human race

In all of these types of shame, there is some standard of value involved, which provides a necessary condition for feeling shame or being ashamed.

435 Ibid.

In the first three, a standard of value that the person feels defective in relation to is implied, which he or she expects that should be accepted by both himself/herself and imagined or real others. The fourth, collective type of shame is caused by being a member of a group that is defective in relation to a standard that is valid for all of humanity.[436] Stump holds that all human beings, at some point in life, will have to struggle with all of these types of shame.

Stump rejects, head on, the idea that there might be some kind of compensation for shame in heaven. This notion implies that there will be a remedy for shame, although not here and now. She finds this idea confusing and unconvincing. No good can outweigh the shame that a person suffers, and the idea of compensation in the afterlife is not able to defeat shame. Furthermore, since shame is related to something in a person's past, this origin is impossible to change, as is all of history. The past remains no matter what is offered in heaven to those suffering from or subject to shame. Accordingly, to think that atonement can compensate for shame by providing access to the benefits of heaven is misguided.[437]

Stump instead identifies the antidote to (some forms of) shame in its opposite: honor and admiration. Her argument is as follows: a person who feels ashamed is convinced that something about herself warrants that real or imagined others have no desire for being in community with her. Shame, then, emerges out of others turning away because of our weakness, powerlessness, ugliness, or other defects. The human proneness to consider those without power or who have fallen from power as "devalued, degraded, debased, defiled, despoiled" implies that they are "diminished in social standing or cultural stature, and they lack attractiveness for us in consequence. And so a certain kind of vulnerability and helplessness is also a hallmark of shame."[438] However, whereas such conditions for shame are what makes us turn away, the one whom we honor

436 Ibid, 116. This type of shame is addressed, for example, in the analysis of Michael L. Morgan on the shame felt for being part of the humanity that stood behind the Holocaust, *On Shame* (New York; London: Routledge, 2008).

437 Cf. Stump, "The Atonement and the Problem of Shame", 117.

438 Ibid., 118.

or admire is one who is attractive to us, and the one we admire and with whom we desire to have community.

> To the extent that others have a warranted desire for him, they have the second desire of love for him, namely, the desire for union (of one sort or another). And if others are drawn to him and desire union with him, the shamed person's shame is lifted. It helps in this connection to notice that a shamed person can be thought seriously deficient by others on the basis of highly varying scales of value, ranging from moral or religious standards to standards of fashion current in a particular community. And it is possible for a person to be shamed on one set of standards and honored on another.[439]

The fact that shame can be lifted when a person experiences that someone honors him or her, and that this can happen based on other standards than those which caused the shame, points to an important feature in religious believers: when they believe that God honors them, the belief in this acknowledgment may provide an exchange of standards of self-evaluation that may, in fact, liberate them from shame. On a more generic level, what religions do is that they often provide alternative standards by which people can experience their emotional predicament, offered as a remedy because alternative standards of evaluation are employed.[440]

At this point, Stump's considerations of the positive effects of the notion of Christ's atonement show their relevance. Atonement provides a good that defeats the suffering of shame because it allows a person to see himself as honored and valuable or lovable – and "that is greater than his shame and for which his shame is somehow essential."[441]

Stump is careful in extending the implications of atonement. She is not building on the ideas we presented in the earlier section, that imply that Christ suffered because of, or as a punishment for, human sin. Instead, it is God's love for humankind that comes to the fore in atonement, and

439 Ibid.

440 However, this may go both ways: it is possible to imagine that religious standards sometimes contribute to shame with regard to something that the person previously has been proud of doing. The condition for this being the case, however, is that the person now recognizes the religious standards as more valid than the standards that previously generated his or her pride or honor.

441 Stump, "The Atonement and the Problem of Shame," 119.

which displays God's desire for unity and community with the human race. Thereby, she can avoid the problematic elements in an interpretation of atonement where Christ must die because of the sins of the one who is ashamed – an idea that could easily lead to more shame. She writes:

> When, voluntarily, out of love for humankind, Christ dies by torture naked in the view of his friends and disciples, he joins the shame and suffering of humanity. By this means, he makes the shame of humanity something shared with the Deity, and that sharing is a great honor for the human race. It is one thing to be a member of the species that perpetrated the moral horrors of the twentieth century. It is another thing to be a member of the species of creature to which God joined himself in nature and shame and suffering.[442]

Thus, according to Stump, atonement can be seen as a remedy for the fourth type of shame that she has identified – that of belonging to the sinful human race. "It is not hard to think of the good in question, namely, the honor of having God himself as part of the species and its suffering as greater than the good lost, namely, the honor that the race lost in virtue of its deplorable history."[443]

However, one needs to interpret atonement from a different angle if one is to see it as a remedy for the other types of shame that Stump lists. At this stage of reasoning, Stump enters into a far more distinct, theological mode of thinking than she has done so far. Here, she takes as her point of departure the orthodox claim that in his human nature, Christ bore the sins of all of humanity on the cross. She takes this notion to mean that in his passion and his death, "Christ opened himself up to the psyches of all other human beings, all at once, so that he somehow received in himself, in psychic union, the psyches of other human beings, in their sin and shame, without himself actually becoming guilty of a sin of his own. By this means, he bears the sins of all human persons in himself."[444]

Accordingly, Stump holds, what Christ did was necessary on his part for establishing a union between him and every human being. He opened himself up to their "indwelling" in him so that they could respond by

442 Ibid., 121.
443 Ibid., 122.
444 Ibid., 123.

uniting themselves with him. In such a union, Christ dwells in the human person, just as the human being dwells in Christ. This idea implies that what is required on the side of the human is to be willing to make this union happen.[445] It is this personal union with each person that can provide a remedy for the other types of shame, according to Stump.

In conclusion, then, we see that Stump's approach to atonement as a remedy for shame provides alternative standards for honor than other human standards – the Deity is willing to join in the shameful conditions of humanity because of the desire for unity with the human race. The conditions that contribute to shame in humanity are not sufficient for Christ to give up the desire for community and union. Thereby, Christ shows that humanity is more valuable than any standards that cause shame. Furthermore, as Stump shows, this does not abolish the causes of shame and shaming but provides a chance to establish an alternative means for self-value. The challenge for the one who is ashamed is to be able to believe that this is something that took place for him or her.

If we consider Stump's discussion from a distance, we can see that the way she uses religious imagery is parallel to what it would be in contexts other than religious ones, as well. It is about accepting people despite their imperfections. Thus, again, we see that religious ways of dealing with shame explicate or articulate features common to all humankind. Religious ways of addressing or dealing with shame are not constitutionally different from those used in other realms of human life.

Sin and feeling accepted or repressed

Religious imagery uses the notion *sin* for the dark side of the human condition. This notion describes the depravity of humans, and as such, it has contributed significantly to human beings' sense of being repudiated by God and others – thus causing shame. However, from a more positive angle, the notion of sin may also contribute something positive and realistic to the human condition, provided that it is used within a context that allows for nuance. That requires, however, that it is seen in relation to the

445 Cf. ibid., 124.

most positive symbol that Christianity has for human beings, namely, that humans are created in the image of God, with the dignity related to that designation.

The concept of sin may be a resource when it comes to the understanding of human growth and transformation. But then it has to be understood not only in terms of what must be morally rejected, but also in terms of what stands in opposition to the image of God in humans, and the human calling to do God's work in the world – a calling which is the basis for human self-respect and self-esteem from a religious point of view. Sin is distortion and corruption of the goodness in the world and the personal life and experience of the individual. Accordingly, one could still use the word sin for certain elements in human life and human experience without having to accept the "Protestant-Augustinian tradition doctrine of original sin which holds that the entire created order, including human nature, must be repudiated in order to 'put on' a new life whose centre of gravity is not self but God."[446] This doctrine might then provide relevant resources for interpreting human experience. There are still a lot of horrors in the world that can be interpreted in terms of sin. Moreover, basic tensions in human life are not well served if we interpret them within a basically harmonious framework. Human life is about growth, transformation, and the overcoming of problematic features. Some of these might be in stark contrast to the ideal human that both Christian theology and other spiritual traditions depict as desirable.

However, talk about sin without causing shame is only possible if one can first underscore or affirm something constitutionally positive about humans, such as the understanding of them as created in the image of God. By affirming the human being as created in the image of God, theology makes it possible to affirm the human need for positive self-esteem and self-recognition (more on this below). Even more so, as these are elements that we know from psychology that are best nurtured when expressing a relationship that is unconditional. Let us explain:

446 Linda Woodhead, "On the Incompatibility between Christianity and Holistic Spirituality; A Reply to Jan-Olav Henriksen," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 19 (2006): 60.

When the self-symbol God is seen as one who loves you only when you conform to certain patterns, act in accordance with specific norms, or have or lack specific feelings and desires, it is hard to develop a positive and religiously based affirmation of oneself. It leaves one constantly in need of referring to and adjusting oneself to experience oneself as valuable, and it makes God's love dependent upon one's actions.

Religious resources for work against shame need to uphold the distinction between humans and God, between the actual and the ideal, and affirm that this is unavoidable, even in a context where humans are aiming at growth and moral improvement. It is important to avoid the identification of the human with the divine because it would otherwise contribute to narcissistic grandiosity in the human. Such identification would overload the human, and make the human's religious status dependent on the outcome of human agency. Exactly that is rejected in both Luther's theology of justification by grace alone, as well as in Augustine's doctrine on grace.[447] Recognition by God is fundamentally unmerited. Furthermore, one can address expressions of such overestimation of human abilities as expressions of sin, and thereby point to the limits of human life as something that one has to acknowledge. The hubris (note the allusion to Augustine's understanding of sin here) of humans is to try to override the unavoidable character of these limits.

The object of much pastoral counseling is to develop the ability to discern what the necessary limits are that cannot be overcome, and what we should, from a realistic point of view, strive to transform and overcome. Hence, to understand how sin works as hubris in human life means finding out how one can become a better person. On the other hand, to find out where false ideals of humility are at work and hold someone back from developing the call to be an image of God is the other side of the same task.[448] The result, given that this work succeeds, is that humans come to know themselves better. It might not, in effect, be very different from what Woodhead reports on the aims of the practices of the so-called new spiritualities:

---

447 Cf. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1996).

448 Cf. Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin, and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Washington: University Press of America, 1980).

> To be a mature human subject is to be someone who has a body and feelings, is aware of them, takes responsibility for them, and "manages" them successfully. It is to be a bounded emotional self, which is open to impressions from outside, but able to respond to them appropriately. Attentiveness to the bodily and the emotional states play a vital role in the construction of this sense of bounded individual selfhood. Religions may facilitate such self-awareness when they authorize a self which is rooted and grounded in the emotions of that unique self itself. By being recognized, valued and discursively represented, the embodied emotional self comes into being.[449]

Such an embodied and positively valued self represents a challenge to versions of religion that overlook, ignore or reject positive traits that are important for their followers. In their study *The Spiritual Revolution,* Woodhead and Heelas *et al.*, give contemporary examples of how people's inner lives are only to a certain extent recognized in the religious contexts they researched, and they see this as a challenge to Christianity's present state.[450] Their results are telling: specific feelings, especially strong ones, or those expressing positive self-esteem apart from what is recognized as religiously valid, or desires that are not in accordance with Christian ideals, are subject to repression. Thus, self-projects are interrupted. This causes shame, not only because one harbors such feelings or desires, but potentially also because they lead to agency that is not in accordance with that of the religious context to which they belong.

Images of God and the processes of the self

A central element in many religions is the notion of God. In the following, we will call this the God *symbol*, to place it in relation to Kohut's self-psychological approach. This symbol may have profound effects concerning shame – regardless whether the person believes in the existence of God or not. God is a powerful symbol in many people's psyches nonetheless.

---

449 Cf. Woodhead, "On the Incompatibility between Christianity and Holistic Spirituality; A Reply to Jan-Olav Henriksen," 59.

450 Paul Heelas. Linda Woodhead, et al., *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

Shea understands the God symbol from the process of human imaging. For him, imaging is part and parcel of what it means to develop a coherent self that can make sense of events, and which can negotiate meaning and deal with life's contingencies. Imaging is both what we do and what we are. It engages all of the self's senses to help us grasp and relate to our reality. Shea holds that, "Imaging is a continuous, developing, bodily process, an ongoing organizing and reorganizing of perceiving and knowing." Processes of imaging constantly help us to reconfigure "the whole."[451] Imaging is not subjective and arbitrary, nor should it be seen as a means for escaping reality; instead, it is how we entertain the real and engage fully with life.[452] It is what makes it possible to have knowledge of reality, and for the mind, "the task of the imagination, and particularly of the religious imagination, is to compose the real."[453]

Shea sees religion as that which links the self and God. From that perspective, imaging is the very way in which such relations take on the character of being real. The incomplete process of imaging, which he calls fettered imaging, is a stage in the process of becoming a more mature self. Imaging is, therefore, part of that which constitutes the development that will eventually lead to the superego of the self. The content of this superego is made up of cultural understandings, societal norms, parental values, the influence of peers, and religious beliefs. This content "combines with the incompleteness of the adolescing self's own perceptive and cognitive powers to hinder and constrain what may later be a freer, fuller, more complete, and more appropriate imaging of reality."[454]

What kinds of processes lead to a belief in a superego God and how are these, subsequently, of importance for shame and shaming? According to Shea, the superego God is produced by the adolescing self, with his or

---

451 John J. Shea, *Finding God Again: Spirituality for Adults* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 9.

452 Ibid., 10. For a similar assessment from the point of view of the philosophy of religion, see R. Neville, *The Truth of Broken Symbols,* (Albany, 1996). For constructive theology, see G. Kaufman: *The Theological Imagination* (Philadelphia 1981), especially Chapters 1 and 2. The strength of Kaufman's contribution is that he not only stresses that our conceptions of God are our constructs, but he also relates this understanding of the constitution of theological discourse to contributions in contemporary self-psychology.

453 Shea, *Finding God Again*, 10. Shea is referring to Sharon Parks here.

454 Ibid., 11.

her particular needs, transference patterns of relating, and with his or her particular logic of objective knowing.[455] As a consequence, this experience of "God" evolves alongside the self that holds on to this God. The result can be different versions of "God" which nevertheless all have some characteristics in common. In the following, we present the elements in the superego God (understood as a supreme being) that seem most relevant to the topic of shame.[456]

The *God of law* commands and is the source of morality. He commands obedience more than understanding and insight into God's will. This version of "God" is perhaps the one that most strongly implies a fusion of religion and morality. Here, the standards against which the person measures him or herself are rooted in an instance to which he or she cannot object, and to elements that are not negotiable. It is unavoidable that this God will become a God of guilt and shame. As the self grows, so do the ambiguities in its relationship with this God, who is not only benevolent and good but also judging and all-seeing – a point that contributes further to shame.[457] Thus, this symbol mirrors the self's own dividedness and moral failure.

We can add the following reflection to Shea's description here: understood as a supreme being, this God is omnipresent. We have already suggested in a previous analysis that this God can enter the consciousness of the individual at any given time and, as it clashes with it, interrupt the already existing context of agency by introducing a new and different one in which God's presence is the main feature. For religious people, this point displays how the imaginaries that are enmeshed in their fundamental ways of relating to the world and the self make them exposed to the risk of shame in a way that is probably greater than non-religious people. God can always appear in the consciousness of the believer and disturb projects, intentions, and intentions in ways that cause shame.

455 Ibid., 23.

456 We will not refer to all of Shea's points in detail as this is not necessary for our present purposes.

457 Shea places this God's commandments entirely within the realm of Lawrence Kohlberg's description of the pre-conventional and conventional forms of morality, which we discuss in the next chapter. See Shea, *Finding God Again*, 26.

Stephen Pattison sees the problems of the God of law most strongly articulated in the ideal of God as perfect, good, and complete in "Godself". For a person prone to shame, such a symbol of God can become destructive because the ideals it implies means that almost everyone is bound to fall short. Shameful dissatisfaction with oneself is the result. Pattison sees the aspiration to perfection as pernicious and persecutory for ashamed selves.[458] The notion of God as a punisher may also deeply trouble people who have problems with the God presented by the authorities, and reinforce the sense of ontological badness in the believer.[459]

Obedience and adaptation are the immediate requirements for good standing with this God. These form the preconditions for God to offer necessary security. However, in the long run, this God may be challenged by the experience that impossible and rigid commandments are not really helpful when dealing with the challenges of life. Moreover, such a God may also engender shame and a false self, because this God symbol always demands conformity and the neglect of one's own emotional responses.[460]

Closely related to the above God of law is the God of dependency and control. On the one hand, this God provides everything that the adolescent self needs for growth and development, but on the other hand, power and authority are restricted to "Godself". The self has no independent access to these resources. Providence and dominion describe this God. Shea holds that this notion of God holds an inbuilt contradiction: when related to the concrete experience of human life this God is all-powerful and all-knowing and desires our well-being. However, this God also allows humans no autonomy. The contradiction between the apparent

---

458 Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology*, 238.

459 Cf. ibid., 241.

460 Shea, *Finding God Again: Spirituality for Adults*, 26. For this point, see also Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology,* 238, who points to how the rhetoric of God helping people to find their "true" selves in him nevertheless advocates conformity to God's needs and will. This call "to become as God wants one to be, to obedience and to conformity, can help to crush people's sense of their own goodness and the appropriateness of their being." As a consequence, such rhetoric may encourage a shameful heteronomy and conformity and leave people profoundly discontented with themselves as they are.

call to freedom and responsibility and God's demand that we remain in a position of absolute dependence on God is not easily solved.[461]

The benefit for the self in holding on to this God symbol is nevertheless apparent: this God promises to protect one from the pains of inner struggle and from having to make responsible life choices. However, the condition for fulfilling this promise is that one gives up the struggle for freedom and autonomy. Hence, comfort and security come at a price. Gratitude may, in the long run, be exchanged with rebellion.[462] From the perspective of shame, this may be seen as negative: the idea that God does not need anything from humans and that humans do not actually desire anything from God may imply for people who are prone to shame that they will continue to feel incompetent and worthless, instead of being affirmed for actually being able to do something useful for others. "The price of developing a sense of absolute gratitude to and dependence upon God may be the acquisition of a diminished view of the power and value of the self," writes Pattison.[463]

The God of the group is linked to a group that is ordered hierarchically. God is at the top, and then come the authorities appointed to speak on God's behalf, who therefore require attentive obedience. By accepting these terms, one can become a member. Belonging to the group determines whether one is a true believer in God. This God is a God of compliance, convention, and conformity. At best, the group (and its God) offers comfort, strength, and solidarity. However, a lack of acceptance of the requirements may also lead to feelings of isolation and rejection – and thus engender shame, just as we can see in Stump's earlier description of not being desired. So too can the lack of ability to adhere to the group's expectations for conduct, that is, when it comes to issues about substance abuse.[464]

---

461 Ibid., 29.

462 Ibid.

463 Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology*, 240.

464 Cf. Elizabeth A. Prosek et al., "Experiencing Shame: Collegiate Alcohol Abuse, Religiosity, and Spirituality," *Journal of College Counseling* 20, no. 2 (2017) and Pekka Lund, "Christian Faith and Recovery from Substance Abuse, Guilt, and Shame," *Journal Of Religion & Spirituality In Social Work: Social Thought* 36, no. 3 (2017).

We may supplement the analysis of the superego God presented thus far with other traits that Stephen Pattison identifies as important in the symbol of a God that engenders shame. When God is understood as completely different from other beings, this may lead to a total dis-identification of God with humans. If this trait is dominant, it is hard to see how such a God can mirror human development in ways that provide affirmation of God's attunement to human needs and interests.[465] Moreover, and in line with this, as *God does not have a body* (unlike humans), dis-identification may also follow from disembodiment. Underscoring the contrast inherent in the body-spirit dichotomy may imply that all things relating to the body are negatively related to God, who is spirit.[466] Pattison points to the possible consequence of this understanding that anything can be done to the body,[467] not only by the self but also by others. Violations of the boundaries of the body, be they in terms of ridicule, violence, sexual abuse or drug abuse, may, as we have already indicated, contribute to shame, no matter if they are caused by others or oneself. As the body is our concern in terms of not only appearance, but also in terms of sexuality, digestion or excretion, the body may be a source of shame in many ways, because it does not share in God's nature or live up to the ideals of perfection that religions mediate.

According to similar logic, a God that is primarily presented as pure and holy cannot tolerate the unclean. Such God images may increase the personal sense of alienation from both the ideal self and the divine. Furthermore, the associated quest for reconciling purification with the divine "can also foster some most unpleasant human attitudes and vices such as self-righteousness, exclusivism, and contempt for others."[468]

We have repeatedly pointed to the body as the locus of feelings and desires. However, many Western images of God portray God as rational and, accordingly, as one that does not have feelings or desires.[469] For a self prone to shame, this God symbol contributes to a split in the self

465 Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology*, 236f.
466 Ibid., 237.
467 Ibid.
468 Ibid., 237f.
469 Ibid., 238.

that can be far more complex than that described here.[470] The contrast between a self-controlled and passionless God and a self in the hands of its own emotions may contribute to self-experiences of shame and inadequacy. Repression and the denial of feelings may turn into an ideal, and failure to live up to this ideal may, in turn, engender similar feelings of inferiority.[471] It may also render the self more prone to abuse by others.

How should we assess the risks of shame in the context of religion?

The present chapter has presented some of the different levels at which shame may be at work in the context of religion. Like other areas of human life, shame is prevalent here as well. How to evaluate the risks for shame in a religious context? The answer to that question may depend on who you are, and whether or not you are engaged in religion, and, if so, in what ways. For those who are religious and still find it is worthwhile to be so, we can offer the following options.

Religious practitioners who are focused on the need for obedience to authority and the disciplining of the flock may find that shame is, and has to be, a part of the repertoire of interaction and conduct. They may argue that this has always been so, that this is a consequence of being faithful to tradition, and so on. The cost of this attitude is the possible arrested personal growth and development of adherents and the risk of losing some of them, especially if shaming practices become too pervasive.

Other religious practitioners may see the analyses we have offered here, and similar ones, as an excellent opportunity to be constantly aware of the risks of shame and shaming. They may be motivated to develop forms of interaction and agency that impede the development of shame and utilize other mechanisms for moral teaching and codes of conduct.

---

470 For the social effects of this godly ideal, see also the sociology of emotions as described by Riis and Woodhead in A Sociology of Religious *Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), which describes thoroughly the sociological functions that may surround the features we describe here.

471 Cf. Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology*, 238f.

Because religious practices and teachings are employed in so many different contexts and mean different things to different people with different background stories, it is not likely that shame will ever be eliminated from religion. But if one has the aim of reducing shame in religious contexts, there is much to be aware of. If one does not see this as a valuable aim, then one can go one as before. If the latter is a good strategy for religion in a modern or postmodern context remains to be seen. We think not.

The latter points notwithstanding, religion addresses – and must address – failure, because its acknowledgment is a precondition for growth and self-development. But how failure is addressed, and what symbols are employed for dealing with it, varies, and must do so. Graham Ward writes wisely, "Theologically, human beings still walk a high wire between *amor sui* and *amor dei*, pride and humility, assertive self-determination and obedience; with shame, the opening can always be seen beneath the feet, below the wire."[472] The religious practitioner will need to develop modes that overcome shame in a community, and can do so only if he or she can develop trust in an idealized figure with whom he or she can identify without also acknowledging their difference – and that can only be learned in healthy and well-functioning contexts of human interaction.

In her analysis of various aspects of shame, Martha Nussbaum also asks if her analysis is at odds with major religious ideas regarding shame.[473] She points to some critical elements that are worth considering in this conclusion, and which we have hinted at already. Her recommendation is that religions emphasize that perfection is an implausible and inappropriate goal for a human being.[474] At first sight, this might seem like an approach that could generate or contribute to shame, but that need not be the case. Consider what we have written above about standards that generate shame. If these standards are too high, they may cause shame by merely setting the bar too high. Thus, a more realistic understanding of the capacities and capabilities of human beings contributes to an

472 Ward, "Adam and Eve's Shame (and Ours)," 313.

473 See Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, 342f.

474 Ibid.

adequate understanding of the human condition and provides the means for more tolerance in the face of imperfection and insufficiency.

Of course, religious ideas exist that consider the human being as not worthy of respect – as we suggested in the previous section. But Nussbaum holds that the major religions accept an idea of human dignity and, therefore, also human rights. They do not see this idea as incompatible with teachings regarding human frailty and inadequacy.[475] Thus, she seems to underscore the point we have made above about seeing the failures of humanity against a fundamentally positive backdrop of human dignity, which in the Abrahamic traditions is expressed in the notion of the human being as created in the image of God.

There are three important considerations that we can develop based on Nussbaum's short remarks regarding religion:

> First, the idea about human inadequacy and imperfection need not in itself engender shame – even when articulated within a religious context. To be aware of one's finitude may provide a realistic notion about what it means to be human – and allow for a recognition of the vulnerable and frail human condition, without this being a cause for shame.
>
> Second, it is primarily when these features of the human condition are related to specific standards that contribute to jeopardizing someone's stature or belonging to a specific community that they may become problematic. When inadequacy and imperfection are employed as a basis for the evaluation of a person's potential recognition by others, and as a condition for their desire for community with this person, shame lurks in the background.
>
> Third, if religious symbols are employed to express the ambiguities of the human condition in a way that allows for the recognition of human dignity (being created in the image of God is a symbol used in Judaism, Islam and Christianity), as well as the imperfect status of humans, these in combination may contribute to a more sound and realistic understanding of the human condition that can hinder the development of shame. Then, religion can make a positive contribution to a culture in which shame is all too pervasive.

475 Ibid., 343.

Furthermore, we can relate these points to Jill McNish's suggestion for a religiously constructive response to shame. She holds that a certain "sense of being somehow flawed or at least feeble, inadequate, or finite, is an ontological part of what it means to be human."[476] Shame is, accordingly, in her view, something we need to approach constructively to come to terms with the conditions for our existence. The argument that she offers to substantiate this point is as follows:

Shame is situated at the borderline between unity and separation. Like many others, both secular and religious, philosophers, theologians and psychologists, McNish uses the Genesis story about Adam and Eve in the Garden as her point of departure for reflection. She sees the content of this story as an illustration of how separation occurs: "It is really not about God's expulsion and banishment of the primal couple from the garden and/or from God's presence, but rather the couple's own shame experience and their need to separate themselves from the unity they had felt with nature itself and from God's presence."[477] Hence, McNish points to how this story illustrates what we have previously identified as the movements entailed in shame: to separate oneself from community, and to desire for its return.

If we, furthermore, consider this interpretation in light of our understanding of shame as the result of an interruption, the myth about God's presence in the Garden is about a presence that makes Adam and Eve aware of a context of agency and intentions different from the one in which their own agency takes place. Thus, they experience separation from God as something that causes shame, whereas they previously lived in a state of unquestioned union and immediacy. But shame not only manifests a separation between humans and the God who can relieve humans from their sense of wrongness. It also holds a productive potential. McNish develops this potential in a critical comment to Vicki Underland-Rosow. She describes Underland-Rosow's position as follows:

> Shame is antithetical to spirituality. Much institutional religion in our culture separates humans from themselves (their feelings, desires, and thoughts), from

---

476 McNish, *Transforming Shame: A Pastoral Response*, 125.
477 Ibid., 130.

> each other, the universe, and a Higher Power. Spirituality brings things together. Spirituality involves connections. Spirituality is often experienced as profound oneness with the universe. Shame involves separation, alienation. Spirituality has no need for disconnection: Most western religion demands separation and shame."[478]

Read in the light of the fundamental idea about religion in William James as stated in the introduction to this chapter, one might say that Underland-Rosow's contrasting of religion and spirituality here points to how religion builds on the premise of separation, and therefore allows for shame to have a valid place in the religious context. However, spirituality, which is related to human growth and self-acceptance, seems to require for shame to be overcome. McNish nevertheless sees hidden problems in this way of establishing the solution. She critically addresses the premise that it is "in the nature of things that human beings should experience a perpetual state of unity and connection with the source of being and with one another."[479] The problem with this position is that it does not allow authentic spirituality to include experiences of brokenness, dislocation, and fragmentation. Thus, this understanding of spirituality seems to offer a false and superficial picture of the human condition. Separation is a necessary condition for individuation and creativity, and without it, there would be no human growth or progress. Therefore, McNish underscores the necessity of separation: "In order to individuate and come into their own as separate and authentic human beings, people need to experience boundaries between themselves and God and one another. Shame is one of those affects that enables this experience."[480]

---

478 Ibid., 134.

479 Ibid.

480 Ibid., 135. It is against this backdrop that McNish interprets the myth about the Garden of Eden: "The advent of shame caused Adam and Eve to leave the paradisal garden. Yes, this was the end of dreaming innocence. It was the end of humankind's thoughtless unity with God and nature and an end too of humankind's unthinking identification with God. However, it was also the beginning of human creativity and invention. Eve ate of the Tree of Knowledge. This was the beginning of shame. From this archetypal moment, human individuals began to experience boundaries. Leaving the garden set limits and gave shape, substance, and direction to human life. They went out of Eden and began to work, to create, to invent – in short, to become individuals and to start the long process of individuation, both as a species and as individual persons. They lost their unthinking experience of unity with God and nature, but they began the process of finding themselves as human creatures. That unity which was lost is what individuals seek in a

McNish can therefore argue that the experience of shame is "an important way that God reaches out to us and touches us," because shame may point to unavoidable elements in the human condition. Thus, she also points to the same elements that Nussbaum identifies as necessary for humans to acknowledge in order to come to terms with these features of human life that cause shame: "We are frustrated, even overcome at times, by our physical, finite nature and by failings and inadequacies specific to us as individuals." However, these experiences are instances with religious significance, since it is possible to experience oneself as accepted by God, nevertheless. The unconditional acceptance of God can make experiences of shame transformative, "if and to the extent that we can avoid resorting to the various defenses which seek to deny our experience of shame."[481] Hence, she interprets the New Testament stories as chronicles of shame. "They are about the outcast, the unlovable, the impure, the abandoned – the shamed – in all of us, not just outside of us."[482]

It is clear from her elaborations on shame as a contributor to spiritual and personal growth that the shame she is talking about here is adequate, that is, it is a shame that the person in question is entitled to feel. Hence, McNish's argument rests on the premise that separating adequate from inadequate shame is necessary before one employs shame for a positive spiritual and personal purpose. However, given that premise, her constructive proposal for shame in a spiritual context can make sense:

> Psychic and spiritual growth can be attained only in this process of owning the fragments of ourselves, and this is what God asks of us. This is the pursuit of wholeness, and there is a cost to it because seeking wholeness does not mean finding only the good parts of ourselves but all of ourselves. This is what is involved in transformation of shame and the integration of shame experience. Unless we are willing to enter into this process of naming and owning the

lifelong quest. The negotiation of the suffering involved in grasping and seizing that which was gained while still holding on to a piece of the unity that was lost is the challenge of human existence."

481 Ibid., 143.

482 Ibid., 166.

> shameful, shamed, and isolated parts of ourselves, we will be unable to achieve any sense of unity with God.[483]

To acknowledge weakness and vulnerability, and own it, is an important condition for overcoming shame. McNish, therefore, sees the theme of transforming weakness and thereby shame as a central motif in Christianity – and one that takes the human condition more fully into account than one that sees shame only as a way to spiritual suicide.[484] We note, however, that her position needs the careful distinction and discernment suggested above: shame is not an unqualified way to a positive religious mode of being-in-the-world.

483 Ibid., 167.
484 Cf. ibid., 169.

CHAPTER 6

Shame and Morality

Introductory remarks

When we have talked to people who do not work in a scholarly context about writing on shame, we have had various and somewhat different responses. Sometimes when we said that we were writing about shame, it functioned as a conversation stopper. At other times, people brightened up and said, "Oh, yes! That's interesting." But people rarely pursued a conversation on the topic, and when they did, it was often in a way that indicated that they saw shame as a disciplining or moral phenomenon. We got responses like these:

- People have stopped feeling shame about cheating on their tax returns! They only feel ashamed about the wrong things, like about how they look or what part of their body is not in accordance with the ideals they have. What they should do is feel ashamed for lying, cheating, bullying!
- We live in a shameless society! The moral decline has gone too far!
- I feel ashamed of being English: about how we treat the homeless, and about how we may appear to the rest of Europe!

These three examples show what some people think others ought to feel shame for. Said differently, shame is identified here as something that applies – or should apply – to others, and not to oneself. Even in the last case, it is not really the one uttering the statement that is at the center, but the others who make her feel ashamed for being English.

Shame is, nevertheless, also tacitly present in other cases where people are identified and exposed due to their moral transgressions. We say *tacitly present* because shame as such is not the topic, but the following

instances are cases where shame most likely plays a part, and also, to some extent, is instrumental for the actual agency of some of those involved:

- A newspaper discloses that a prominent and highly profiled CEO has been using inside information to trade stocks for a considerable profit. He loses a vote of confidence. The media attention causes him to flee, and one day later he is found in his car in the woods, dead by suicide.
- The #MeToo movement focuses on women who have been subjected to treatment they have been ashamed to tell others about, and who finally have found the courage to do so as they learn that they are not alone. They overcome shame by sharing their stories. But in the wake of this movement, we also learn about men who have been outed and fired from their jobs with no trial. Some of these men have committed suicide, most likely, partly due to shame.

To be ashamed for a moral failure can have devastating consequences. As these examples show, the ambiguities of shame are apparent in moral contexts. They are taken from conversations and newspaper reports that have appeared during the period in which we have worked on this book.

This chapter articulates a main element in what inspired us to write this book. We are critical to the employment of shame for moral purposes. We are not alone in holding a critical view on how to deal with shame as a moral instrument, although we, like others, also disagree as to the extent of criticism. One can take a look at how philosopher Martha Nussbaum, to whom we have already referred,[485] differs from a scientist like Jennifer Jaquet[486] with regard to different views on the use of shame in the public interest. Furthermore, the chapter is written with a specific purpose in mind: it intends to show how problematic it is to employ shame for moral purposes and consider it a viable tool for moral development, growth, and progress.

To deal with the relationship between morality and shame, we need to distinguish the moral context from other, related contexts. Shame also

485 See especially Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*.
486 Jennifer Jacquet, *Is Shame Necessary? New Uses for an Old Tool* (London: Allen Lane, 2015).

exists in contexts of socialization (which has to do with how the individual develops an understanding of his or her role and acceptable behavior in society), and of disciplining (punishment or reward for behavior).[487] If we understand morality as something different from socialization and disciplining, it becomes obvious that it is a rather complex phenomenon.

We can understand morality as *the ability to act on shared values and ideals that are recognized as your own, in a specific context and with reference to the relationships at hand*. This definition of morality connects with the widely held understanding of shame as the reaction you have when you realize that you have failed to live up to specific standards that shape your self-conception.[488] Fundamentally, it ties morality to agency as an expression of your own commitments. When we define morality in this way, it has two immediate consequences: First, it allows the agent to consider the contextual elements for agency. Second, it also opens up to other-based considerations that relativize a strict notion of autonomy as based in the individual only: the agent who acts morally may still consider the impact of his or her actions on relationships and contexts. Thus, morality is not only based on principles but on the experience and assessment of contexts and relationships as well.

This understanding of morality ties it closely to the ability to perform agency, that is, the capacity for making decisions based on understanding yourself and your situation, following your own will, and determining your own interests and aims. Thus, morality presupposes a certain amount of cognitive and rational capacity, and empathy. Elements of self-evaluation and consideration of your own capabilities are involved, as well. Morality also requires subjectivity, that is, the ability to think of oneself as the origin of one's actions and act accordingly.[489]

The emphasis here on agency may seem to cloud the idea that morality is not only about what one does, but also about who one is, about what is one's character, and how prior experience or empathy may engender

487 Cf. the presentation of findings in social psychology in Gausel and Leach in Chapter 3, pp. 43–46.

488 This is a fairly common definition, adapted here from John Deigh's reference to Gerhart Piers and Milton B. Singer, *Shame and Guilt: A Psychoanalytic and a Cultural Study* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), in Deigh, "Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique," 225.

489 This last point can also be seen in relation to Deigh's distinction between ownership and authorship, as referred to previously (see pp. 123–124).

a specific response. The character can dispose a person to do something based on intuition, almost like a moral reflex, without having to make a deliberate decision. This point is clearly expressed in virtue ethics. However, we argue that also in virtue ethics, the capacity for agency, and therefore actions, are within the horizon of what defines morality. One can never understand someone as courageous if the person never acts in ways that display courage. A righteous person is righteous in virtue of his or her decisions and the aims he or she pursues, and he or she is assessed according to these. What virtue ethics bring to light, though, is how one is not only occasionally morally challenged to feel shameful because of what one does, but one is also prone to shame because of who one is – or is not yet, as a virtuous character. Other moral theories may relate more one-sidedly to the aims or actual consequences of agency, or the norms that guide it. Thus, they address occasions or opportunities for shame in different ways. Nevertheless, we shall see that the focus on character in virtue ethics may shed light on specific features regarding the capacity for feeling shame, and provide reasons for an argument against some types of shamelessness.[490]

Thus, we can analyze the role of shame in morality from different points of view. We can ask: Is it good, from a moral point of view, that people should feel ashamed for their moral failures and shortcomings? Can the feeling of shame provide reliable information about what it is right to do or not to do? Are there good alternatives to shame in this regard? Does shame make the moral agency more or less rational or transparent? Can shame be said to be a moral instance at all, if it is so strongly related to the subject and his or her self-perception? Does shame make people turn away from moral challenges and become too self-occupied instead? Given that shame is almost always backward-looking, and emerges as a result of things past, can shame guide future moral agency? And if it can, can it do it well? We hope to have some well-founded answers to these questions at the end of the present chapter.

490 See below, pp. 328ff.

Brief comments on shame and moral theory

Modern moral theory has not focused much on shame, and shame is hardly ever made a topic in the constructive considerations that moral philosophers make in order to argue their positions. Thus, shame has, to a large extent, become a silent topic in moral theory. What one has focused on is simply something different than shame. In this section, we want to reflect briefly on how shame may be silenced by the ways modern moral theories are set up – and thereby provide a framework for an understanding of why shame is not usually a part of moral theory, although it may still play a tacit role in different types of human agency, among which moral agency may still be one.

As moral agents, humans act on and articulate their values, ideals, and norms. These shape their intentions, desires, actual actions, and the aims they pursue. A moral agency shapes a sense of self and identity, as well. However, in what ways the relation between moral ideals or values and the self is understood varies in moral theories. It is not possible to develop that topic in detail here, but we need to consider in brief how moral theories provide different contexts for the role of shame with regard to moral conduct. Some of these considerations build on what we have presented above.[491]

The *deontological* approach to ethics seems to restrict the role of shame considerably. No moral norm says that "you shall not act in shameful ways" – partly because this statement does not provide any moral insight, and partly because emotions do not in themselves provide us with something that in and by itself qualifies as moral motivation.

Utilitarianism (or more broadly, *consequentialism*) may provide an indirect role for shame. This approach to agency focuses on the best possible outcome of an action in terms of utility, or the principle of avoiding pain and enhancing pleasure. Since shame is among the negative (painful) emotions, utilitarianism can address the avoidance of shame as one of the guiding principles for morality. Thus, shame can have a positive moral function. Furthermore, since utilitarianism mainly focuses on

491 For further elaborations from a sociological point of view on how shame may be related to identity formation, see Jan E. Stets and Michael J. Carter, "A Theory of the Self for the Sociology of Morality," *American Sociological Review* 77, no. 1 (2012).

actions and their results, the only place shame can have in this theory, in addition to this, is where the result of an action seems to fail. Then, the agent may feel ashamed for not being able to realize this aim and achieve the desired outcome. However, nothing in the actual construction of morality from a utilitarian point of view suggests that shame should have a role in how the moral subject considers him or herself (as apart from the consequences of his or her actions). Similar considerations apply to other teleological approaches, except for virtue ethics.

Virtue ethics emphasizes the formation of character. Virtuous acts reflect a virtuous person. Someone who fails to perform in a virtuous way is prone to feel shame, not only for what he or she has done but for who he or she is. He or she has failed to display the qualities that are expected by someone who has taken on the task of moral development – and he or she is then a failure, not only in his or her own eyes but also in the eyes of all others that know about the obligations that he or she has taken on concerning this development. In virtue ethics, we are closest to the conventional level of morality. What is considered a virtue may vary from context to context and depend on cultural conditions.[492] Within the frame of virtue ethics, shame may be a strong motivator for how one develops one's moral competence, because the focus is on the moral agent, and not exclusively on the actions and goals one has set for oneself.[493]

Kohlberg's different stages of morality: implications for shame

Development of moral competence

Shame can be analyzed in the context of morality from the point of view of the development of moral competence. In this section, we

492 Cf. Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

493 See below. It is also worth noting that virtue ethics emerged in a (Greek) social context where the social bonds were tighter, and the actual social role of the moral agent had a bearing on how he was considered. On shame within different cultural contexts, including more aristocratic ones, and in relation to guilt, see also the analysis in Peter Hacker, "Shame, Embarrassment, and Guilt," *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 41, no. 1 (2017).

provide a backdrop for the discussion of shame that follows by looking into some elements in Habermas' adaption of Kohlberg's analysis of this development. Habermas' understanding of the conditions for ethics relies mainly on the stages of moral development Kohlberg identified. Kohlberg's theory about individual moral development provides access to some of the conditions that are in play, and therefore also to the context in which shame can emerge as a problematic issue for morality. However, Kohlberg's position has also been criticized as being gender-biased, and Carol Gilligan has voiced concerns about how his research does not take relational elements fully into consideration because of this bias.[494] Hence, the following approach is only meant to highlight conditions for shame and shaming in the context of different types of morality. It should not be read as a basic approval of all the empirical elements in Kohlberg's analysis. Kohlberg's starting point defies our initial premise: that we are constituted as embodied selves in a tight relational and structural network.

A major concern for Habermas is to develop an ethical theory that can be understood as universal and not only based on contextual conditions. He sees this universality as a prerequisite for people to be able to handle ethical issues in a world where different opinions exist about what should be considered as morally good. Among the advantages that Habermas sees in Kohlberg is that the different stages in his theory allow us to reduce the different forms of ethics to a small number of stages in moral development.[495]

The main features in Kohlberg's identification of the stages of individual moral development are as follows:[496]

---

494 See Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

495 Jürgen Habermas, *Moralbewusstsein Und Kommunikatives Handeln*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), 128.

496 The following is from Habermas, *ibid.,* 134f., but slightly adjusted in order to integrate the social dimension better, as these are referred to in ibid, 139. Our translation.

Level A: Pre-conventional morality

1. *The Stage of Punishment and Obedience* (egocentric)
   The understanding of what is right is here related to obedience towards rules and authorities, and to the avoidance of hurting others. The motivation for doing right is to avoid punishment.
2. *The Stage of Individual Instrumental Purpose and Exchange* (concrete individualism)
   The right thing to do here is to follow the rules that serve one's individual interests and allow others to do the same. Hence, self-interest is the motivation.

Level B: Conventional morality

3. *The Stage of Mutual Interpersonal Expectations, Relationships, and Conformity* (the individual in relation to other individuals)
   At this stage, the individual takes on the role of kindness towards others and is interested in their reactions and feelings. Loyalty and faithfulness towards partners and peers, as well as the willingness to conform to their rules and expectations, are central elements. The motivation for this behavior is to appear as good in the eyes of others and oneself since this is considered that which serves you best in the long term. (cf. The Golden Rule).
4. *The Stage of Social System and Conscience Maintenance* (Interpersonal motives and agreement)
   Central at this stage is to do your duty towards society, maintain the social order and the welfare of the group or the society. The motivation is to maintain self-respect and/or good conscience and to avoid negative consequences for the community or society.[497]

Level C: Post-conventional, principled morality

At this level, the focus is on rights, values, and principles that are, or can be, common to all individuals in a society that is "designed to have fair and beneficial practices." This level has the two following stages:

---

497 Conscience is a topic we have deliberately left out of this study, due to the complexity it exhibits, and because we do not think it offers much in terms of understanding shame directly. Nevertheless, we would like to note that it should be treated as part of shame's context. For an analysis of shame, guilt and conscience, see John Cottingham, "Conscience, Guilt, and Shame," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics*, edited by Roger Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

5. *The Stage of Prior Rights and Social Contract or Utility* (The individual is aware that there are norms and values prior to a given social condition, and defines him or herself in relation to these)
   The move beyond conventional morality at this level becomes apparent in the understanding of the right: the right is constituted by basic rules that express the fundamental rights, values, and the social contract, even when these may be in conflict with the concrete rules or laws of some groups that are members of the society. These "basic rules" are employed to regulate the interests of different groups in society, and recognizes their right to pursue their interests, but not at the expense of others. The motivation for doing the right here is the wish for all to live as well as possible, and the understanding that this right can only be realized when the social contract is maintained and respected.
6. *The Stage of Universal Ethical Principles* (Morality is the rational basis for the development of society, and every person is an end in his or herself, and not only a means for others)
   The underlying assumption is that all of humanity should be guided by universal ethical principles. The rules of a given society are valid to the extent that they are in accordance with these universal principles. The motivation for doing the right is, at this level, that one as a rational person has realized the validity of these principles, and accordingly, is committed to them.

Several important elements in the above scheme can help us to get a better grip on the role of shame in relation to morality. Let us start by looking at some of the insights that appear from the post-conventional and most developed stage of moral development.

Shame under the conditions of the post-conventional stage

The distinction between the right and the good comes to fruition at the post-conventional level. Here, the right is identified by what is in accordance with universal principles, and not constituted by reference to

concrete and historically situated outcomes (of good). Whereas the good is linked to concrete empirical achievements, consequences, or outcomes, the right is conditioned by actions that are in accordance with specific principles, norms, or rules. It means that moral stages that focus on the right also make it possible to separate the agent from his or her actions since the focus is on the action. Thus, the extent to which he or she, in a given case, feels shame, will not be due to who he or she is, but what universal standards he or she has not been able to live up to through his or her agency.

Furthermore, if one operates based on what is right to do, the motivation for doing the right is linked to one's *insight* into something that is defined as right for everyone to do. It is not linked to my status in the group, my relation to some others that may approve of me or make me feel ashamed. Therefore, a moral action is, in principle, transparent concerning *why* it should be done, and why everyone who finds themselves in the position where this action is an option, should do it. Accordingly, the universal orientation in post-conventional morality excludes the clash between contexts of agency in principle. It also eliminates the possibility of experiencing the double movement of shame, as the agent here is always acting in accordance with principles that make him or her a part of the moral community – and which therefore does not jeopardize his or her membership in it.

The emphasis on insight into the right as the valid moral motivation at the post-conventional level, therefore, excludes shame, or the potential for shame, as a possible motivation for doing the right. There can be no guidance at this level expressed in sentences like "if you do not do this, it is shameful" or "by doing this, you bring shame on us" because such statements do not convey any understanding of why this is wrongful or shame-causing. Accordingly, motivations that appeal to shame cannot be part of what constitutes post-conventional morality. The only option for feeling shame at a post-conventional level is if you do not live up to the moral standards given by the universal principles into which you have gained insight. Thus, if shame is present here, it is not as a motivational factor, but as a backward-looking response to what has taken place in the past. It expresses a self-judgment due to the realization that one has failed

to live up to one's own standards. Furthermore, the role of others in this respect is not to trigger shame, but to instigate in you the insight into why what you did was wrong or should be otherwise – in other words, they may convey a sense of guilt, but not shame.

Consequently, at the post-conventional stage, shame neither seems to have a role in providing moral motivation or guidance, nor in providing moral insight into why something is right or wrong. Furthermore, the focus at this level is on the well-being of society, from which no individual is excluded. We can, therefore, say that post-conventional morality in principle overcomes the potentially egocentric and/or divisive elements that may come to the fore at other stages of moral development, and which are in a profound way expressed in how shame closes in on and centers the individual on him or herself instead of the (generalized) other (to which he or she also belongs in principle). A society based on post-conventional morality places all members at the same level with regard to the opportunities for acquiring moral insight and motivation. Because shame cannot in itself bring insight into why something is morally right or wrong, the communal element is constituted by shared insights and common reasoning.

However, to move from one moral stage to another is the result of learning and increasing competence. It is also a development in which increased autonomy plays a role – a point that is especially important if one considers shame as a socially conditioned emotion. The autonomy we are talking about here is articulated in the moral subject's ability to offer reasons for why something is right to do and make these his or her own.[498] Thus, both Kohlberg (and even more so, Habermas) make a case for morality as rooted in cognitive considerations where the reasons given for an action or a judgment are what constitutes its content. Moral emotivism is ruled out at this stage.[499] So are contextual and relational elements. The universal approach here focuses instead on increased sense for non-partiality, reversibility, and mutuality. Thus, it leads to insights into

498 Cf. again Deigh's distinction between ownership and authorship, which seems relevant here as well: post-conventional morality focuses on actions that can be owned by the person performing them.

499 Cf. Habermas, *Moralbewusstsein Und Kommunikatives Handeln*, 46, 130ff.

the conditions for just ways of acting and for assessing conflicts related to moral questions. One acquires moral competence by being confronted with and challenged by moral questions and the need to handle them.[500]

Accordingly, the motivation for action is no longer to be found in "it is good for me/us," but in a de-centered perspective that shapes how one considers the moral problems at hand and finds guidance for solving them. Instead of viewing moral challenges only based on one's own context, one relates them to principles that transcend the given life-world of those who participate in the discourse, and is thereby more inclusive, and can in no way be accused of being egocentric or group-centered, as in the previous levels of morality. Habermas summarizes the outcome as follows:

> Only at the postconventional stage is the social world uncoupled from the stream of cultural givens. This shift makes the autonomous justification of morality an unavoidable problem. The very perspectives that make consensus possible are now at issue. Independently of contingent commonalities of social background, political affiliation, cultural heritage, traditional forms of life, and so on, competent actors can now take a moral point of view, a point of view distanced from the controversy, only if they cannot avoid accepting that point of view even when their value orientations diverge. With this concept of autonomy, the notion of the capacity for responsible action also changes. Responsibility becomes a special case of accountability, the latter here meaning the orientation of action toward an agreement that is rationally motivated and conceived as universal: to act morally is to act on the basis of insight.[501]

Thus, Habermas develops an understanding of morality that de-situates it from the context that is the foundation for moral judgment. He also decreases the impact that emotions, which are always expressed in specific relations, have on moral formation. The actual social conditions thereby become neutralized, at least to some extent, and do not play a formative role in the deliberative process that shapes moral agency. Consequently, shame is rendered little impact and no role at the level

500 Ibid., 136.
501 Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 162.

of post-conventional morality. One may ask, though, if this is not a relatively ideal conception of moral agency, and one which is not among those that are empirically easiest to detect. At the other levels of morality, that take more into account the actual context in which moral perceptions are shaped and formed, though, shame still may play a considerable role. Perhaps not so much in terms of providing insight into the reasons for acting, as in other modes of motivation for moral agency. Let us consider these in turn:

Shame at the pre-conventional level of morality

At the p*re-conventional leve*l, shame can play the role of making sure that one is obedient to others and complies with their expectations. We are then speaking more about disciplining than about morality in the qualified sense. Here, shame mainly functions as an instrument for disciplining, as one may wish to avoid the painful experiences of feeling shame for something one has done or plans to do. Furthermore, one can feel shame for being punished for showing a lack of obedience. Shame, accordingly, plays the role of a regulator in the close interaction between the agent and his or her peers. However, the agent may not have any insight into why something is right or wrong – only into what is shameful behavior and what is not. Against the backdrop of this insight, he or she may regulate his or her actions to avoid shame. The egocentric and context-bound perspective is hardly transcended. Shame remains either a predominantly backward-looking emotion, as it functions as a reaction to acts already done, or as a deterrent mechanism for future actions. In both cases, the behavior is regulated by relationships with actual others, and no real moral autonomy is possible here.

Shame at the level of conventional morality

At the conventional level, moral motivation is related closely to the individual's ability to meet and conform to or comply with the expectations of the society of which he or she is a part. He or she can adopt the rules of society as his or her own, and therefore also act with a certain amount

of autonomy. However, the risk for shame is great at this level because the individual is always related to the opinions and norms of others in the performance of his or her agency. Hence, the clash of contexts of agency lurks here. He or she may realize that he or she is not facing up to the standards they represent or the normative components that he or she, as a member of the same group, has adopted for him or herself. Shame may occur whenever compliance is not realized, either because one becomes aware of this lack, or because someone else tells you. The interruption that this manifestation of lack represents disturbs the intended coherence of agency as hitherto performed.

Since the interests of the individual as a member of the group are in focus, shame can play an essential role in securing conformity and compliance without any significant development of insight into why something is good or not. Thus, conformity does not necessarily equal morality. The most vivid example of this are the ideals for cooperation and loyalty that we find in a mafia context. Other examples are, for example, how daughters are told to behave in a specific manner in order not to bring shame over the family or clan without learning about why this is so or why compliance is necessary. Thus, shame may impact agency in ways that restrict personal autonomy or obliterate it altogether.

Habermas nevertheless does not reject altogether that contextual considerations can have a role in the development of moral competence. But his understanding of this development implies that it is necessary to make sure that the individual is given access to resources that allow him or her to question legitimately, and eventually also transcend, contextually given norms and expectations, and to do so by means of insights that he or she has had the chance to develop autonomously. Thus, the mechanisms that most strongly engender shame are not among those he considers as beneficial for moral development. One needs to base moral development on a mode of practical reasoning that is rooted in reason, and not in the emotions.

Against this backdrop, Habermas makes a distinction between moral and ethical modes of practical reasoning. Ethical reasoning, he holds, is related to questions about the good life for the individual. In this context, Habermas uses Charles Taylor's notion about strong preferences, which

is not about arbitrary dispositions, but about basic traits in a person's self-understanding, character, and identity.[502] To address questions about the good life, the individual must thematize his or her own identity and make him or herself and not only his or her agency a theme for reflection. This existential self-understanding has a strong evaluative component based on both adopted ideals and on the experiences contained in one's life-history. Thus, it contributes main elements in what we can identify as the components in the individual's context of agency, and also to what constitutes the architecture of the moral self. It can also imply a critical evaluation of the processes and values that have resulted in his or her actual identity:

> Hence, the clarification of one's self-[…] calls for an appropriative form of understanding – the appropriation of one's own life history and the traditions and circumstances of life that have shaped one's process of development. […]. Bringing one's life history and its normative context to awareness in a critical manner does not lead to a value-neutral self-understanding; rather, the hermeneutically generated self-description is logically contingent upon a critical relation to self.[503]

This understanding is notable for its relevance to how we have previously described shame as the result of interruption of intentions and the concomitant invested desire that emerges out of the individual's context of agency when it clashes with a different (perceived, imagined or real) other-based context of agency (which includes different ideals, values, norms, etc.). Habermas seems to presuppose that the thematization of coherence, unity, and integrity of a given life and its accompanying agency should be understood as an ethical question. It entails that the moral self-evaluation that considers one's goals in life, what constitutes a good life, one's achievements, etc., is of crucial importance for the development of a person's self-understanding and the direction and the ordering of his or her desires and aims. The stronger one's moral subjectivity is shaped by

502 Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 4f.
503 Ibid., 5.

the values and aims that have led to one's understanding of what a good life is, the greater is the risk of experiencing shame if these ideals are rejected, and their pursuit is interrupted in a way that feels convincing for the subject. In this case, others may very well be within the context of consideration as well, since these questions are about the aim of one's life.[504] Nevertheless, the questioning of one's own, or the group's form of life, and to what extent it is built on acceptable ideals, requires a mode of reasoning that goes beyond the mere feeling of shame. Shame itself cannot contribute significantly to solving questions about the good life in a viable, lasting, and coherent manner.

Accordingly, ethical questions represent a level of reflection that can be developed into more moral questions when the answers to these are questioned from a more external and universal perspective. The increasing levels of moral considerations and argumentation seem to make shame redundant as a resource in personal moral development. Given the considerations so far, there seem to be strong reasons for being critical of the role that shame plays in a moral context. However, there are recent attempts to rehabilitate shame's role in moral contexts that merit further attention before we can draw any such conclusion. To one of these contributions, we turn now.

Defending shame: Resources

Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni: Shame defended as morally relevant

In their thoroughly argued book *In Defense of Shame*, Deonnai et al. make a strong case for the rehabilitation of shame as morally relevant. The definition that their defense relies on can help us understand further some of the features related to shame in a moral context. Deonna et al. nevertheless acknowledge the ambiguous evaluation of shame in relation to morality: Some see it, they argue, as "a central tool for navigating successfully within our moral environment; at other times, it is taken,

504 Cf. Habermas, *Erläuterungen Zur Diskursethik*, 1. Aufl. ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 105.

rather, to be a morally suspicious emotion that we should do our utmost to rid ourselves of."[505] Tacitly, they also point to what we have called the backward-looking character of shame, since it is the negative emotional evaluation of our past traits or actions that may justify a negative evaluation of ourselves as unworthy, as degraded, or as exhibiting an unwanted identity.[506]

Deonna et al. see emotions in general as morally relevant if they can be determined to be morally good or bad, or if the motivations they embody are distinctively moral. This qualification implies that shame cannot be understood as potentially moral apart from the themes or formal objects it relates to, or, in our words, how it is related to our intentions and desires. Shame needs to be related to *moral* objects and our eventual failure in achieving them if it is to work in a moral context. Thus, "it is not necessary to possess an already established conception of the moral good to reflect on the relations between emotions and morality. For, rather than enquiring into whether an emotion is intrinsically or extrinsically morally good or bad, we may wonder whether it qualifies as morally relevant or irrelevant," they hold.[507]

The distinction between morally relevant and irrelevant emotions implies that they can "count as morally relevant when the motivations they embody satisfy constraints we are familiar with from more classic ways of conducting ethical discourse."[508] Thus, shame becomes morally relevant *if the reasons for it can be part of a moral discourse that offers reasons for acting in this or that way.*[509] Accordingly, shame offers moral guidance only when it is made transparent by a cognitive investment that can justify this function. Emotions are sensitive to reasons and, thus, potentially sensitive to moral reasons. Shame as "an emotion is morally relevant when the values in terms of which its evaluation proceeds are moral values."[510] Thus, they suggest that shame can have some cognitive

505 Deonna et al., *In Defense of Shame: The Faces of an Emotion*, 4.
506 Cf. ibid., 7.
507 Ibid., 14.
508 Ibid.
509 Ibid., 14–15.
510 Ibid., 15.

content – a point that is not without relevance if shame is related to moral agency as defined in the introduction to this chapter.

Against the two dogmas

Deonna et al. devote a considerable amount of space in their book to argue against two dogmas that they think are misleading and which lead to a rejection of shame as a moral phenomenon. The first dogma they call *shame socialism*, which implies that the view of others on oneself fundamentally conditions shame.[511] As such, it implies a moral heteronomy that should be avoided, and accordingly, it cannot be an acceptable basis for morality. The second dogma says that shame is morally bad because it is associated with other feelings that we usually consider as having a negative value. According to this view, shame correlates with a variety of insidious emotional conditions and action tendencies (such as aggression). From this perspective, shame promotes self-destructive attitudes and leads to anti-social behavior. Consequently, it should be avoided.[512]

Deonna et al.'s definition of shame identifies it as "the subject's painful sense of her own incapacity to live up to, even minimally, the demands consubstantial with one or some of the values she is attached to. This verdict of incapacity captures the distinctive sense in which an individual's identity is shaken in shame."[513] The strength of this definition is that it relates shame to identity and the sense of self, or to the overall architecture of the self, and that is, we agree, crucial for moral concerns, as moral agency requires the ability to identify (with) some values on which one can act. It is also in consonance with our initial definition of shame occurring as a response when one's agency is interrupted (be it by one's realization of incapacity or the judgment of others). Furthermore, their definition also uses a metaphor we can relate to: shame is shaking, sometimes it even shatters or dissolves the (sense of) self. They hold that:

---

511 Note how this "other-based" understanding of shame in a moral context runs counter to the understanding of morality that is based in autonomous acceptance of norms and ideals, as defined in the introduction to this chapter.

512 Cf. the connection between shame, low self-esteem, and narcissistic rage, as described in the previous chapter on shame and psychology.

513 Ibid., 98.

> In shame, we take it that we exemplify a specific disvalue that strikes us as an indication of our incapacity to exemplify a self-relevant value even to a minimal degree. This experience of incapacity, although circumscribed to the value undermined in the circumstances, affects the self in a way. Our identity being constituted by the values to which we are attached, it is shaken precisely insofar as we experience our inability to honor even minimally the demands that go with this value.[514]

If we relate this definition to our previously established understanding of shame as resulting from the interruption of the intended projects of the self, as these projects are shaped and guided by values that we are attached to, Deonna et al.'s definition of shame in relation to morality makes sense. Mostly, shame is not a tangential experience, but one that involves the self – be it in a global sense or in a more restricted one. Shame is, therefore, more than an unfavorable construal of ourselves. It is sometimes "a verdict of unworthiness that has an all-or-nothing character."[515] However, occasionally we may also "feel shame in connection with values we hold only peripherally." Then, the all-encompassing negative judgment about ourselves does not apply.[516] Nevertheless, they emphasize that severe evaluation is present in shame. But they also argue that one needs to distinguish between the evaluation component in shame and the object dimension. Sometimes these two components can be separated and sometimes not. For example, they are combined when shame manifests an identity we do not want.[517] Accordingly, for Deonna et al., "a full and ambitious account of shame" […] has to portray this emotion as a negative evaluation of the self that is severe but does not have an all-encompassing character."[518]

Furthermore, Deonna et al.'s definition of shame is pluralist and they can therefore identify how shame presents itself in a wide variety of contexts and different forms. Accordingly, the values that result in shame

514 Ibid., 122.

515 For a critical discussion of the relation between shame and decrease in perceived self-worth, cf. Deigh, "Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique."

516 Deonna et al., *In Defense of Shame: The Faces of an Emotion*, 98–99.

517 Ibid., 77.

518 Ibid., 99.

can be of different kinds: “Shame can arise as much in connection with the values manifested by an individual’s *pudeur* as with those manifested by his dignity, decency, or integrity.”[519] Or, as they write later on, “what matters for shame within the present proposal is the attachment we have with respect to each and every value we care personally to exemplify. These might belong to any family of values, among which we can count moral, sexual, aesthetic, political, cultural, and intellectual values, as well as those values having to do with one’s public image.”[520] Thus, shame can be conditioned by a multitude of factors or elements, among which not all have to be strictly moral in content but all of which contain some value or evaluative component.

There are several preconditions for the experience of moral shame, and Deonna et al. list them in the following sequence:[521]

1. A subject must be complex enough to be attached to values.
2. She must furthermore be attached to self-relevant values – that is, values that she takes as imposing practical demands on her.
3. She must have the following discriminatory ability: she must be sensitive to the fact that she may fare more or less well in regard to the demands these values impose on her.

Given these preconditions, the subject will feel shame if, and only if, these conditions are met:

1. She comes to take a trait or an action of hers to exemplify the polar opposite of a self-relevant value.
2. She apprehends this opposition as indicating a distinctive incapacity with respect to the demands of this particular value.
3. This incapacity is distinctive in the sense that it consists in the incapacity to exemplify, even minimally, the value in question.[522]

519 Ibid., 75.
520 Ibid., 118.
521 Cf. our definition of morality above, p. 271.
522 Deonna et al., *In Defense of Shame*, 102–103. Our italics.

We find it notable that this description of the conditions for shame in a moral context contributes to our underscoring of shame as the result of interrupted agency. On their part, and given this account of shame, Deonna et al. argue in the following way against the two "dogmas" they find prevalent in the recent literature on shame:

Against the socialism position, they hold that the relevant values for the constitution of shame need not have to do with our social standing, or with the invasion of our privacy. It is only some types of shame that are elicited thus, and they should be distinguished from other types of shame. In moral matters, "the role of others […] is most of the time confined to triggering our realization that we are or have behaved in a way that is below the threshold of what we personally deem acceptable."[523] Therefore, shame does not always require the subject to take the perspective of others upon what he or she is or does. Furthermore, they argue that "shame is social when, and only when, it construes the self-relevant values of reputation or privacy as under threat or as out of our control."[524] Far from all shame involves such evaluation, though. Therefore, they suggest distinguishing between social and personal shame: "Shame is social when the self-relevant values concern the way we appear to others; it is personal when the self-relevant value has nothing to do with appearances."[525] In other words, shame in the context of morality is not always a social emotion or one that needs a social context to appear.

The distinction that Deonna et al. establish between social and personal shame sustains their argument "that cases of social shame so defined are not coextensive with cases of public shame – shame occurring in the context of a real or imagined audience – but can also occur in connection with solitary shame – when the emotion is experienced in the absence of any public, real or imagined."[526] Thus, they distinguish between personal and social shame. This distinction makes it possible for them to claim that personal shame often occurs in front of, and because of, others, who then trigger the subject to take a new perspective upon what he or she has

523 Ibid., 138.
524 Ibid.
525 Ibid.
526 Ibid.

done or who he or she is. However, such instances need not have anything to do with the features that usually are seen as connected to social shame, such as threats to reputation or failure to control what should be kept private.[527]

As we have seen, according to Deonna et al., personal shame results from the individual's negative assessment of themselves in the light of the values with which they identify. Shame thus tells them that, in some sense, their identity project and/or the intentions of their agency have failed. Again, we note how this is in accordance with what we have previously sketched about shame. It is notable that shame in this sense is not necessarily the result of heteronomy, nor the result of non-transparent evaluations.[528] It may be caused by some lack of control over the conditions for agency, though.

Turning then to what may be the content of social shame, Deonna et al. identify three main features, among which only one of them (and one that has already been mentioned) seems to make shame problematic from a moral point of view: shame is properly social when the self-relevant values of reputation or privacy are at stake. However, it is hardly the case that all instances are morally relevant in which this is the case. Even though shame is social in such contexts, it is not the same as saying that this shame has moral content or implications.

Furthermore, shame is social because "we learn *in situ* and in contact with others about those circumstances that merit shame."[529] However, shame is not the only emotion that falls into this category. Concerning moral values, this only tells us that values "are singled out in specific

527 Ibid.

528 The point that shame does not compromise moral autonomy is also argued strongly by Fabrice Teroni and Otto Bruun in "Shame, Guilt and Morality," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2011). However, there as well, the understanding of shame as productive and resting on personal moral convictions tends to overlook the complexity of interrelations between selves and others. Dan Zahavi comments on this position, and argues that it "mainly targets highly elaborate, self-directed judgmental forms of shame." Therefore, it is cognitively demanding, and accordingly, it "would rule out not only something like pre-reflective shame, but also anything like infantile shame. Another worry might be that shame is less about one's failure to exemplify a self-relevant value than it is about exemplifying a self-relevant defect; that is, what is shame-inducing is not the distance from an ideal self but the closeness to an undesired self." See Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*, 220.

529 Deonna et al., *In Defense of Shame: The Faces of an Emotion*, 152.

social and historical settings" and that we "find in shame an especially powerful tool for their inculcation."[530] Thus, Deonna et al. seem to consider shame more relevant for disciplining than for moral teaching, but we would argue that in itself, it does not mean that it is any more morally qualified than, for example, fear.

Shame triggered by the attitudes of others ("public shame") need not have an undisputed moral function. We may also feel shame when no one makes us fear for our reputations or makes salient our lack of control over what we think should be kept private. Deonna et al. hold that others are ancillary to the shame we feel in such cases, and they put forward the strong claim that shame is never heteronomous. Interaction with others is, nevertheless, often required for us to realize the full extent of our moral shortcomings. They can draw our attention to our theoretical or practical blind spots. "Because we take autonomously the insights of some of these others to be authoritative, they may contribute to correcting, refining, or enlightening our moral sensitivity. For this reason, shame may constitute a privileged route to moral progress."[531] This point we aim to discuss further below, not least because it seems to run the risk of oversimplifying cases where we feel ashamed because of the appeal of others, and despite ourselves being convinced that we are acting in a morally justified way.

Despite their strong argument for shame as a potentially moral emotion, Deonna et al. claim that it makes little sense to speak abstractly about shame as morally good or bad. There is "ample reason to conclude that the moral character of shame will be a function of the particular value attachments it manifests and which it is likely to further promote." They continue:

> This shows that shame not only need not be morally ugly but that it can also be morally beautiful. This beauty is admittedly fragile, since it can easily succumb to two great evils: shame is potentially informed by ugly values (e.g., concern with appearances fostering servile conformity) and, when felt chronically and irrationally, potentially destructive for both the individual and those close to him. This, we submit, is the source of the diverging diagnoses about shame.[532]

530 Ibid., 152.
531 Ibid., 152–153.
532 Ibid., 183.

Deonna et al. suggest that shame may compare favorably with guilt because shame is associated with shortcomings that cannot be captured in terms of right or wrong action, and therefore requires a deeper self-awareness. In other words, shame may contribute to ground moral values more profoundly in the moral subject. Because shame is a response to deficiencies concerning the moral virtues, it does not undermine morality, but "serves to place our moral concerns within the broader context of our general interests and values," they argue.[533] Thus, they see shame as playing a potential role in moral formation that is much in consonance with what we briefly described above in relation to virtue ethics. Shame as a phenomenon in the overall architecture of the moral self serves the internalization of virtues. Then the question is, what kind of moral subject does one become when shame is given this role? If the development of virtues employing shame instead of moral insight emerging out of deliberative reasoning takes place, what kind of relationships does that engender between the potentially virtuous moral agent and their peers?

J. C. Manion: The possibility of determining the moral relevance of shame

The arguments

We saw in the chapter on shame and psychology that Martha Nussbaum worked hard in order to identify to what extent it is possible to ascribe a positive function to shame. Her conclusion is that such possibilities exist only to a limited extent. Other philosophers seem to come to much the same conclusion. Jennifer C. Manion's article "The Moral Relevance of Shame" illustrates this point.[534] She argues that shame can "play an important positive role for the ashamed person *despite its negative and potentially debilitating effects*."[535] The italicization of words in the quoted sentence intends to show the ambiguity that she thereby admits that shame has. The quote also signals the challenge present when shame is

533 Ibid., 184.

534 See Jennifer C. Manion, "The Moral Relevance of Shame," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (2002).

535 Ibid., 73.

identified as playing an important positive role, despite its debilitating effects.[536] Accordingly, it is crucial to look into her contribution in detail.

Manion's intention in rehabilitating shame's moral relevance centers around two main elements: first, she thinks that negative accounts of shame underestimate and misdescribe its motivating power. Second, shame represents a possibility for self-reflection that can "motivate an agent to seek a (re)considered moral identity and a closer approximation to an improved and improving moral ideal."[537]

Manion holds that not all instances of shame are morally relevant. Shame has a broader scope than that which is relevant for morality. Accordingly, one must account for when it is morally relevant and when it is not. One strategy for identifying the moral relevance of shame would be to say that it must be based on traits, acts, or features in a person that are under their control and which they can, therefore, correct or adjust.[538] This strategy makes shame morally relevant when it is related to the capacity for agency, which, on its part, can be assessed in relation to specific values or norms. Nevertheless, in Manion's view, shame is not only related to acts, but also to who the moral person is.[539] In that regard, shame's moral relevance points us to a notion of morality we find in virtue ethics, insofar as this position in moral philosophy underscores the formation of a person's moral character and abilities, and not only acts or their outcome.

Against this backdrop, Manion defines moral shame as "shame precipitated by some *moral* lapse, failure or omission that results in an agent's disappointment in aspects of her own moral character over which she has some significant control."[540] Thus, it is primarily an experience of failure to meet one's moral ideals. Manion's emphasis on disappointment is interesting to note since she thereby points to how it can be merged with

536 Manion seems quite aware of the challenge she has put before herself: She sees shame as a "significant blow to the self. If shame is therefore to be recommended as beneficial for the person experiencing it, this blow cannot be devastating to a person's moral character or agency. Any good that shame serves must counteract its negative repercussions. Shame must produce a certain good especially well." Ibid., 78.

537 Ibid., 73.

538 Ibid., 75.

539 Ibid., 76.

540 Ibid., 77.

the emotion of shame. We would nevertheless argue that disappointment need not be a consequence of moral shame.

Shame may also work against moral motivation, either because it erodes one's confidence in one's own potential for moral agency, or because it causes outright immoral behavior, be it rage against others or more self-absorption or isolation.[541] On the positive side, though, is its capacity to motivate improvement: we can ease the discomfort of being shamed by trying to prove to ourselves that what we are ashamed of is not an irreparable trait in us. "We can and do seek our own approval and to reaffirm our goodness in our own eyes constitutes one aspect of moral integrity." Thus, it can lead to an improvement in our moral character, Manion claims.[542]

If we read this against the backdrop of our previous analysis of Kohlberg and Habermas, Manion's reasoning at this point presents us with a problem. If we act morally because our motivation to do so is that it eases our discomfort in feeling shame, we find ourselves at the pre-conventional or conventional stage of morality. It is pre-conventional because the motivation is the desire to avoid discomfort and conventional in terms of trying to look good in our own eyes again as measured by the standard of conventional morals. In other words, insofar as the overcoming of shame is not morally motivated, shame also does not seem to motivate actions based on moral insight. Instead, the morally relevant function, which appears as secondary, emerges from one's concerns regarding oneself or oneself in a social context of expectations, conventions, and assessments. Thus, Manion's argument for the moral significance of shame rests on the levels of morality in which communal and relational elements play a significant role, and in which moral insights may not contribute significantly to the development of a mature moral subjectivity. However, that does not imply that such secondary functions cannot contribute morally to society. In a less than perfect world, there will always be people who are morally immature and that may be tempted to pursue their own immoral desires that will put vulnerable others at risk. Thus, even at a pre-conventional level

541 Cf. ibid., 80.

542 Ibid., 81.

shame may serve as a morally protective bulwark against immoral desires and actions.

Evaluation

Manion is right in arguing that shame may sometimes contribute to our awareness of values and how we function in a social setting. Shame's disruptive character may provide us with new assessments of our expectations and capacities and put "a sudden halt to any unquestioning operations of the self." Thus, it provides the opportunity for self-doubt, and "it is precisely because of this feature [self-doubt] that shame is a potentially valuable moral emotion."[543] Its moral value lies in its ability to question our moral identity or character. As a consequence, we may be able to shape new and better ideals of who we can still be in the future. Manion may be right in arguing this, but we would still like to ask: at what cost? Is not the risk in employing shame as the primary motivator for moral formation that one loses sight of the necessity of building moral character on moral insight about what is right and good to do, and not on the need for overcoming the negative emotion of shame that emerges out of one's former conduct? We can push this critical question even further by addressing the conclusion in Manion's discussion of the positive contributions of shame to morality. She writes, "Because it requires an evaluation of core aspects of the self and not simply one's isolated actions, moral shame is more likely to encourage deep, significant transformations of moral character than are guilt feelings."[544] Given the ambiguities of shame's function in the context of morality, to which Manion herself testifies, one can ask if shame can contribute to profound *moral* transformation. We would argue that shame *in itself* offers no necessary or valid moral insight, although it *may occasionally* mediate it. Thus, shame may continue to hold the moral self captive in unfavorable conditions, instead of contributing to the liberation of its moral potential. Against this backdrop, we acknowledge that it can also motivate the moral subject to move

543 Ibid., 83. In these lines of reasoning, she bases her reflections on the analyses of both J. Rawls and G. Taylor.

544 Ibid., 84.

away from the morally problematic situation. In such cases, it mediates a morally relevant transformation.[545]

Support for morality? Pattison on shame

Arguments

Among the risks of employing shame in the context of morality is that it makes the shame-experiencing individual self-occupied or too self-absorbed to achieve the necessary distance and clarity that can lead to genuine moral insight and assess the moral challenges in ways that are not conditioned by the agent's concerns for him or herself. But as suggested at the end of the previous section, shame may also be a push towards employing other elements in the architecture of the self, which may lead to a transformation of the self's conditions for agency. Furthermore, moral insight at the post-conventional level relies on autonomous considerations and reasoning. In the chapter about psychology and shame, we pointed to how important it is that the self is provided with opportunities to develop emotional self-reliance in its relation to others to avoid being prone to shame. Accordingly, the need for some independence from others is not necessary only to develop genuine moral insight but is also needed to develop a capacity to resist the influence of shaming, especially when it is not, or should not be, morally relevant.

We are not referring here to self-reliance understood as a mode of total independence from others. We find such ideas about independence in modern forms of individualism. Instead, we argue in favor of an independence or self-reliance that can recognize interrelations and dependencies as the flip side of our differentiation from others. Such differentiation implies that one can model the relationship with others along the same lines as a mature relationship between a parent and a child: as a

545 The critical point made here can be developed further in light of the comment made by Rom Harré and W. Gerrod Parrott in *The Emotions: Social, Cultural and Biological Dimensions* (London; Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 8: "Shame, to return to a point made by Gabrielle Taylor, limits the shamed person's motives to make things right. The shamed person in effect must accept a debased self as congruent with the wrongful action, and is motivated not so much to compensate for the action as to withdraw from public scorn."

relationship marked by increasing differentiation, and by a growing level of trust in oneself, as well as the recognition of the importance of the other for becoming oneself. Under such conditions, the self can receive the necessary affirmation and recognition to create the fundamental conditions for self-trust, self-respect, and self-esteem.

These considerations may also be developed further in light of the difference between guilt, feelings of guilt and shame that we presented earlier. In contrast to feelings of guilt, from which the self can differentiate itself and to which the self can relate in a transparent manner once the distinction between action and agent is learned, shame has a different status. Stephen Pattison speaks about the tendency for shame to take over the self, and underscores the pre-subjective status it sometimes has. One can feel guilty and still maintain a sense of self-esteem, even to the extent that one can admit to being guilty of a particular action without feeling disparaged by the reactions of others. Shame does not make this possible in the same way.[546] It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to be able to differentiate between feelings of guilt and shame and to acknowledge that the two may not operate according to the same kind of logic. However, they may be more intertwined than is often recognized.[547]

Furthermore, Pattison points to an essential element in the relationship between shame and morality that may help us to see problematic and even pathological traits in the way in which shame conditions (or fails to condition) human agency. He asserts that humans suffering from pathological shame (shame that has an enduring negative effect on self-esteem, social interaction, and capacities for agency) are often not part of the moral community or lack the necessary competence to be

546 For further elaborations on this distinction, see Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology*, 43f.

547 Cf. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*, 361: "In guilt, one typically acknowledges that one has done (or intended) something wrong. In shame, one acknowledges that one is something inferior, falling short of some desired ideal. The natural reflex of guilt is apology and reparation; the natural reflex of shame is hiding. And while guilt typically suggests a constructive future – making reparations, not doing that sort of bad thing again – shame often offers no constructive advice. Sometimes one can resolve to correct a perceived inadequacy, but often what one is asked to blush for is an ineradicable part of what and who one is. Because shame pertains to any ideal, social or personal, it is a mistake to think that it is entirely a public or social emotion."

genuinely moral.[548] We find it is important to underscore that this is not the case for everyone that suffers from such shame. Some may also use morality and moral action to overcome the enduring feeling of shame and to regain their experience of being part of a community. Remaining a moral person despite suffering from pathological shame can be extremely important. It may well be what makes them still able to hold on to some self-esteem and dignity. Thus, what Pattison does not take sufficiently into consideration is that chronic shame does not need to invade all parts of human agency.

However, when shame has the effect that people become "trapped in themselves" in ways that cut them off from genuine relationships with others, morality becomes a challenge. Although they may have a strong sense of other people's opinions and even be supersensitive about the effect of other people's attitudes and actions upon themselves, they are not "other-regarding and moral in the sense of being able to take properly defined and limited responsibility for their own actions and then being able to execute them," writes Pattison, who sees them as being in a pre-social and pre-moral state.[549] We underscore that he says this about people who suffer from pathological shame – and not those who may occasionally experience shame in relations or because of what they do.[550] We nevertheless find that his generic statements about this condition seem to render those who suffer from pathological shame with fewer resources for morality. However, such statements consider neither specific individuals nor the fact that specific contexts may add to the burden on those who are fighting for their decency in a situation of pathological shame. A survivor

548 He is not alone in this – the incapacitation of the self by shame when it comes to social interaction is pointed to throughout much of the literature.

549 Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology*, 123f. Cf. Brené Brown's observation in *I Thought It Was Just Me: Women Reclaiming Power and Courage in a Culture of Shame* (New York: Gotham Books, 2007), about how shame is highly correlated with addiction, depression, violence, aggression, bullying, suicide, and eating-disorders, whereas guilt is inversely correlated with these.

550 Nevertheless, shame's complexity with regard to its impact on morality in general should not be ignored. Research suggests that people who score high on shame-proneness will be more likely to engage in unethical behaviors. Furthermore, also people with low self-control have difficulty foreseeing the longer term consequences of their actions, which when combined with high shame-proneness, may make unethical actions more likely. See Steven Murphy and Sandra Kiffin-Petersen, "The Exposed Self: A Multilevel Model of Shame and Ethical Behavior," *Journal of Business Ethics* 141, no. 4 (2017), 664.

of child sexual abuse may struggle with such shame. Regaining or holding onto their other-oriented morality by pursuing moral goals may provide a much-needed confirmation that not all is broken. So, even though there is a self-affirming element to this, it does not exclude the true moral value of both deliberation and action. This self-affirming element does not have to differ, at least not in principle, from the self-affirming element present in any moral other-oriented deliberation and action.

Based on his critical assessment of pathological shame-carriers' capacity for moral responsibility, Pattison concludes that shame is not a particularly useful tool for morality. From his point of view, shame produces humans who are under the risk of being unable to act entirely as moral agents.[551] To the extent that shame is used as a mechanism for discipline, its moral potential appears in a new light. Instead of being a useful tool for enforcing moral capacities, shame impedes these capacities, although it may look at first sight to be an effective and useful tool for discipline and control. Using shame for such purposes may, therefore, be counterproductive: it contributes to the dissolution of the moral self that it is intended to edify. This point is overlooked by both Deonna et al. and Manion in their attempts to rehabilitate shame's contribution to morality. Nevertheless, we should not forget that sometimes it may mediate the need for transformation, or for regaining dignity and thereby indirectly serve moral purposes.

Pattison identifies the problematic aspects of the moral uses of shame in how it makes people feel bad about who and what they are. Identity as a sinner or as morally pernicious is "a global judgment about the whole self as fundamentally bad, defective and worthy of rejection." When, for example, religious moral teaching addresses shamed people who think like that about themselves, this teaching may achieve the opposite of what it is aiming at because it "maintains sinners rather than enhancing personal and social responsibility."[552]

The recognition of the humanity of people and their moral standing are closely linked to concepts about humanity. In Pattison's view, shame

551 Cf. Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology*, 126.

552 Ibid., 266. Cf. our thoughts below about the necessity of paying attention to the distinction between the pre-subjective self and the active subject.

implies a potential impediment to the moral self since shame may imply a dehumanization of the self and defines the self in categories that do not involve oneself as a person, but define one in terms of abstract and pejorative characteristics. This concurs with what we saw previously in Cahill's analysis of derivatization, and we will return to other aspects of the same feature below when we look at Thomason's understanding of shame. A society that shames groups or individuals thus does not recognize them as equals. Shaming may imply rejection and contribute to projecting images of others as enemies to be feared. Furthermore, those who are shamed may be "confined to a realm of wordless invisibility." In this way, shame marks the bounds of the human community.[553] This delineation represents in an almost violent manner the clash between contexts of agency, where the shameful is left as an outsider.

Our initial reference to the "shameless Arabian daughters" is one prominent example of what is at stake here: when people act in ways not recognized as acceptable, they may be subjected to shaming that defines them as unclean. If I do this or that, I am unclean. If I have these thoughts or feelings, *my* feelings and thoughts are unclean. Hence, the employment of such notions in relation to shame makes it more challenging to differentiate acts from the self. Processes of differentiation/separation are blocked because the shaming notions are employed by those who have the power to define them.[554]

The immense issues to which this may lead can be discerned by looking at sexual emotions, which are deep and complicated elements of the human self. If such emotions are identified as unclean, part of the self may be perceived as unclean, and the problems related to this uncleanness may seem insurmountable.[555] Furthermore, shame is often used to deliberately exploit the close relationship between identity and sexuality to control the sexuality of others. Since sexuality and sexual emotions, as pre-subjective, cannot be assessed as things that are only related to one's own subjective choices, or considered as objects of one's attitudes toward these emotions, the ability to separate oneself from them, or disown them

553 Ibid., 183.
554 Pattison *Shame,* 182f.
555 Cf. the discussion of Eleanor Stump above, pp. 247ff.

is limited.[556] Accordingly, speaking of desire or thoughts or imaginings as clean or unclean may contribute to the enhancement of (the pathology of) shame, since it directly targets the source of agency in desire.[557]

Violence as a response to shame compromises a moral definition of shame

Violence is among the problematic moral topics that humans face. It also presents us with some specific problems related to morality. Violence contributes to making problematic some of the prevalent definitions of shame, including those presented in this chapter as advocated by Deonna et al. and Manion (above) and Kekes (below). To discuss this problem further, we will take our point of departure in Krista Thomason's critique of the definition of shame as the reaction when we fail to live up to standards, norms, or ideals, which we can call the standard moral definition of shame. Her critique aims to demonstrate that this definition is flawed. The reason for this claim is the empirical observation that agents often respond to shame with violence and aggression. However, to act violently is not an obvious or intelligent response to the painful feeling of failing to live up to an ideal. In other words, the standard moral definition of shame cannot explain why such reactions take place. Thomason, therefore, implicitly argues that we need a definition of shame that is not based exclusively on moral concepts but which nevertheless can allow us to address the morally problematic feature of violence as a reaction to moral failure. Her main claim is that "shame arises out of a tension between our identity and our self-conception: those things about which we feel shame are part of our identities, but they are not part of our self-conception."[558]

---

556 Cf. Manion on moral shame as based on the capacity for agency, and Deigh's differentiation between authorship and ownership.

557 If we link these points to the topic of the former chapter on religion, this is probably also why many homosexuals perceive strict religious positions on their sexuality to contain a double message: on the one hand, they may be told that they are valuable as they are created in the image of God or fully equal with the rest of society whereas, on the other hand, when it comes to their sexual identity they are unclean and unworthy, and should be different. As we are speaking about layers of the self that are predominantly pre-subjective, this may cause a great deal of confusion, frustration, and anger.

558 Thomason, "Shame, Violence, and Morality," 1.

Let us consider her position in more detail because it also presents us with opportunities for understanding more profoundly what we have spoken of as a clash between contexts of agency.[559]

A philosophical account of moral emotions, among which shame is usually included, faces two challenges. The first challenge is to explain how the emotion has moral value and what role it plays in moral life. We have done some work previously in this chapter to clarify to what extent that is the case with shame. The other challenge is to provide a good conceptual analysis of shame that can account for the way we actually experience it.[560] This second challenge is not only philosophical, but empirical: a definition must make sense of the empirical data we have on shame. This last point is where the moral definition of shame fails, according to Thomason. She articulates the empirical falsification of the moral definition of shame as follows:

> If shame is the painful feeling of not living up to one's values, it does not make sense that agents would respond to that feeling by doing something morally bad. What is more, doing something violent alleviates feelings of shame. If the traditional view is right, this experience is impossible: doing something morally wrong should make agents feel more shame rather than less.[561]

Thomason refers to several literary examples in which people respond to shame by doing something violent to themselves or others. Now, since the moral definition sees shame as a painful response to the failure to embody the values we care about, the standard moral definition is challenged by such examples. According to it, shame should cause us to act with restraint. We have also seen above how Manion argues for shame as instigating self-improvement: the moral definition implies the expectation

559 Another version of this section has previously been published as Jan-Olav Henriksen, "Violence, shame, and moral agency – An exploration of Krista K. Thomason's position" in *De Ethica,* 2020.

560 Thomason, "Shame, Violence, and Morality." 2.

561 Ibid., 2. A precondition for this analysis should be noted: this analysis fits insofar as shame stands alone. However, shame, guilt, aggression, and striving for dignity may all be part of the emotional turmoil of chronic shame. Thus, studying shame as an empirical phenomenon also needs to take into consideration the fact that cause and effect, reasons and actions, are complex. This complexity adds to the turmoil and is hard to make sense of. It is a complex relational social system where we can observe correlations without being able to separate one or the other empirically to test them against clear-cut definitions.

that one attempts to overcome shame by living up to one's ideals and values in the future. However, in the cases that Thomason describes, shame inspires the opposite of self-improvement. The standard moral definition of shame cannot explain this fact. Moreover, it also fails to address the fact that immoral acts can make those who experience shame feel better. In other words: immorality sometimes alleviates shame.[562]

Thomason presents several possible strategies that one can adopt to explain instances of alleviating shame by acts of immorality without having to give up the moral definition. First, one can claim that shame is sometimes irrational, and accordingly, in exceptional cases, irrationality serves as an explanation. Second, one can also argue that in some cases, shame is not adequately focused. It is properly focused when "(1) we hold ourselves responsible for our failure and (2) when the norm to which we respond is a legitimate one."[563] Third, irrational shame, defined as shame that leads to incomprehensible acts, can also be explained by Gabriele Taylor's notion of "false shame," which occurs when we have standards or norms imposed upon us for a brief period, and these are contrary to genuine shame, which is the moral kind that occurs when we fail to live up to our ideals.[564] Finally, one can classify cases of reactive and immoral shame as those performed by shame-prone individuals with a maladaptive self-image, because "shame-prone individuals are more apt to respond with aggression than those who are not, but this is an issue with shame-proneness and not with shame."[565]

Thomason nevertheless finds no reason for comprehending violent responses to feelings of shame as irrational.[566] That some shame-prone individuals respond to shame with aggression does not mean that anyone

562 Ibid., 6. Cf. how the elements we described above on the transportation and transformation of shame (e.g. by blaming others, scapegoating, etc.) contribute to such immorality.

563 Ibid., 7.

564 Ibid., 7. The reference she uses here is to G. Taylor, "Shame, integrity, and self-respect." In *Dignity, Character, and Self-Respect*, edited by Robin S. Dillon (New York: Routledge, 1995).

565 Thomason, ibid., 7.

566 Cf. ibid., 7–8. She also points to how these approaches can in fact contribute further to shame, and to people feeling shame about feeling shame: These explanatory approaches "encourage us to find fault with ashamed people. Because the traditional way of understanding shame is about failing to live up to values, we are forced to claim that agents who experience shame about their faces have misguided values and false beliefs. A different account of shame could explain them in a way that does not require attributing mistaken values to agents who feel this way." Ibid., 12.

who responds to shame with aggression is shame-prone. No empirical data suggests this to be the case, she claims.[567] Thus, she rejects all the attempts to explain the link between shame and violent response within the frames of the moral definition. Accounts of shame based on this definition cannot explain why agents are tempted to respond to shame by doing something wrong.[568] Her alternative account for the relationship between shame and violence widens the scope beyond shame caused by failure to achieve ideals and values. In our context, it is notable since it points to the broader conditions for agency, and to how shame may be a response to its interruption.

According to Thomason, shame arises when we feel that some aspect of our identities defines us.[569] She does not address in detail what causes this feeling, but according to the examples she offers, it is likely to think that they are the result of interpersonal exchange, and not only an intra-personal experience. It is the globalization of one aspect of us that comes to dominate our inner realm of experience. To make this definition work, she has to make a distinction between identity and self-conception: "those things about which we feel shame are part of our identities, but they are not part of our self-conception." Thus, she contributes to nuancing the role of shame in what we have called the architecture of the self. The following example is an illustration:

> An agent feels shame when some aspect of her identity becomes prominent or revealed in the shameful moment and that she feels that this thing defines her as a whole. That is, in episodes of shame she feels defined by, reduced to, or totalized by some feature of herself. I take this defining feature of shame to be necessary rather than sufficient. In other words, someone may find herself in these circumstances and feel something other than shame. My contention is that when an agent reports feeling shame, this feature will be present in the experience. Similarly, if an agent does not yet feel shame, but fears it, it is because she fears that some aspect of herself will define her.[570]

567 Ibid., 8.
568 Ibid., 10.
569 Ibid., 2.
570 Ibid., 11.

Accordingly, shame is the experience of feeling defined, reduced to, or totalized by some feature of ourselves.[571] As mentioned, this view corresponds to Cahill's understanding of derivatization.[572] Thus, experiences of shame involve a tension between our identity and our self-conception. A self-conception is our "self-image," that is, "how we represent to ourselves the person we take ourselves to be." On the other hand, "our identities extend beyond what we represent to ourselves. An agent's identity is who she is in a broader sense and can include things that fall outside of her self-conception."[573]

In this analysis, two elements are worth highlighting. First, the distinction between identity and self-conception sheds light on how shame results from what happens when two different contexts of agency clash, that is, when they do not complement each other but are in conflict. This conflict causes what we have called a disturbance of interruption of agency. Second, Thomason sheds light on Deigh's distinction between authorship and ownership, because shame makes it impossible to disown the feature in question: Shame as "the result of our inability to disavow that aspect of ourselves by which we feel defined explains why shame makes us feel so powerless. The thing that causes me shame both overshadows me and yet is me."[574] The combination of these two aspects helps us to understand the complexity of shame. But she also provides us with additional insights into these complexities:

The metaphor "overshadow" that Thomason uses can also be linked to our previously established notion of interruption, because Thomason uses it in the characterization of shame as experiencing one's lack of agential control over the feature that causes shame. "Shame arises in response to those aspects of ourselves over which we have very limited

571 Ibid., 12.

572 Cf. above, pp. 188ff.

573 Thomason, "Shame, Violence, and Morality." 12. Here, Thomason seems to build on G. Taylor when she speaks of the agent experiencing shame as "becoming aware of the discrepancy between her own assumption about her state or action and a possible detached observer-description of this state or action, and of her further being aware that she ought not to be in a position where she could be so seen, where such a description at least appears to fit." See Taylor, *Pride, Shame and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment*, 66.

574 Thomason, "Shame, Violence, and Morality," 13.

control."[575] It can be features related to our bodies, our intelligence, our grace (or lack thereof), our families, and our socioeconomic status, all of which are things over which we have little influence: "The shame that we feel about these aspects of our identities does not stem from the fact that we falsely believe we are responsible for them and thus failing to live up to ideals. It stems from the fact that they compete with our self-conception in comprising who we are."[576]

Another important element in Thomason's understanding of shame is that it also provides the means for understanding how it correlates to issues like race and gender, which in a similar way are beyond one's ability to control.[577] Such shame is not due to the feeling of failure because of sex or skin color but caused by how others have identified these traits in ways that overshadow what else they may feel about themselves. "Women and people of color are often thought of as a group rather than as individuals and others attribute thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to them in light of their sex or their skin color. Feeling as though one's identity can be 'read off' of one's skin color or sex understandably makes one feel totalized by one's skin color or sex."[578] Hence, this phenomenology of shame can account for feelings of being made small. "The feeling of smallness is the feeling of our self-conception being dwarfed by the aspect of our identities that inspires our shame."[579] When that which causes shame thus overshadows us, or, as we would say, interrupts us and our self-conception, it impacts how we can articulate ourselves in agency.

Thomason argues that her understanding makes it unnecessary to divide shame into kinds: all shame results from the lack of coherence between self-conception and identity.[580] Thus, she can explain cases of moral shame without reference to a failure to live up to ideals. Shame emerges because someone, despite how she represented her moral character

575 Ibid., 14
576 Ibid.
577 Cf. ibid., 14f. This also goes for features of embodiment, as we have pointed to previously.
578 Ibid., 15.
579 Ibid.
580 Cf. ibid., 16. Or, as we would state it, all shame is the result of clashes between different perceived or experienced contexts of agency and their conditions.

to herself, clearly was capable of doing something she thought she would never do. Shame thus interrupts or disturbs one's self-conception.[581]

How can this account of shame explain the relationship between shame and violence better than the moral definition can?[582] Thomason argues that "we respond to shame with violence because it allows us to once again feel defined by our self-conception rather than those aspects of ourselves that fall outside of it." Violent acts should be seen as a protest reaction that tries to manifest that I am more than my face, my arms, my failure. It is, in her view, not the destructive element in the violent act that is its main aim, but the attempt to regain control. "Violence is the attempt to regain control, which shame itself has caused one to feel that is lost."[583] She elaborates:

> Our bodies, our sexuality, and our socioeconomic statuses are all rich targets for shame that are a part of our identity even though we do not choose them. Shame makes us feel that we are not in control of who we are: parts of my identity define me independently of how I want to define myself. One of the ways of alleviating shame is to do something that regains a sense of control. We try to hide, cover ourselves, or get away from the situation, and these actions can help us regain feelings of control because we remove from sight the thing we experience as shameful. Violence, anger, and aggression can accomplish the same goal. At first this looks puzzling because it seems that we might be equally reduced to or totalized by our acts of violence or aggression as much as our faces or bodies.[584]

Although she sees the violence in question primarily as an act of self-assertion, it is reasonable to ask why one cannot regain control and assert oneself in other and less destructive ways. Thomason seems to downplay the severe content of acts of shame-induced violence.[585]At least, one

581 Ibid., 16.

582 For the sake of the argument, we follow Thomason's line of reasoning here, in which violence is a liberating action. But also the opposite, striving for dignity, may be a liberating action as a response to shame. What contextual factors or parts of our architecture that play together with a search for dignity or violence are nevertheless not clear. For example, the shameless Arabian daughters reacted to objectivization by striving for dignity and not by acting violently.

583 Cf. Thomason, "Shame, Violence, and Morality," 17.

584 Ibid., 17.

585 Cf. Breivik, see below.

would think that violence was performed against the one who made one feel ashamed. But that is not always the case.

Against this backdrop, shame that results in violence becomes possible to understand as rational to the extent that it restores a sense of agency:

> My sense of myself as an agent is closely connected to my self-conception. That is, one of the primary ways I think of myself is as an agent: one who chooses, acts, and makes decisions. Since my sense of my own agency is a large part of my self-conception, when I am seen as an agent, I feel as though my self-conception (not the parts of my identity that fall outside of it) is determining who I am.[586]

Thus, shame's violence is also a protest against becoming "reduced to some feature of our identity that we experience as fixed." The act of violence constitutes the one who performs it as something else and more than what he is in his shame. That is the rationale for performing the act. The response from others – even a negative one, implies that the person to whom they are responding is more than the possessor of some shameful feature.[587] Moreover,

> becoming the object of resentment by doing something violent helps us to regain the feeling of control we lose in shame because we once again feel that our self-conception determines who we are. Others surely respond negatively to me as the violent agent, but they are no longer seeing me as an object of amusement or fascination. What we seek in shame is not approval, but recognition […]: Violence gains us that recognition because in asserting our agency, we assert our self-conception.[588]

There are several elements to point to and discuss in Thomason's alternative understanding of shame. First of all, we need to ask, why does violence stand forth as the most obvious reasonable way of assuring one's agency? Violence is not only destructive, but it is also almost guaranteed to diminish the status of the agent in the eyes of others, and thereby, it may cause even more shame. One could easily think of other less destructive ways of responding to shame: protest, laughing, or simply by doing

586 Thomason, "Shame, Violence, and Morality," 18.
587 Ibid., 18.
588 Ibid., 19.

something that shows that you do not accept being defined exclusively by this or that trait – as in running for public office if you are a woman or black. Furthermore, since not everyone responds to shame by acting violently, the variation in responses may also suggest that some do not consider it a good solution at all. Hence, one should distinguish between what makes acts of violence possible to understand, and what makes them the most reasonable choice, that is, founded in good reasons or warrants. We do not find this distinction in Thomason.

A related, second comment follows. According to Thomason, it is possible to see a moral interest in the struggle for recognition that the violent act implies. But the negative recognition that is provoked by a violent act (which is usually morally condemned) is most likely going to end up in a new rejection and more shame, due to how the violent act defines the agent. The most obvious example of this is the Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik, whose acts can be understood as the result of narcissistic shame and rage. After his deeds, however, hardly anyone can relate to him without thinking of the shameful acts he performed. The extensive discussion about his sanity and to what extent he could be considered responsible for his actions (cf. the discussion of authorship vs. ownership previously) suggests that it is not logical to consider violence a rational response to shame – simply because it can engender more shame. Nevertheless, this criticism does not exclude the possibility that shame can catalyze different strategies that articulate struggles for recognition.[589]

Thirdly, in the description referred to of self-asserting violence, Thomason seems to emphasize the response of others to these acts as crucial for the experience of overcoming the shame-defining features in the agent. This explanation may be relevant to some instances of violence, but does it also explain self-inflicted violence, like suicide? Is it not more likely to see violence as one painful act performed to numb an experience of another pain, without ascribing too much rationality to it?

Thomason's conception of shame does not lead her to argue for the elimination of shame altogether, though. She sees shamelessness (which

589 Cf. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

for her is the alternative) as something that “reveals an agent’s failure to recognize the limitations of her own self-conception.”[590] She also sees shame as valuable because it can open us up to the perspectives of others – “it means that we do not take our own points of view as the only important ones.” Shame allows us to overcome the limitations of our self-conceptions, by disturbing them: “The more authoritative I think my self-conception is, the more prone I am to overlook things that do not fit with it.”[591] She continues:

> A liability to shame prevents us from taking the way we see ourselves to be the primary authority in our self-estimation. Feelings of shame arise when we feel defined by some aspect of our identity that is not part of how we see ourselves. Even though that part of our identity is not part of our self-conception, we feel shame because we still acknowledge it as ours.[592]

We can rephrase Thomason’s intention here more negatively: we need shame when we become too conceited. Our all-too-prevalent tendency to evaluate ourselves positively is the reason why we need shame to prevent self-inflation, “not because it is morally good to judge ourselves lowly or poorly, but because a liability to it requires that we recognize that we are not always the people we take ourselves to be.”[593] Accordingly, she takes issue with conceptions of shame that see it as an emotion of self-protection, although she does so without offering any discussion of the positions that argue thus. In other words, shame can contribute to moral progress. This topic is discussed further by John Kekes.

John Kekes: Shame and moral progress

John Kekes’ article “Shame and moral progress”[594] takes as its point of departure the ambiguous evaluation of shame in the scholarly literature: at the one extreme, shame is always justified, but at the other, shame is

590 Thomason, “Shame, Violence, and Morality,” 20.
591 Ibid., 21.
592 Ibid., 21.
593 Ibid., 21–22. One could, of course, ask if these aims are not better reached by means of other and more transparent strategies that allow for deliberation and weighing of shortcomings.
594 John Kekes, “Shame and Moral Progress,” *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (1988), 282f.

seen as inflicting a wound in the self. He places great emphasis on shame's contribution to moral agency, and it is therefore of vital interest for us to discuss his contribution critically. His argument that "whatever value there is in shame can be achieved in less self-destructive ways" than those manifested in shame experiences is what interests us the most.[595]

Kekes discusses how we should assess shame in relation to possible moral progress. From a moral point of view, shame is caused by the realization that we have fallen short of some standard we regard as important. Hence, he argues for a moral understanding of shame, which is what Thomason wants to move beyond. However, against the backdrop of the previous section, this understanding of shame in the moral realm can be integrated within the broader understanding of shame as the tension between self-conception and identity for which Thomason argues. In both cases, we may become aware that there is a dissonance between our standards and what we are.

According to Kekes, "those who are incapable of this emotion cannot be seriously committed to any standard, so they are apt to lack moral restraint."[596] This strong and generic claim requires empirical underpinning, which he does not offer. It can also be questioned from a moral point of view since it sounds somewhat arrogant or stigmatizing. One can, for example, easily think of someone with a strong sense of justice and moral insight into why something is right, who nevertheless feels guilt and not shame when he is found to lack in some act the standards to which he is committed. Although one can say with Kekes that, "Shame is a sign that we have made a serious commitment," shame is not the only sign of such commitment. It is also not necessarily the only condition under which it may appear (think of gendered shame, impairment shame, class shame, race shame, etc.). Furthermore, when he sees shame as an impetus for honoring our commitments, he argues that this is so based on a motivation that belongs to other levels of morality than the one we find in post-conventional morality: shame motivates honoring the commitment, "since violating the commitment painfully lowers our

595 Ibid., 282.
596 Ibid.

opinion of ourselves."[597] This fact in itself can cause one to have some doubts about shame's positive contributions, in ways similar to those we have addressed in previous sections.

Thus, shame implies a self-denigrating aspect. It "does not merely alert us to our shortcomings, it makes us feel deficient on account of them."[598] Feeling shame is likely to be self-destructive because it can "undermine our confidence, verve, and courage to navigate life's treacherous waters." This makes shame problematic from the point of view of moral progress, since it diminishes the resources needed for the only agency capable of it, namely our own.[599]

Fundamental to shame is its self-directed orientation: the subject who has it and the object towards which it is directed are the same. We have previously described this as the double position that shame instigates. Human beings "are not merely the subjects and objects of it [that is, shame], we are also aware of ourselves as objects when we feel ashamed."[600] The experience of shame involves a sense of failure. However, to "recognize a failure in ourselves requires the comparison between some aspect of our present selves and the standard which a better self would have more closely approximated than we have done."[601] Again, we see shame as occurring as a result of the clash between different (normative) contexts.

This point becomes even more obvious in what Kekes writes next: For shame to have cognitive value, one has to make a comparison with a certain amount of detachment. This detachment allows for another perspective than the one we initially and immediately had. Then we can consider our characteristic or action as others would see it.[602] Thus, Kekes argues, "What is essential to shame is to detach ourselves from what we are, have, or do to the extent that we can view it as falling short of some standard,"

597 Ibid.
598 Ibid.
599 Ibid.
600 Ibid.
601 Ibid.
602 Ibid.

be it private or public.[603] Or, in other words, the potential contribution of shame lies in its capacity to help us objectify ourselves and our agency.

However, contrary to other self-insights that can be established by progress in reflection, shame's way of disrupting our previously established intentions takes place in other ways. For example, it does so by shocking and interrupting us "either because we have not engaged in self-conscious examination or because the result of the examination has been to subsume the relevant characteristic or action under a neutral or complimentary description."[604] The realization "that, in fact, we have been cowardly, or cruel, or dishonest" causes the shock as "we suddenly see some aspect of ourselves in a new and unfavorable light."[605] The cognitive contribution of shame is therefore related to the fact that:

> We see what has been there, but we see it for the first time or we see it differently from the way we used to. Shame involves interpretation, which is often reinterpretation, and what produces it is some episode, some criticism, some comparison which we encounter and whose significance forces itself on us, such as Adam and Eve discovering that they were naked.[606]

We cannot consider shame's moral aspect unless we have first developed an understanding of the cognitive aspect thus described. However, Kekes makes a central claim in his assessment of shame as a moral feeling: he argues that there is no difference between moral shame and other types of shame. The distinction between moral shame and "natural shame" or other types of shame "rests on the assumption that morality and the domain of choice coincide."[607] Kekes' argument against this distinction is therefore interesting, as it related to an understanding of shame that relates it to conditions of agency, among which choice is a crucial one. His argument goes as follows: "Since the objects of natural shame are not chosen, natural shame is placed outside of morality. However, the domain of morality is wider than the sphere of choice. Morality is concerned with

603 Ibid., 284.
604 Ibid., 285.
605 Ibid.
606 Ibid.
607 Ibid.

living good lives and there are many constituents of good lives about which we often have no choice."[608] Shame is, therefore, not only the result of choices we have made, but also due to failures and defects for which we have not made any choice, but which nevertheless mean that we are not up to our own standards of excellence.[609]

> It is essential to living a good life that we should, at the very least, not feel bad about ourselves. Our self-respect depends on the sense that we are living up to our standards. Shame may occur when we realize that we have fallen short of these standards. Thus shame is an experience of failure, but it may or may not be culpable failure.[610]

At this point it is necessary to stop and ask if this is a sufficient argument for leaving the distinction between moral and natural shame behind and if it rests on an adequate understanding of shame. Take as an example a person who feels ashamed for a natural trait for which they did not make a choice, like skin color or red hair. There is absolutely no failure involved in these features. Nevertheless, people may feel ashamed of them, just as they may feel ashamed of belonging to a group or a family that is considered by the majority of members of society as outcasts, without having done anything morally reprehensible. This example suggests that shame is caused by the interruption of the desire to belong – also when belonging is not defined by moral standards or standing. Kekes does not discuss this point.

The only way Kekes' refutation of the distinction between natural and moral shame can make sense is if it is restricted to the standards we have accepted as valid for ourselves. It would make sense of his claim that "whether we feel ashamed depends on our standards and not on whether the failure to live up to them was due to innate or acquired, voluntary or involuntary, or cultivated causes."[611] Furthermore, "Shame painfully brings home to us the brute fact that we have committed ourselves to be a certain way and we did not live up to the commitment. Since the reason

608 Ibid.
609 Ibid.
610 Ibid., 285f.
611 Ibid., 286.

behind the commitment was that being that way was a good way of being, having failed, we feel bad about the way we are."[612] He concludes this line of reasoning with the claim that "shame is a moral feeling, *because the fact in its case is that we find some aspect of our lives bad*."[613] But this final statement, italicized by us, can only make sense when the aspect of our lives that we find bad is determined as being thus by a standard that we accept. When I feel bad because someone thinks my red hair is ugly, this is not a moral feeling, even though I may feel ashamed by it. Kekes seems to be on the wrong track here when he sees shame exclusively as the result of how we evaluate our commitments.

However, despite these critical remarks, Kekes identifies an essential element in what causes shame when he links it to our commitments. He argues that from a moral point of view, shame is "proportionate to the centrality of the unfulfilled commitment to our conception of a good life." It is this connection to our agency as based on a conception of a good life and the commitment it engenders that makes the occurrence of shame significant for considering it in relation to moral progress.[614] He sums up the considerations of shame and moral progress in three interrelated claims.

The first claim is concerned with how individuals can move from experiencing one type of shame to other types. He underscores that it is first and foremost a development in terms of how individuals change their attitudes towards norms and standards: going from a superficial attitude towards a deeper one in regard to moral standards. The movement of individuals from liability to propriety-shame, to honor-shame, and to worth-shame is one kind of moral progress. In propriety-shame, we care about appearances. It appears when standards set by appearances count against us. In honor-shame we care about appearing as we are, and this shame is dependent on our failure to conform to standards of appearance definitive to our honor that we have developed. Finally, worth-shame is the result of how we care about being in a certain way. It is independent of appearances and emerges out of the failure to live up to our own

612 Ibid.
613 Ibid.
614 Ibid.

standards. Thus, "The progress is from caring about how we seem, to caring about how we are."[615]

The second remark concerning shame and moral progress is linked to development in a similar way to that identified by Kohlberg and Habermas, and builds on the previous comment: it is progress towards more self-direction. "People whose chief moral concern is with appearances are at the mercy of public opinion and depend on it for their choices and judgments; people moved primarily by honor subordinate their choices and judgments to public opinion, but they have made it their own opinion; while people whose moral standards include both public and private ones can criticize and correct their choices and judgments in both social and personal morality."[616] The advantage of this is that the development of increased self-direction thereby provides "greater scope for moral criticism, and consequently, a better chance of moral improvement."[617]

The third comment is especially relevant for us since it concerns the conditions for agency and the potential to develop some resilience concerning shame: Kekes argues that "the more we concentrate our moral resources and attention on what is in our control, the less scope we leave to chance." Furthermore, he argues that the described development is towards one in which there is increasing emphasis on the moral resources in the moral subject herself, and in her private world, since "our control over the private sphere is always greater than our control over the public

---

615 Ibid., 290.

616 Ibid.

617 Ibid., 290f. There are more favorable approaches to shame in the formation of the moral self than Kekes. Johannes van der Ven argues against Kekes' rejection of the teaching of shame and says that it is only acceptable for so-called inauthentic shame, "in which the person fears for his/her reputation in the eyes of others. This kind of shame, in my interpretation, is based on other-directed self-esteem. Moral progress, however, cannot and must not lead us away from what I call authentic shame, which is shame engendered by a failure to meet my own longing for honesty and integrity, which are based on inner-directed self-esteem. The education of shame means to advance the child's transition from the stage of inauthentic to authentic shame. The transition from inauthentic to authentic shame cannot be made by the child without educational assistance. It requires educational conversation or even educational counseling, which must include a certain mix of nondirective and directive approaches. Nondirective interventions are, for example, mirroring, supporting, cognitive understanding, and emotional understanding of the child's utterances. Directive interventions are questioning, interpreting, exposing, or advising." J. A. van der Ven, *Formation of the Moral Self* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 334. Van der Ven does not seem to consider the full ramifications of Kekes' argument.

one." Therefore, "a moral attitude which concentrates on the private is more likely to lead to a good life than others."[618] Thus, the progress here can also be estimated with regard to the improvement of the chances to live a good life.[619] Progress is correlated with "greater depth, self-direction, and control" and thus, to fundamental conditions for coherent agency. These regard the individual (depth) and moral traditions (self-direction). In the latter case, we can see a moral tradition improving when it fosters the moral progress of its members.[620]

Kekes also argues that this progress should imply moving away from all forms of shame toward other responses to moral failure. This recommendation has implications for individuals as well as moral traditions.[621] He expresses his reason for this recommendation in the following claim: shame "weakens moral agents, and it leaves a residue which adds a burden to the deficiency with which the agents already struggle."[622] Furthermore,

> Shame is a bad feeling. It is not just painful, but the pain it makes us feel is on account of our own deficiencies. It diminishes our self-respect, and it does so in important ways, because the deficiencies which occasion it are obstacles in the way of living what we regard as good lives. Thus shame is a kind of moral double jeopardy. Not only are we saddled with deficiencies, but we have shame to pillory us for them.[623]

Against those who argue that shame is painful but necessary, Kekes replies that there are more constructive reactions to violations of moral commitments: "Anger at ourselves, resolution to improve, the desire to make amends, a quest for understanding why we did what we regarded as wrong are some others."[624] All of these reactions contribute to maintaining our self-respect, a point that is important to counter the claim that one cannot have self-respect if one cannot feel shame.

618 Kekes, "Shame and Moral Progress," 291.
619 Ibid.
620 Ibid.
621 Ibid.
622 Ibid.
623 Ibid.
624 Cf. ibid., 292.

Furthermore, Kekes argues that shame cannot serve to protect against the corruption of the moral self. It cannot protect us from doing wrong in the future because if the wrong is in the future, there is nothing to be ashamed about yet. Hence, it is not shame, but the fear of shame that supplies the function that guides future action here. What Kekes ignores here, however, is how I may be ashamed of some of my inclinations, and therefore keep myself in check concerning future actions. In such cases, shame may prevent me from specific actions in the future and serve a moral function.

On the positive side, the wish to maintain self-respect may be a better candidate for supplying this function. But also pride, honor, vanity, kindness, etc. can do that. Negative modes of motivation can be fear of punishment, fear of loss of love, of respect, or of status. These may serve just as well as fear of shame, according to Kekes. With regard to past actions, shame is likewise not able to supply any protecting function, because the wrong has already been done. Shame is not the only response that can contribute to the removal of our sense of self-corruption in such cases. Recognition of failures "may produce many morally acceptable reactions of which shame, at best, is only one."[625]

Accordingly, Kekes comes fairly close to arguing that the case for shame as a contributor to the development of a moral self is not a strong one. Instead, it seems to decrease some of the competencies needed for moral progress on both the individual and the collective level:

> If moral life is to go well, there must be a robust self capable of engaging in it. It must be able to make more or less detached choices and judgments, it must be able to withstand adversity, it must have strength, confidence, and integrity. Shame undermines all this, weakens the self, and that is why moral progress consists not merely in developing from propriety-shame, through honor-shame, to worth-shame, and thereby growing in independence and self-direction, but also in developing from worth-shame to less destructive forms of moral response to the recognition of our moral failures.[626]

625 Cf. ibid., 292.
626 Ibid., 293.

Kekes claims that "This is not seen by many writers on shame", and we agree. Much of the material we have reviewed for this book overlooks these problems of shame's effect on the development of a mature moral self. Shame taps energy from the self and its projects, undermines self-confidence, and makes us less capable of developing the moral creativity we may need to instigate progress and thereby become more morally mature. Or to put it negatively, in the words of Kekes: "shame undermines self-direction, reduces the chances of moral reform, and weakens our selves. Correspondingly, a moral tradition which makes available moral possibilities other than shame is better than one which does not."[627]

Can we then find alternative means for moral progress if shame apparently is a feeling over which we have no control? Kekes argues that although we cannot have direct control over shame, we can control it indirectly. What he means is that "once we have it, we can decide to cultivate or to minimize it, to strengthen or to weaken it, to attribute greater or lesser importance to it. What makes this possible is that in addition to the emotive aspect of shame, which is beyond our direct control, shame also has a cognitive and a moral aspect, and these we can control."[628] In short, "The cognitive aspect of shame involves a self-conscious detached comparison between the deficiency responsible for our failure and the standard of which we have fallen short. The moral aspect of shame is the identification of the standard as an essential component of our conception of a good life and the acceptance of the standard for the evaluation of our own character and conduct."[629]

Accordingly, Kekes suggests that we cultivate our capacity for directing our attention in a way that enables us to minimize the influence of shame, and instead direct our attention toward our conception of a good life. This conception "is bound to have sufficient force to counteract shame, for the intensity of our shame depends on how much we mind having fallen short of the conception."[630] This proposal is not only

627 Ibid.
628 Ibid.
629 Ibid.
630 Ibid. "Thus, the stronger our shame is, the more attractive we must find the goal of which we are ashamed to have fallen short. And if the goal is not very attractive, then we could not mind all

interesting in itself, but it is also one which we can relate to Thomason's idea about violence as the immediate response to shame: the more one is able to detach oneself, and consider alternative reactions to shame, the more constructive those alternatives have the potential to become.

Cheshire Calhoun: Moral shame as the result of relational practices

The primacy of human practices

Instead of addressing shame in a moral context as something that only has to do with not conforming to moral standards, one can also see shame as deeply rooted in human practices. These practices have also, of course, moral components, as they rely on the expectations that participants in these practices have to each other. Cheshire Calhoun has provided an interesting analysis in which she provides an apology for moral shame that offers an alternative to shame as analyzed by B. Williams, J. Kekes, J.P. Tangney, and others.[631] To a large extent, her analysis provides us with a description of shame's function in a morally charged context – and it is less directed towards making a strong normative case for shame's unavoidable role in moral matters.

Calhoun points to how philosophers see shame as problematic because it is often more concerned with how one appears in the eyes of others than with what was done. Thus, it profoundly compromises the agent's autonomous judgment about what morality requires. The relevant recommendation to deal with this challenge would be for agents to develop the capacity to be more insensitive "to the shaming gaze of others and attentive only to the demands of their own practical reason."[632]

Calhoun nevertheless argues in favor of the importance of being able to feel morally ashamed. Shame over moral failings is "essential to a mature ethical agent's psychology. More controversially, I think that vulnerability

that much the failure to achieve it. So we can't always derive from shame the clue to a better, less destructive response."

631 See Cheshire Calhoun, "An Apology for Moral Shame," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 12, no. 2 (2004).

632 Ibid.

to feeling ashamed before those with whom one shares a moral practice, even when one disagrees with their moral criticisms, is often a mark of moral maturity."[633] To sustain this position, she must argue against positions like Kekes' above, and also against that of B. Williams, who argued that the only relevant shame we have to feel is when we look bad in the eyes of those whom we respect and agree with concerning values. She claims that both scholars "make shame suitable for an autonomous agent only by reducing the other before whom we feel shame to a mirror of ourselves. Both drop from view the fundamentally social nature of shame."[634] Thus, she identifies two crucial features: the perspective of the other is essential to understand shame, and, correspondingly, shame is a social phenomenon. The relational element in shame especially comes to the fore in what she calls "the primary fears attached to shame." These "are fears of being ridiculed, made the subject of gossip, subjected to demeaning treatment, and of being ostracized or abandoned."[635] Such fear can also help explain the desire to conceal one's failings from others' view. And this is what attempts to reconcile shame with autonomy, as Kekes tries to do, cannot explain. Addressing such attempts, Calhoun writes that,

> it severs the connection between shame and concern for one's standing in a social world. It does so because it mistakenly takes the object of shame to be what the agent alone believes is a moral failing. The real objects of shame, however, are failures to meet moral standards that are also held by other people. Shaming moral failures are paradigmatically ones that might, if exposed, reduce one's social standing in some actual group and might degrade the quality of one's social interactions.[636]

Thus, Calhoun identifies as central to the experience of shame the concerns about how one appears in others' eyes, as well as the fear of having socially exposed discrediting facts and the anxiety about others' contempt and about having one's social relations impaired.[637] In other words,

633 Ibid., 129.
634 Ibid.
635 Ibid., 131.
636 Ibid.
637 Ibid., 132.

shame engenders the experience that the other's perspective towards me is not coherent with that which determines my agency, and this lack of coherence makes me aware of the clash of perspectives that may imply discrediting, negative exposure and contempt.

The position that accepts that one should feel shame in the eyes of respected others (Bernhard Williams) also acknowledges that there is a social dimension in shame.[638] It nevertheless does not solve the main problem, since Williams, like Kekes, "traces the power to shame to the shamer's mirroring to a large extent the agent's own evaluative perspective."[639] However, this position does not make it understandable "why moral criticisms with which one disagrees would have any power to shame at all." Accordingly, it is "hard to see why particular moral criticisms shame an agent who does not endorse them."[640] The attempt to reconcile shame with autonomy in this way cannot capture shame's distinctively social character, Calhoun holds.[641]

A final problem with these suggestions is that they must render some specific experiences of shame as irrational. Otherwise, we cannot explain the fact that people feel moral shame when their behavior is exposed publicly is problematic, even when they do not see it as problematic themselves.[642] The views Calhoun criticizes cannot explain why someone suffers from shame in cases when he is otherwise considered "a mature, well-formed ethical agent" who would presumably "only feel shamed by moral criticisms that mirror his own, or that at least invoke ethical standards he respects. More worrisome, we must discount as irrational or immature much of the shame suffered by socially disesteemed populations – racial minorities, women, the poor, lesbians and gay men."[643] Pervasive shame often coexists with a denial that there is

638 Cf. how this differs from Deonna et al.'s understanding of shame, above.
639 Calhoun, "An Apology for Moral Shame," 135.
640 Ibid.
641 Ibid.
642 Many of the men who have been exposed in the #Metoo campaign probably did not see any problems in their own behavior prior to being exposed in the media. But as a consequence of being outed, shame was the result.
643 Calhoun, "An Apology for Moral Shame," 135.

anything to be ashamed of. Such cases remain unexplained in the views that Calhoun criticizes.

In sum, we have instances in which we feel shame without good reason, and instances in which we feel shame when we differ from the values of those who make us feel ashamed. The question is how we can make a morally relevant case for shame that can explain these experiences and give us a better grasp of what is at stake. Calhoun suggests that we approach this problem from a wider perspective and see shame as an expression of the fact that we have the capacity to take fellow participants in the social world seriously.[644] Moreover, she argues that taking other participants seriously is not the same as giving in to others' views, which would be the main argument for arguing against moral shame to protect moral autonomy. Her suggestion fits well with how we see shame as the result of the interaction between different evaluative contexts of agency, and helps us to specify our position further.

Shame as an element in social practices

Calhoun uses the metaphor "weight" when she analyzes shame in the broader social context. She says that it is a question about allowing the judgments of others to have some weight. However, she rejects the assumption that "weight" is an epistemic notion: that would mean that they can be weighed in our reasoning process if we have accepted their truth. Moral agents are nevertheless not just knowers, but participants in various social practices of morality. This fact enables Calhoun to suggest that "the 'weight' central to shame is not an epistemic notion." Instead, the "weight" of others' opinions is related to their relationship with us as fellow participants in social practices. If we approach shame from this angle, it becomes understandable why another's view of us can have practical weight, even when we deny the truth of their view.[645] She sums it up thus:

> Moral criticism that shames has what I will call "practical weight." Moral criticism has practical weight when we see it as issuing from those who are to be

644 Ibid., 138.
645 Ibid., 139.

> taken seriously because they are co-participants with us in some shared social practice of morality.[646]

In other words, Calhoun's understanding of shame situates shame within a broader context of social practices. These emerge because people want to do something together. Such practices are not only those which we identify as professionals, although these are also included. Many of them are also related to what takes place in institutional contexts, although Calhoun does not address the institutional dimension in her description of these:

> A social practice of morality comes about because there is something else that we want to do together – work in a profession, engage in religious worship, play sports, live together in a neighborhood, have a marriage. These various activities are sites of particular moral problems that produce the need to generate shared moral norms. The practice of education, for example, produces a need for norms governing student–teacher relations, including sexual relations. The practice of medicine generates a need for norms governing the response to terminal illness. Those moral norms then get hammered out among people who already share a social world.[647]

Everyday life consists of a plurality of moral practices, each with its shared understandings about how "we" do things. The contexts of these practices, accordingly, allow co-participants "to engage in a shared enterprise of evaluating each other's behavior and character, determining who has lived up to and who has fallen short of shared moral ideals, and calling each other to moral account for transgressions."[648] At this point, the notion of expectations becomes essential, since shaming within the context of such practices means "impressing upon the person that she has disappointed not just one individual's expectations but what some "we" expected of her."[649] Moreover, "The power to shame is a function of our

---

646 Ibid., 139.
647 Ibid., 140.
648 Ibid.
649 Ibid.

sharing a moral practice" and is articulated as a representative viewpoint within the practice. It is why shaming criticisms have practical weight.[650]

The expectations towards participants in social and moral practices are, therefore, the backdrop against which one can see shame. However, there is one more element in Calhoun's analysis here that is important, namely that the moral criticisms that lead to shame must have a representative character. Thus, it is understandable why one can feel shame in light of some appraisals and not in light of others: if the critique is not representative of the standards of the moral practice, then it does not lead to shame in the same way as when it is. Thus "vulnerability to shame has more to do with our sharing a moral practice with others than it does with accepting another's criticism."[651]

> To share a social practice means that one finds its moral understandings intelligible, even if not endorsable. One understands how people could come to think this way about moral matters. One understands what counts for others as acting responsibly, being truthful, being honorable, giving good moral advice, and so on.[652]

Such emphasis on how evaluation is representative means that Calhoun can shift the focus from how the shamed person endorses the shamer's perspective to the representativeness of the shamer's viewpoint. "What inspires shame is recognition of who we are for those with whom we share a moral practice."[653] It is the representative viewpoint that constitutes the power to shame. This interpretation can also explain why one may feel shame even when one has nothing to be ashamed of. The unfortunate consequence is that "the power to shame is likely to be concentrated in the hands of those whose interpretations are socially authoritative."[654] This point may not only be valid for moral shame in the strict sense, but may also apply to, for example, shaming practices in other social settings, such as sports clubs or religious groups.

---

650 Cf. ibid., 141.
651 Cf. ibid., 141–142.
652 Ibid., 143.
653 Ibid.
654 Ibid.

The emphasis on representativeness constitutes a problem because the power to shame may be unequally distributed, and therefore be to the disadvantage of minority groups. How can Calhoun then develop an argument in favor of moral shame? Given that "the burden of shame seems unfairly distributed in inegalitarian societies, serving only to further burden those who are already unfairly burdened […], what apology could be made for moral shame"?[655]

The moral relevance of shame in the context of practice

Calhoun defends moral shame by pointing to its social function. She describes morality in a way that nevertheless could (almost) be done by a cognitive ethicist like Habermas: "Morality is, in part, a critical, normative enterprise conducted by individuals who use their own best judgment to arrive at moral standards and practical conclusions, who seek the rationally best justifications for their judgments, and who critically assess the standards and practical conclusions of both particular others and of social practices of morality."[656] We have italicized 'individuals' in the quotation here not only to suggest where Habermas and others may disagree but also to point out how Calhoun sees shame as the element that opens up to the social dimension of morality: she admits that shame does not serve the normative and critical dimension of the moral enterprise. Nevertheless, "moral criticisms that we judge to be rationally indefensible may provoke shame." But this does not mean that shame seconds "the critical normative judgments that we reach as autonomous, reflective individuals."[657] It serves another function than the reflective, normative one. Shame's contribution to morality is related to its role as a fundamentally social enterprise. It serves as a means to regulate interactions between social actors. Calhoun elaborates this point:

> Morality regulates interactions between real social actors. Even if particular social practices of morality seem flawed from the individual's critical, normative perspective, the social practice of morality is the only moral game in town. It is

655 Ibid., 144.
656 Ibid.
657 Ibid.

> only in real social worlds that I have a moral identity. Who I am, morally, is who I am interpretable and identifiable by others as being. That I fancy myself (even with what I take to be the best reasons) to be one kind of person rather than another does not give me an identity as that kind of person. Instead, the set of one's possible moral identities is delimited by the available moral interpretations within an ongoing moral practice.[658]

The way Calhoun situates the moral self in the context of practices is crucial to her explanation of why we can be vulnerable to being shamed before others with whom we disagree. Participation in moral practices provides us with inescapable moral identities "because one's own self-conception does not decisively determine who one is."[659] Thereby, she tacitly utilizes a distinction between identity and self-conception, similar to Thomason. Moreover, "the identities that we have within particular moral practices are inescapable because we typically do not choose moral practices." Instead, we choose social practices, and as a consequence, "we then find ourselves located for better or worse in particular ongoing moral practices." Accordingly, she sees shame not as "the emotion of a critical, normatively reflective, autonomous agent. Shame is the emotion of the practitioner of morality."[660]

Is Calhoun's argument for shame really an argument for moral shame? We think it is. To situate shame in the context of practices makes sense. She is nevertheless clear that shame can be abused for disciplining and for oppression, and that it does not convey any guidance that is automatically possible to justify as moral content in itself. Shame can make us aware that there are certain standards that we do not live up to, which we should have. But it is not clear that shame is an obvious, or even a good, tool for moral formation of regulation of interpersonal relationships and the content of social practices. Thus, the main contribution of Calhoun lies in how she points out limitations in the positions that try to combine a certain sense of shame with moral autonomy, and how shame may make us more open to the judgments of others who are more experienced moral

658 Ibid., 145.
659 Ibid.
660 Ibid.

practitioners than we are ourselves. So far, we can thus conclude that she offers a clear, albeit not very strong, defense against the promotion of shamelessness. We now turn, therefore, to another philosopher who has analyzed reasons for being shameless or not.

Michelle Mason: Are there good reasons for not being shameless?

Shame as a behavioral regulator

Calhoun's description of how shame works in social practices is not a strong argument in favor of shame. It is more explanatory than apologetic. However, as has become increasingly more apparent throughout this chapter, we are developing a relatively critical assessment of shame's moral contribution. This assessment can be seen as a normatively aimed argument for shamelessness. Against that backdrop, perhaps the strongest objection to the trajectory of the argument in this chapter so far is the claim that shamelessness is a moral fault. Intuitively, though, to make the generic claim that this is the case seems to be a somewhat hasty conclusion. Therefore, we have to consider in more detail under what conditions we should regard shamelessness favorably, and when we may assess it critically.

If we look back at the positions we have identified as important concerning the problematic features of moral shame, we can, with Michelle Mason, identify them either as positions in which shame has no moral content or as positions in which shame is considered as expressing a primitive mode of morality.[661] We can also, alternatively and in light of the analysis of Calhoun, see shame as a morally relevant emotion that may, on occasions, contribute to the regulation of behavior for participants in practices that have moral content, but without shame itself having a necessary moral function or providing moral guidance.

661 See Michelle Mason, "On Shamelessness," *Philosophical Papers* 39, no. 3 (2010). For examples, think of our initial description of the shameless Arabian daughters.

Shamelessness as a moral problem

However, it is not only shame that presents problems for morality. Mason's contribution addresses the problematic absence of shame. She argues that it is necessary to consider shamelessness as a moral challenge. Her precise scope is based on the claim that shamelessness, understood as an evasion of moral self-censure, can be morally pernicious. Against this backdrop, we need to assess its problematic moral stance.[662]

Mason argues against what she calls "the common assumption," that is, that "to call a person or action shameless often purports to mark a moral fault in that person or action."[663] There are notable exceptions to this common assumption about shamelessness. Aristotle, for example, points to the fact that we consider the morally virtuous person shameless – simply because she does not have anything of which to be ashamed. This seems to be a case of actual shamelessness, and not a case in which the agent does not have any capacity for shame, or evades moral self-assessment.[664] Other positive cases of shamelessness are when someone distances themselves from others' wrongful attempts to shame them. In such cases, the absence of shame manifests autonomy or independence from the pressure to internalize another's evaluation, even when someone else would be likely to feel ashamed for the same act.[665] In these cases, lack of shame does not necessarily signalize a moral lack, and they run contrary to the common assumption. All these are cases that Mason calls "autonomous shame." This autonomy impedes shame and results in shamelessness. It can be considered as positive because one is then not subject (or, as she says, "a slave") to another's evaluation and the shaming effect of it. However, she also sees this autonomy as a condition in which one is precluded from another type of "slavishness": the one that is "constituted by the evasion of any evaluative ideal of the person or by the total subjugation of one's evaluative scheme to another person or unworthy end."[666] It is this evasion, or

662 Ibid., 403.
663 Ibid.
664 Ibid., 404.
665 Ibid., 405.
666 Ibid., 408.

the tendency to evade evaluations that may cause justified shame, that she sees as a potential moral problem concerning shamelessness.

This problem can be highlighted if we address it in relation to the aforementioned two positions that are skeptical towards shame as a moral device: the one that sees shame as having no essential moral content, and the one that sees it as an instance of primitive moral thinking.[667] Considered from the point of view of both positions, heteronomous shame should be abolished and shamelessness appears as a recommendable alternative to such shame. This approach entails that shamelessness is "a moral fault only in cases where shame registers something within the agent's control and morally assessable as wrong."[668] Furthermore, "The philosophical account of shamelessness this version of the Moral Primitive critique of shame suggests is one where shamelessness consists in a willing disregard of moral values others would impose on one in favor of those one has autonomously endorsed oneself. It is easy to see how, on such a view of shame, shamelessness might emerge as a virtue of authenticity or integrity rather than a vice."[669]

The critique of shame as morally primitive contains one important element: it points to how the experience of shame may involve the perspective of another and the other's evaluative expectations.[670] Sometimes it makes sense to think of this perspective of the other as one from which one should rightly distance oneself. Yet, sometimes, it does not – and then, shamelessness is not a moral virtue and a sign of the mature, autonomous agent, but his or her vice. One way to get around this is to make a distinction between shamelessness and the lack of shame, in which

667 Ibid., 410. In the first case, "shame is not a properly moral attitude at all, understanding 'moral' here to function descriptively in delineating an area of practice characterized essentially by a concern with obligation and individual responsibility." Mason describes shame's problematic standing here, interestingly, also from the point of view of *practice* (cf. Calhoun above): "On this first view, any practice lacking essential conceptual ties to notions of obligations and individual responsibility is not properly regarded as a practice of morality." Accordingly, she names it the "No Essential Moral Content critique of shame." In the latter case shame is "not a properly modern moral attitude but instead a psychological remnant that finds its conceptual home in forms of moral thinking, albeit primitive forms of moral thinking." She calls this the "Moral Primitive critique of shame."

668 Cf. ibid., 414.

669 Ibid., 415.

670 Cf. ibid., 416.

the latter means that you do not feel shame, and have no reason to, even though you have the capacity for it. What, then, makes shamelessness, as Mason defines it, more specifically a moral fault in her opinion?

As already suggested, Mason sees shamelessness as a form of moral evasion. To be shameless is to regard oneself as "beyond the reach of any ideals of character appraisal." The notion of character is essential here.[671] A shameless person sees moral appraisal from a narrow perspective: it concerns one's actions but leaves one's character untouched. "Because those moral standards to which the shameless do subscribe are narrow in this sense, behavior for which one might hold oneself accountable in a way that bears on the esteem one regards as one's due is, for the shameless, at most an occasion for guilt or regret."[672] In other words, shamelessness excludes one's character from appraisal. To have shame, though, would include an appraisal of character. Accordingly, Mason suggests the following definition of the experience of shame as morally relevant:

> To experience shame is to experience oneself (shame's object) as diminished in merited esteem (the property that renders the emotion fitting its object) on the ground that one has violated some legitimate ideal of character.[673]

Thus, Mason comes close to the earlier mentioned understanding of moral shame as defined by Rawls and others: it is the reaction to not being able to live up to one's ideals and standards. It needs to be pointed out, because the moral context then, in her view, seems to presuppose that shame is related to cognitively accessible content, and accordingly, that it needs guidance to have an adequate focus.

Shame with a proper focus

Mason lists the following conditions as necessary if shame is to have a proper focus, that is, to be morally relevant, and therefore convey some bearing on the character assessment of the person in question:

671 Cf. how we discussed this notion and its relevance to shame briefly in relation to virtue ethics above.
672 Mason, "On Shamelessness," 417.
673 Ibid., 417f.

> 1. It is directed at oneself as a response to one's violation of an ideal of the person, 2. The violation is one for which one appropriately holds oneself responsible, for example, a) one was not on the initiating occasion acting with nonculpable ignorance, compelled, or forced, b) one is not psychologically abnormal or morally undeveloped, and 3. There is a legitimate expectation or demand that one approximates the personal ideal.[674]

There are several important features in Mason's approach that are worth highlighting: First of all, this allows for considering shame as an emotion of self-assessment.[675] Against this backdrop, lack of shame is a testimony to one's indifference to ideals of character and to the evaluation of one's esteem-worthiness that such ideals support. Concomitantly, "a healthy sense of (properly focused) shame signals a susceptibility to more comprehensive moral appraisal of oneself in light of certain character ideals."[676]

Thus, Mason's contribution builds on the distinction between doing and being that we have identified as relevant in a previous chapter.[677] Actions may provoke shame: "just in case I fear or worry that what I have done […] reflects back on myself in a way that threatens to challenge the esteem that I or others reasonably can maintain for myself in the light of some ideal of character I myself endorse."[678] Shame establishes a focus on who I have revealed myself to be. Thus, she sees shame as a response to what one fails to be. Unlike guilt for specific actions, "shame is an emotion that constitutes a wide esteem evaluation of self."[679] Furthermore,

> by an esteem evaluation of self, I have in mind the features of shame as involving a deeper assessment of the merit of one's character in light of an ideal of such and as possessing an essentially reformative motivational force, one that

674 Ibid., 418.
675 Ibid., 418.
676 Ibid., 419. This definition seems to be especially relevant to the analysis of why people can commit crimes or atrocities that subject others to suffering and pain: they are able to ignore such ideals or substitute them for others. Cf. the case of the guards in the concentration camps during WWII: they had ideals about character formation that excluded compassion for the prisoners.
677 See above, p. 217.
678 Mason, "On Shamelessness," 420.
679 Ibid., 420.

looks inward toward reforming those aspects of one's character that fall short of the ideal in question.[680]

In contrast, shamelessness emerges from this view in the following way: "Shamelessness consists in a failure to value any character ideals recognizable as worthy of a well-lived human life."[681] Accordingly, such shamelessness can be seen in the manifestation of a lack of interest in being a faithful lover or a true friend – such ideals are simply considered as not relevant. Against this backdrop, in the cases here discussed, to be shameless is to lack any constraint on what one will allow oneself to be.[682] This approach does not exclude that one still has to ask if the shame one may hold is morally justified or if shamelessness shows a lack of willingness to subject one's character to moral standards. That can only be determined by considering moral reasons for certain behavior that involves character assessment.[683]

A final consequence of Mason's position is that those who lack shame because they do not consider their character ideals in light of their actions, may, in fact, lead shameful lives. The ideals that help us measure the conditions for a good life appear to be outside their horizon. When one is shameless because of this lack of ideals, one is also blind to significant moral goods, Mason argues, and goes on: "In denying shame its place in the moral domain, a shame-less moral theory likewise obscures an important form of moral failure.[684]

Thus, Mason seems to argue that shame has a precise contribution in the context of morality: it does not convey moral insight, but it helps us to be aware of flaws in our character in a way that a guilt approach cannot do. Shame makes us attentive. Her position does not, nevertheless, exclude that one should try to overcome the conditions and instances in which shame would be relevant, adequate, or necessary. Thus, her argument for the adequacy of shame and against certain types of shamelessness is an argument for increased moral sensitivity and for developing

680 Ibid., 420.
681 Ibid., 423.
682 Cf. ibid., 422.
683 Cf. ibid., 421.
684 Ibid., 425.

moral characters that would not need to feel shame because they acted in accordance with moral ideals into which they had a rational insight.

Concluding remarks

As a conclusion to this chapter, let us return to its Introduction and ask if we have answered the questions there. There were several questions listed, and we will present the answers to them briefly, not by repeating the detailed analyses in the different sections, but by indicating in what way and to what extent the material we have presented provides us with resources for answering and arguing their outcome.

The first question we asked was, is it good from a moral point of view that people should feel ashamed for their moral failures? To this question, we will answer yes – and no. Yes, to the extent that shame is a natural reaction to specific self-perceptions of failure. Because we are fallible as humans, it is good that we react to our failures, as such reactions can make us more prone to altering our behavior. As Manion rightly points out, shame may occasionally also function positively as a motivating factor to establish deep-going and necessary change. Furthermore, as Mason argues, sometimes shamelessness is morally pernicious. Then, shame may contribute to initializing transformations in our characters or provide more comprehensive perspectives on character formation. However, it is better that people feel guilt rather than shame, as guilt makes it possible to differentiate between agents and act in a way that allows the agent to see and experience him or herself as more than the one who performed the despicable act that caused the reaction. Moral competencies are better enabled by guilt than by shame. Therefore, the question should also be answered with a "no," since moral failure should not be identified with personal failure, and moral insight is better enabled by reactions of guilt to specific actions than by shame that also makes the agent shameful.

Furthermore, and concomitant to the rather limited credit we are willing to give shame as a moral resource, we will argue that the answer to the question, "Can the feeling of shame provide reliable information about what to do or not to do?" must be negative. Shame does not in itself provide us with genuine moral insight – at best, it can provide us with

knowledge about how we have not met our own or others' expectations and ideals. Thus, shame is a negative resource. Moreover, it can lead us astray since the expectations and ideals that clash with our shame-causing agency need justification by other instances than our emotional reactions if they are to count as justified from a moral point of view.

Therefore, the question, "Are there good alternatives to shame in this regard?" must be answered in the affirmative, by pointing to how continuous moral discourse, where all voices are heard and all perspectives are taken into consideration, is systematically pursued in order to establish a shared understanding of what shall count as justified, rational and good behavior. Moral discourse can, as Habermas argues, contribute to the formation of will and desire in ways that display moral insight and an agency that does not engender shame. This moral discourse cannot be conclusive but needs to remain open and probing, subjecting every action to repeated scrutiny and critique. It needs to be so not only to ensure that it is justified in the eyes of everyone involved, but to allow this discourse itself to contribute to the moral formation of subjects who learn to take a moral stand, in an autonomous and self-reliant but not individualist or subjective manner. Furthermore, the discussion on shamelessness above suggests that shamelessness is not a good alternative to shame – but rather, in problematic cases, an indication of the morally problematic stance of a person lacking the capacity for assessing one's character.

Accordingly, we hold that shame does not make moral agency more rational or transparent in itself. It complicates moral judgment, and when it overlaps with moral judgment established by discourse and rational insight, this is a contingent result of shame, and not a result that shame alone can carry the burden of justifying.

Can shame be said to be a moral instance at all, if it is so totally related to the subject and his or her self-perception? We acknowledge that shame can perform a rudimentary moral function but, when and if it does, it is a contingent fact and not a function that is based on shame's inherent moral character.

Does shame make people turn away from moral challenges and instead make them too self-preoccupied? We have suggested that this may be the case sometimes, and thus, the answer to this question contributes further

to the problematization of its moral character, as indicated in response to the previous question.

Given that shame is almost always backward-looking, and emerges as a result of things past, can shame guide future moral agency? And if it can, can it do it well? Again, its contribution to these functions is uncertain and not helpful unless complemented by other means. Shame can show us that something is wrong, but not necessarily what is wrong or why, and not what is right either.

Finally, how do we assess – from a moral point of view – that people do or do not feel ashamed for their moral shortcomings and failures? That people feel shame is the result of conditions in problematic human situations and relations, which one should try to overcome, abolish, and leave behind. As said before, shame is a signal that something, until further analysis undetermined, is wrong. A genuinely human society that aims at the respect of others fosters moral guilt instead, based on rational discourse instead of feelings of opaque (moral) shame. To protect people from moral shame and to make them better moral subjects can be done by teaching them to employ the distinction between doing and being. We cannot abolish shame, including moral shame. Still, we can try to build societies, social practices, and relations in which shame has minimal space and does not necessarily occur – for the sake of both morality and humanity.

CHAPTER 7

Concluding Remarks

We started writing this book because of our years-long discussion about the question, can shame serve a positive purpose in human life? We have seen that several authors maintain that it is possible. On a biological level, some experience of shame seems important for the development of a child's brain. Moreover, psychologically, experiences of shame will, most likely, inevitably be the consequence of what Kohut calls optimal frustration. But in both these cases, the neurological and psychological facts are not sufficient to argue for shame taking on a constructive role throughout the life of the individual. When shame interrupts the child's agency, it can only play a limited positive role for a restricted period of time. There is nothing in these dimensions of life that suggests that shame should have a continued role as a tool for regulating, disciplining or controlling behavior.

We can substantiate these principled remarks on the restricted role of shame with a further look into Martha Nussbaum's work. Nussbaum's considerations about shame's positive consequences are restricted and cautious. Much of what she claims seems to be in accordance with the position that we have developed. But Nussbaum also argues that shame can, in fact, serve positive functions later in life, because it can point us in the direction of goals and ideals that may be valuable, and does so when we have failed to live up to them. Furthermore, shame does not always present us with unrealistic ideals but can provide guidance on how to live and what actions to avoid – similar to what Deigh suggests when he says that shame contributes to the regulation of behavior. "It often tells us the truth: certain goals are valuable and we have failed to live up to them. And it often expresses a desire to be a type of being that one can be: a good human being doing fine things."[685] Under such circumstances,

685 Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, 207.

shame can take on a positive character or have a function related to more than social approval or disapproval, Nussbaum holds. Accordingly, shame may inform us about which projects are worthwhile to engage in and orientate oneself towards. Thus, shame may not only contribute to regulating behavior according to the norms and conventions of society, as Scheff and others have claimed, it may also serve to strengthen social bonds – or put otherwise – the responsive movements of shame tell us that the social bonds to those who we care about may be at stake.[686] Therefore, we seek strategies to restore these bonds. Through the movements of shame we seek to ameliorate or restore the shameful situation so that our social bonds may again be confirmed.

However, on the more critical side, our extensive analyses have already suggested that the information or cognitive content that shame conveys concerning conduct is not morally reliable. Shame presents us with problems that are linked to its origin in what Nussbaum calls "primitive shame," which is the shame that results from the failed desire to be complete and completely in control. It also testifies to our vulnerability and to us being too susceptible to the judgment of others. The positive achievement that shame allows for may therefore be contingent. Hence, we do not consider Nussbaum's argument as strong, so far.

Even when shame is adequately motivated, narcissism and its concomitant aggression represent a danger, according to Nussbaum. Therefore, shame as a social instrument appears to be a problematic tool for the regulation of social behavior, be it in moral, educational or religious contexts. In other words, because shame from the outset is the result of a negative relationship between the self and others in the world, it proves problematic to employ it as a valuable social tool. Shame contributes to impeding the subject's experience of both self and world because it restricts the perspective by which to assess the situation.

An adult bearing narcissistic, primitive shame presents us with "the image of a hungry, enraged, empty self, full of impotent anger at being frustrated, and fearful of a world which seems as hateful and revengeful

686 Scheff, "Shame in Self and Society"; "Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory."

as the patient himself."[687] In Norway, we find perhaps the most prominent example of this rage expressed in the terrorist attacks on 22 July 2011. These attacks were a profound example of how shame-driven rage often constructs its own object. There is not necessarily a reality behind the creation of enemy images such as those then in play – a shameful and raging narcissist may pick whatever is in the surrounding environment as the most plausible surrogate for the original source of frustration.[688]

The negative relationship between the individual and the world that is constituted and manifested through shame points to its limitations when it comes to its role in, for example, education and child-rearing. A child is susceptible and vulnerable to the behavior and responses of significant others.[689] Nussbaum's view is, accordingly, "that any appeal to shame in connection with the child's human weaknesses, whether bodily or mental, would be a dangerous and potentially debilitating strategy. And since the child is always so vulnerable to the parent's power and can so easily interpret even a limited moral shaming as a painful humiliation, we are inclined to say that shame is always dangerous in the child-rearing process."[690] Hence, to allow shame to interrupt the child's agency may, in the long run, affect the child's potential for individuality and self-reliance.

This argument can also be applied more broadly. Being bodies among bodies, we are always fragile and vulnerable, always forming and being formed in relation to the other(s) with different levels of self-reliance and self-esteem and within different power relations. As works-in-progress, we are interwoven in a web where the other always matters to us. The humiliation of shame interrupts our intentions and projects, and informs us that these are not alright or accepted as valuable. Thus, using shame as a social tool is dangerous. We seldom know the vulnerability and fragility of the other fully. Shame may severely affect the self of the other.

---

687 Otto Kernberg, here quoted by Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity,* 210.

688 Ibid., 211. Cf. also for narcissistic rage, shame and humiliation, James William Jones, *Blood That Cries out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), passim. On the analysis of the events of 22 July from an interdisciplinary point of view, see also Arne Johan Vetlesen, *Studier I Ondskap* (Oslo: Universitetsforlag, 2014).

689 An obvious example here is the effect of parents' comments on the weight or other bodily characteristics of their children. See for devastating effects in this regard, Jane Megan Northrop, *Reflecting on Cosmetic Surgery: Body Image, Shame and Narcissism* (London: Routledge, 2012).

690 Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, 214.

Nussbaum is nevertheless open to the fact that some cases can be addressed in other ways than pointing to guilt concerning inappropriate behavior. Shame may be one of these. However, even though it might be adequate to both feel shame and sometimes use shame, it does not imply that it should be encouraged either in child-rearing or in other social contexts. A person may feel shame because he was caught on tape uttering an immoral and racist personal comment about another person in public. It is certainly appropriate to feel shame in this situation, especially if the person is incapable of feeling guilt, and shame is all we have. Hopefully, shame will cause him to refrain from making such comments again. But that does not imply that shaming is the way we should deal with racist language. It is preferable to argue cognitively for adjustment in behavior, and such arguments are also better than a mere infliction of shame. Mere shame is not sufficient to develop a moral attitude that is truly rooted in the self's capacity for moral behavior and development. Consequently, we argue that fighting shame is *appropriate* and should be encouraged in almost all cases. If shame emerges in ways that address features such as skin color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and so forth, it should be addressed as morally repugnant. In short, it is our responsibility to fight such shame in a social web where we both form and are formed by the other.

This allows us to pick up our discussion of shamelessness. Nussbaum does not think that being totally shameless is a recommendable attitude: "Whether one is young or old, it seems appropriate to be sensitive to an invitation to shame, and related self-examination, issued by people one loves and respects. Indeed, if one were 'shameless' toward people whose ideals one shares and on whose good will one has learned to rely, that would be a dangerous sign, itself, of narcissism."[691]

We have argued in both Chapters Two and Four that there is a distinction between shamelessness and fighting shame. We initially introduced shamelessness in connection with "the shameless Arabian daughters" who used the concept rhetorically in order to fight the use of shaming as a tool for what they claimed was immoral social control. Thus, what the

691 Ibid., 216.

Arabian daughters suggested was in fact not shamelessness, but a call to fight shame and pursue freedom to realize their own projects without the restrictions of shame. In the analysis of Manion in the previous chapter, we made a distinction between shamelessness and lack of shame, which applies here. "The daughters" pleaded for lack of shame, as shamelessness is not an antidote to shame. As we argued in Chapter Two, shamelessness is the opposite of what we call protective discretionary shame. In this sense, shamelessness breeds shame because it does not protect the borders and the vulnerability of the other. Thus, discretionary shame is ethically informed insofar as it sees, respects, and protects the vulnerability of the other. To sum up, actual shamelessness is morally destructive because it manipulates and disrespects the fragile boundaries of the other. Discretionary shame is morally constructive as it entails a moral judgment of the situation of the other. Other types of shame may serve moral functions, but the basic tenet is that it is retrospective and reactive, holding little value for our capacity for moral behavior or development. As such, shamelessness should not be considered a preferable option.

Against this backdrop, let us also look at Nussbaum's notion *aspirational shame* as a relevant but not recommendable element in child-rearing. In our view, parents not only endorse valuable ideals and encourage children to live up to them, but often, they are "rigidly imposing personal ideals and expectations on a child who has different talents and wishes." The discrepancy between parent and child then causes shame in the child. A serious similarity to this lack of acknowledgment of the child's talents and wishes is when the child experiences shaming as an expression of the parents' lack of love and acceptance.[692] "Again, a focus on acts, in the context of expressing love for the child, seems a more constructive and clearer message."[693] We could also add to what Nussbaum says here that such shame undermines the child's self-confidence and self-esteem in ways that make it even more prone to shame in the long run. Under such circumstances, he or she learns that being perfect is the only condition for being accepted and affirmed by her peers.

---

692 Ibid., 215.
693 Ibid.

Again, we will argue, on the basis of our analyses in the second part of this book, that to encourage ideals of perfection is problematic in all the contexts we have addressed: body perfection, moral perfection, or religious perfection are all contrary to the realities of the human condition. The gap between what in reality is reasonably attainable and impossible ideals serves to produce shame. Shame exploits the vulnerabilities that emerge from body image, and moral and religious imperfection.

As we have argued, shame is part of the complex architecture of the self and manifests itself through responsive movements when the self sees that these projects or ideals can never be realized fully. Thus, it places the self in a limbo between ideal and work in progress, guiding the focus away from more realistic, fulfilling and maturing projects. Through the presence, tacit implicitness and power of the disciplining forces of society – whether these address gender, ethnicity, or religious affiliation – norms and ideals become part of the internal self-policing structure of the subject. Thus, the possible appropriateness of shame is contingent on the morality of the framework to which it refers. As we have tried to show in the analysis of both body and religion, there is little doubt that shame, at least for the most part, has been used to support or reproduce immoral power structures and frameworks that have served, and still serve, to repress and hinder the flourishing of groups and individuals.

Although Nussbaum works hard to find the positive functions of shame, it is evident that her first choice is not to have shame in any case, and that it is mostly not within the horizon of recommendable choices at all. However, she mentions some cases that lie within the parameter of morality and where shame neither reinforces nor undermines narcissism. "Shame over laziness, lack of dedication, and other failure to pursue valuable personal ideals" may be constructive for aspirational purposes, but "it seems most appropriate that the invitation to feel shame come from oneself." Nevertheless, her final words on the topic are that "it seems wiser to focus on acts, even if they do form a pattern that is generally defective."[694] Thus, Nussbaum touches upon the role that shame can play in the motivation for specific modes of agency. Its role, as she describes

694 Ibid., 214.

it, is nevertheless ambiguous: In the social dimension, it is possible to feel shame if one displays a pattern of underachievement, and then, it can play a constructive role that motivates dedication and hard work. But in similar contexts, shame can be paralyzing or debilitating as well. To some extent, the different functions it takes on may be dependent on the extent to which shame is issued by oneself or by another.[695]

Nussbaum elaborates on this point in a way that adds to Deigh's underscoring of the necessity of a conception of shame to integrate the idea that it reflects one's concern for the reaction of others. To be a mature person is to accept one's own moral imperfection, she writes. Part of this self-understanding means that one also has to recognize that "one's efforts toward valuable personal ideals (including moral ideals) can always be improved by the insights of others."[696] Accordingly, the interruption that others may cause to our agency is possible to handle and to be prepared for in different ways. If you have come to accept that you are not perfect, that is a personal competence that can bolster you against shame. Furthermore, if you consider the one who interrupts the agency that may cause shame a friend, shame may not have a strong impact on your self-esteem or self-respect.

The upshot of Nussbaum's analysis of shame is that even though it can be constructive, there are always dangers inherent in every invitation to another person to feel shame. As we claimed above, the fragility, vulnerability and fortitude of the other are never fully known to us. Thus, shame is ambiguous, as is the invitation to feel it.[697] So, although Nussbaum explicitly affirms the constructive role of shame in promoting responsibility, her analysis is primarily focused on the dangers that arise. Accordingly, she sees in shame "a threat to all possibility of morality and community, and indeed to a creative inner life."[698] Shame is therefore not the first instance

695 Ibid., 215.

696 Ibid., 216f.

697 Ibid. "Such invitations may be non-narcissistic or even anti-narcissistic, but they may also bear a concealed narcissism at their core—as when a parent, under the guise of encouraging a child to work harder, tries to control the child and make him just like the parent's ideal self-image. And they may be expressions of respectful criticism in a relationship of love or friendship, but since love and friendship are hardly immune to the dangers of narcissism, even here they may bear subtle messages of narcissistic control that belittle the very humanity of the person shamed."

698 Ibid., 208. Cf. also a similar assessment of her position in Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects*, 149.

to incite or encourage in interpersonal relationships or psychological contexts that aim at freedom, creativity and emotional transparency.

The above points may also prove relevant in the other contexts we have analyzed. Without doubt, shame will continue to exist and exert its role in relation to the body, in morality, and in relation to religious contexts and other contexts of disciplining. However, we need to differentiate between what is the case and what ought to be the case in all the contexts of shame we have analyzed. In some cases, shame may be all we have, and hopefully it can serve as a bulwark against immorality and oppression when other more appropriate social tools are not present. But that does not imply that this ought to be the case. Against the backdrop of our analyses above, there is no strong case for the active employment of shame in any of these contexts, with the exception of discretionary shame. On the contrary, we have seen that shame entails a movement towards the community that should be supported by those who care for the shamed. Shame is usually only effectively overcome when one establishes inclusive practices that express dignity, worth, and recognition. These are the elements that also enable the building of communities that allow for diversity: be it in body shape, ethnicity, religious stance, or moral commitments.

Shame interrupts. While it may sometimes be useful to stop and ask what is happening, when shame interrupts, it is a disturbing and unpleasant experience – not an occasion for pondering and reflection. It may also confine the individual within concerns and feelings about him or herself. Thus, experiences of shame may actually hinder or restrict the potential resources available from broader contexts of agency. This fact suggests that one should work to reduce instances of shame and shaming as much as possible, because other conditions for agency and community may work better in the long run. To make a twist on the title of this book: we should try to interrupt the development of conditions that lead to shame as much as possible, and we should encourage others to move away from using shame as a tool in social contexts where experiences of self-worth and dignity are at risk.

Literature

Aakvaag, Helene Flood. *Hei, Skam: En Bok Om Følelsen Skam, Hvorfor Den Oppstår Og Hva Den Gjør Med Oss.* Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2018.

Althaus, Paul. *The Theology of Martin Luther.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1996.

Améry, Jean. *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.

Andem, Julie. "Skam." In *Skam*, 2015–17. Norway: NRK, 2015. Television.

Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen, Kali H. Trzesniewski, and M. Brent Donnellan. "The Dangers of Generational Myth-Making: Rejoinder to Twenge." *Emerging Adulthood* 1, no. 1 (2013): 17–20.

Bartky, Sandra Lee. *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Life.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005.

———. *Liquid Modernity.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.

———. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Cambridge; Maldon: Polity Press, 2007.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex.* 1st American ed. New York: Knopf, 1953.

Becker, Ernest. *The Denial of Death.* London: Souvenir Press, 2011.

Behnke, Elizabeth A. "The Socially Shaped Body and the Critique of Corporeal Experience." In *Sartre on the Body*, 231–55, by Katherine J. Morris. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Berger, Peter L. *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation.* Garden City: Anchor Press, 1980.

Binau, Brad A. "When Shame Is the Question, How Does the Atonement Answer?" *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 12, no. 1 (2002): 89–113.

Blum, Alon. "Shame and Guilt, Misconceptions and Controversies: A Critical Review of the Literature." *Traumatology* 14, no. 3 (2008): 91.

Boehm, Christopher. "The Moral Consequences of Social Selection." *Behaviour* 151, no. 2–3 (2014): 167–83.

———. *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame.* New York: Basic Books, 2012.

Bragan, Kenneth. *Self and Spirit in the Therapeutic Relationship.* London; New York: Routledge, 1996.

Breggin, Peter R. "The Biological Evolution of Guilt, Shame and Anxiety: A New Theory of Negative Legacy Emotions." *Medical Hypotheses* 85, no. 1 (2015): 17–24.

Broucek, Francis J. *Shame and the Self.* New York: Guilford, 1991.

Brown, Brené. *I Thought It Was Just Me: Women Reclaiming Power and Courage in a Culture of Shame.* New York: Gotham Press 2007.

Burke, Brian L., Andy Martens, and Erik H. Faucher. "Two Decades of Terror Management Theory: A Meta-Analysis of Mortality Salience Research." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14, no. 2 (2010): 155–95.

Burrus, Virginia. *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

Cahill, Ann J. *Overcoming Objectification: A Carnal Ethics.* New York: Routledge, 2011.

Calhoun, Cheshire. "An Apology for Moral Shame." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 12, no. 2 (2004): 127–46.

Calogero, Rachel M., Stacey Ed Tantleff-Dunn, and J. Kevin Thompson. "Objectification Theory: An Introduction." In *Self-objectification in women: Causes, and counteractions.* Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2011.

———. *Self-Objectification in Women: Causes, Consequences, and Counteractions.* 1st ed. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2011.

Capps, Donald. *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

Chrisler, Joan C., and Ingrid Johnston-Robledo. *Woman's Embodied Self: Feminist Perspectives on Identity and Image.* American Psychological Association, 2018. doi:10.1037/0000047–000.

Clough, Miryam. *Shame, the Church and the Regulation of Female Sexuality.* Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2017.

Coffmann E. J. "Stump on the Nature of Atonement" (web.utk.edu/~ecoffma1/SNA.doc).

Cole, Michael. "Culture and Development". In *Between Culture and Biology: Perspectives on Ontogenetic Development*, edited by Heidi Keller, Ype H. Poortinga and Axel Schölmerich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Conboy, Katie, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury. *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Cottingham, John. "Conscience, Guilt, and Shame." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Ethics*, edited by Roger Crisp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Coy, Maddy. "This Body Which Is Not Mine: The Notion of the Habit Body, Prostitution and (Dis) Embodiment." *Feminist Theory* 10, no. 1 (2009): 61–75.

Csordas, Thomas J. "Introduction: The Body as Representation and Being-in-the-World." In *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, edited by Thomas J. Csordas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Davis, Kathy. *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery.* New York: Routledge, 2013.

De Hooge, Ilona E., Seger M. Breugelmans, and Marcel Zeelenberg. "Not So Ugly After All: When Shame Acts as a Commitment Device." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95, no. 4 (2008): 933.

De Hooge, Ilona E., Marcel Zeelenberg, and Seger M. Breugelmans. "Moral Sentiments and Cooperation: Differential Influences of Shame and Guilt." *Cognition and Emotion* 21, no. 5 (2007): 1025–42.

———. "A Functionalist Account of Shame-Induced Behaviour." *Cognition and Emotion* 25, no. 5 (2011/08/01 2011): 939–46.

———. "Restore and Protect Motivations Following Shame." *Cognition and Emotion* 24, no. 1 (2010/01/01 2010): 111–27.

Deacon, Terrence William. *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain.* 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997.

Deigh, John. "Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique." *Ethics* 93, no. 2 (1983): 225–45.

Deonna, Julien A., Raffaele Rodogno, and Fabrice Teroni. *In Defense of Shame: The Faces of an Emotion.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Deonna, Julien A., and Fabrice Teroni. "The Self of Shame." In *Emotions, Ethics, and Authenticity*, edited by Mikko Salmela and Verena E. Mayer. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009, pp 33–50.

Dolezal, Luna. *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body.* Blue Ridge Summit: Lexington Books, 2015.

———. "The Phenomenology of Shame in the Clinical Encounter." *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* 18, no. 4 (2015): 567–76.

Dreyfus, Hubert L., and Stuart E. Dreyfus. "The Challenge of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Embodiment for Cognitive Science." *Perspectives on Embodiment: The Intersections of Nature and Culture* (1999): 103–20.

Duerr, Hans Peter. *Myten Om Civilisationsprocessen: B. 2: Intimitet.* Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposium, 1996.

Dworkin, Andrea. *Pornography: Men Possessing Women.* New York: Putnam, 1981.

Elison, Jeff. "Shame and Guilt: A Hundred Years of Apples and Oranges." *New Ideas in Psychology* 23, no. 1 (2005): 5–32.

Erikson, Erik H. *Childhood and Society.* Revised edition. London: Triad/Paladin, 1977.

Eriksson, Sture, Ann—Louise Glasberg, and Astrid Norberg. "Burnout and 'Stress of Conscience' among Healthcare Personnel." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 57, no. 4 (2007): 392–403.

Farrell, Amy Erdman. *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2011.

Farstad, Marie. *Skammens Spor:* Marie Farstad, *Skammens Spor: Eksistens, Relasjon, Profesjon.* Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2016.

Fenstermaker, Sarah and Candace West. *Doing Gender, Doing Difference: Inequality, Power, and Institutional Change.* London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

Ferguson, Tamara J., Daniel Brugman, Jennifer E. White, and Heidi L. Eyre. "Shame and Guilt as Morally Warranted Experiences." In *The Self-Conscious Emotions: Theory and Research*, edited by Richard W. Robins, Jessica L. Tracy, and June Price Tangney. New York: Guilford Press, 2007.

Fessler, Daniel M.T. "Shame in Two Cultures: Implications for Evolutionary Approaches." *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 4, no. 2 (2004): 207–62.

Fischer, Kurt W., and June Price Tangney. "Self-Conscious Emotions and the Affect Revolution: Framework and Overview." In *Self-Conscious Emotions*, edited by Kurt W. Fischer, and June Price Tangney. New York: Guilford Press, 1995.

Foucault, Michel. "Panopticism" from *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. In *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 2, no. 1 (2008): 1–12.

Fowler, James W. Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.

Fredrickson, Barbara L., Tomi-Ann Roberts, Stephanie M. Noll, Diane M. Quinn, and Jean M. Twenge. "That Swimsuit Becomes You: Sex Differences in Self-Objectification, Restrained Eating, and Math Performance." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75, no. 1 (1998): 269.

Fredrickson, Barbara L., and Tomi-Ann Roberts. "Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1997): 173–206.

Fuentes, Agustín. *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies They Told You: Busting Myths About Human Nature.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Furukawa, Emi, June Price Tangney, and Fumiko Higashibara. "Cross-Cultural Continuities and Discontinuities in Shame, Guilt, and Pride: A Study of Children Residing in Japan, Korea and the USA." *Self and Identity* 11, no. 1 (2012/01/01 2012): 90–113.

Gausel, Nicolay. "Self-Reform or Self-Defense? Understanding How People Cope with Their Moral Failures by Understanding How They Appraise and Feel About Their Moral Failures." In *Social Issues, Justice and Status*, edited by Mira Moshe and Nicoleta Corbu. New York: Nova, 2013.

Gausel, Nicolay, and Colin Wayne Leach. "Concern for Self-Image and Social Image in the Management of Moral Failure: Rethinking Shame." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 41, no. 4 (2011): 468–78.

Gilbert, Paul. "Body Shame: A Biopsychosocial Conceptualisation and Overview with Treatment Implications." In *Body Shame: Conceptualisation, Research and Treatment*, edited by Paul Gilbert and Jeremy Miles: Routledge, 2002.

———. "Evolution, Social Roles, and the Differences in Shame and Guilt." *Social Research* 70, no. 4 (2003): 1205–30.

_______. “Shame: Interpersonal Behavior, Psychopathology, and Culture.” In *Shame: Interpersonal Behavior, Psychopathology, and Culture*, edited by Paul Gilbert and Bernice Andrews, XIV, 288 s. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

_______. “What Is Shame? Some Core Issues and Controversies.”. In *Shame: Interpersonal Behavior, Psychopathology, and Culture*, edited by Paul Gilbert and Bernice Andrews, XIV, 288 s. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Gilbert, Paul, and Bernice Andrews. *Shame: Interpersonal Behavior, Psychopathology, and Culture.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

_______. “Shame, Status and Social Roles: Psychobiology and Evolution.” In *Shame: Interpersonal Behavior, Psychopathology, and Culture*, edited by Paul Gilbert and Bernice Andrews, XIV, 288 s. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Gilbert, Paul, and Jeremy Miles. *Body Shame: Conceptualisation, Research and Treatment.* Hove: Brunner-Routledge, 2002.

Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development.* Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Gimlin, Debra. “The Absent Body Project: Cosmetic Surgery as a Response to Bodily Dys-Appearance.” *Sociology* 40, no. 4 (2006): 699–716.

Girard, René. *The Scapegoat.* London: Athlone Press, 1986.

Girard, René, and Patrick Gregory. *Violence and the Sacred.* Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.

Glasberg, Ann-Louise. *Stress of Conscience and Burnout in Healthcare: The Danger of Deadening One's Conscience.* Umeå: Umeå University, 2007.

Goldenberg, Jamie L., and Tomi-Ann Roberts. “The Birthmark: An Existential Account of the Objectification of Women.” In *Self-Objectification in Women: Causes, Consequences, and Counteractions*, edited by Rachel M. Calogero, Stacey Ed Tantleff-Dunn and J. Thompson. Washington D.C: American Psychological Association, 2011.

Goodliff, Paul. *With Unveiled Face: A Pastoral and Theological Exploration of Shame.* London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2005.

Greenberg, Jeff, Tom Pyszczynski, and Sheldon Solomon. “The Causes and Consequences of a Need for Self-Esteem: A Terror Management Theory.” In Roy F. Baumeister (Ed.) *Public Self and Private Self*. New York: Springer, 1986.

Grogan, Sarah. *Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women and Children.* 3rd edition. London: Routledge, 2017.

Gross, C. A., and N. E. Hansen. “Clarifying the Experience of Shame: The Role of Attachment Style, Gender, and Investment in Relatedness.” *Personality and Individual Differences* 28, no. 5 (2000): 897–907.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Erläuterungen Zur Diskursethik.* 1. Aufl. ed. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

———. *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993.

———. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990.

———. *Moralbewusstsein Und Kommunikatives Handeln.* 1. Aufl. ed. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983.

———. *The Theory of Communicative Action.* 2 vols. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984.

Hacker, Peter. "Shame, Embarrassment, and Guilt." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 41, no. 1 (2017): 202–24.

Haidt, Jonathan. "The Moral Emotions." In *Handbook of Affective Sciences*, edited by Richard J. Davidson, Klaus R. Scherer and H. Hill Goldsmith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Halperin, David M., and Valerie Traub. *Gay Shame.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Harré, Rom, and W. Gerrod Parrott. *The Emotions: Social, Cultural and Biological Dimensions.* London; Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996.

Hatzfeld, Jean. *A Time for Machetes: The Rwandan Genocide: The Killers Speak: A Report.* London: Serpent's Tail, 2005.

Heelas, Paul, Linda Woodhead, et al. *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Henriksen, Jan-Olav. *Relating God and the Self: Dynamic Interplay.* Farnham: Ashgate, 2013.

———. *Religion as Orientation and Transformation: A Maximalist Theory.* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017.

———. *Representation and Ultimacy: Christian Religion as Unfinished Business.* Münster; Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2020.

———. "Violence, Shame, and Moral Agency – An Exploration of Krista K. Thomason's Position" in *De Ethica, A Journal of Philosophical, Theological and Applied Ethics*, 2020: 23–33.

Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery.* New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Herz, Nancy. "Vi Er De Skamløse, Arabiske Jentene – Vår Tid Begynner Nå." Column, *Aftenposten* (Oslo), 25th april 2016.

Honneth, Axel. *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.

Honneth, Axel, and Avishai Margalit. "Recognition." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 75 (2001): 111–39.

Hutchinson, Phil. *Shame and Philosophy.* New York: New Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Jacquet, Jennifer. *Is Shame Necessary? New Uses for an Old Tool.* London: Allen Lane, 2015.

James, Scott M. *An Introduction to Evolutionary Ethics*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature.* New York; London: Penguin Books, 1985.

Janoff-Bulman, Ronnie. "Assumptive Worlds and the Stress of Traumatic Events: Applications of the Schema Construct." *Social Cognition* 7, no. 2 (1989): 113–36.

———. *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma.* New York: Free Press, 1992.

Jones, James W. *Terror and Transformation: The Ambiguity of Religion in Psychoanalytic Perspectives.* Hove: Brunner-Routledge, 2002.

———. *Blood That Cries Out From the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism.* Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Jütten, Timo. "Sexual Objectification." *Ethics* 127, no. 1 (2016): 27–49.

Kalvemark, Sofia, Anna T. Hoglund, Mats G. Hansson, Peter Westerholm, and Bengt Arnetz. "Living with Conflicts – Ethical Dilemmas and Moral Distress in the Health Care System." *Social Science & Medicine* 58, no. 6 (2004/3 2004): 1075–84.

Karterud, Sigmund. *Fra Narsissisme Til Selvpsykologi: En Innføring I Heinz Kohuts Forfatterskap.* Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal, 2009.

Katchadourian, Herant A. *Guilt: The Bite of Conscience.* Stanford: Stanford General Books, 2010.

Kaufman, Gershen. *Shame: The Power of Caring.* 3rd ed., revised and expanded. Rochester: Schenkman Books, 1992.

Kaufman, Gordon: *The Theological Imagination.* Philadelphia; Westminister Press, 1981.

Kealy, David, and John S. Ogrodniczuk. "Pathological Narcissism: A Front-Line Guide." *Practice* 24, no. 3 (2012): 161–74.

Kealy, David, and Brian Rasmussen. "Veiled and Vulnerable: The Other Side of Grandiose Narcissism." *Clinical Social Work Journal* 40, no. 3 (2012): 356–65.

Kekes, John. "Shame and Moral Progress." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (1988): 282–96.

Keller, Heidi, Ype H. Poortinga, and Axel Schölmerich. "Introduction." In *Between Culture and Biology: Perspectives on Ontogenetic Development*, edited by Heidi Keller, Ype H. Poortinga and Axel Schölmerich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Kirkengen, Anna Luise. *Inscribed Bodies: Health Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse.* Dordrecht; Boston: Kluwer Academic, 2001.

Kohut, Heinz. *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders.* New York: International Universities Press, 1971.

———. *The Restoration of the Self.* New York: International Universities Press, 1977.

Kohut, Heinz, Arnold Goldberg, and Paul E. Stepansky. *How Does Analysis Cure?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Leach, Colin Wayne, and Atilla Cidam. "When Is Shame Linked to Constructive Approach Orientation? A Meta-Analysis." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 109, no. 6 (2015): 983–1002.

Leder, Drew. *The Absent Body.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Leeming, Dawn, and Mary Boyle. "Shame as a Social Phenomenon: A Critical Analysis of the Concept of Dispositional Shame." *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice* 77, no. 3 (2004): 375–96.

Leer-Salvesen, Paul. *Tilgivelse.* Oslo: Universitetsforlag, 1998. Electronic resource.

Lelwica, Michelle M. "Losing Their Way to Salvation: Women, Weight Loss, and the Religion of Thinness." In *Religion and Popular Culture in America,* 3rd ed, edited by Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan. Oakland: University of California Press, 2017.

Lelwica, Michelle Mary. *Shameful Bodies: Religion and the Culture of Physical Improvement*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

Levi, Primo. *The Drowned and the Saved.* New York: Vintage International, 1989.

Lewis, Helen B. "Shame and Guilt in Neurosis." *Psychoanalytic Review* 58, no. 3 (1971): 419.

———. "The Role of Shame in Symptom Formation." In: Clynes M., Panksepp J. (eds) Emotions and Psychopathology, 95–105, Boston, MA.: Springer, 1998

———. *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis.* New York: International Universities Press, 1971.

Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide.* New York: Basic Books, 2000.

Lindholm, Charles. *Culture and Identity: The History, Theory, and Practice of Psychological Anthropology.* Revised and updated. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007.

Lonner, Walter J, and John Adamopoulos. "Culture as Antecedent to Behavior." In *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology: Vol. 1: Theory and Method*, edited by Ype H. Poortinga, Janak Pandey and John W. Berry. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997.

Lund, Pekka. "Christian Faith and Recovery from Substance Abuse, Guilt, and Shame." *Journal Of Religion & Spirituality In Social Work: Social Thought* 36, no. 3 (2017): 346–66.

Lynch, Tony, and Nishanathe Dahanayake. "Atheism and Morality, Guilt and Shame: Why the Moral Complacency of the New Atheism Is a Mistake." *Philosophical Investigations* 40, no. 2 (2017): 103–20.

MacIntyre, Alasdair C. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory.* 3rd ed. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

Mackenzie, Catriona, and Natalie Stoljar. *Relational Autonomy.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

MacKinnon, Catharine A. *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Madsen, Ole Jacob. *Generasjon Prestasjon: Hva Er Det Som Feiler Oss?* Oslo: Universitetsforlag, 2018.
Mameli, Matteo. "Meat Made Us Moral: A Hypothesis on the Nature and Evolution of Moral Judgment." *Biology & Philosophy* 28, no. 6 (November 01 2013): 903–31.
Manion, Jennifer C. "The Moral Relevance of Shame." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (2002): 73–90.
Marino, Patricia. "The Ethics of Sexual Objectification: Autonomy and Consent." *Inquiry* 51, no. 4 (2008): 345–64.
———. "Philosophy of Sex." *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 1 (2014): 22–32.
Mason, Michelle. "On Shamelessness." *Philosophical Papers* 39, no. 3 (2010): 401–25.
McFall, Linda. "Shame: Concept Analysis." *Journal of Theory Construction & Testing* 13, no. 2 (2009): 57.
McNish, Jill L. *Transforming Shame: A Pastoral Response.* New York; Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2013.
Mesel, Terje. *Når Noe Går Galt. Skam, Skyld Og Ansvar I Helsetjenesten.* Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2014.
———. *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep.* Kristiansand: Portal Forlag, 2017.
Miller, Arthur G. *The Social Psychology of Good and Evil.* New York: Guilford Press, 2004.
Miller, Joan G. "Theoretical Issues in Cultural Psychology." *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 1 (1997): 85–128.
Morgan, Michael L. *On Shame.* New York; London: Routledge, 2008.
Murphy, Steven, and Sandra Kiffin-Petersen. "The Exposed Self: A Multilevel Model of Shame and Ethical Behavior." *Journal of Business Ethics* 141, no. 4 (2017): 657–75.
Neville, Robert C. *The Truth of Broken Symbols,* Albany: SUNY 1996.
Niedenthal, Paula M., June Price Tangney, and Igor Gavanski. "'If Only I Weren't' Versus 'If Only I Hadn't': Distinguishing Shame and Guilt in Counterfactual Thinking." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 67, no. 4 (1994): 585.
Northrop, Jane Megan. *Reflecting on Cosmetic Surgery: Body Image, Shame and Narcissism.* London: Routledge, 2013.
Nussbaum, Martha Craven. "Objectification." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 24, no. 4 (1995): 249–91.
———. *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
———. *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice.* Cambridge; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013.
Okkenhaug, Berit. *Når Jeg Skjuler Mitt Ansikt: Perspektiver På Skam.* Oslo: Verbum, 2009.

Oosterwijk, Suzanne. "Choosing the Negative: A Behavioral Demonstration of Morbid Curiosity." *PLoS ONE* 12, no. 7 (2017).

Pajacvzkowska, Claire, and Ivan Ward. "Introduction: Shame, Sexuality and Visual Culture." In *Shame and Sexuality. Psychoanalysis and Visual Culture*, 1–20. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.

Papadaki, Evangelia Lina. "Feminist Perspectives on Objectification." In *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford: Stanford University, 2010.

_______. "What Is Objectification?" *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (2010): 16–36.

Park, Christine J. "Chronic Shame: A Perspective Integrating Religion and Spirituality." *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 35, no. 4 (2016): 354–76.

Parkins, Wendy. "Protesting Like a Girl: Embodiment, Dissent and Feminist Agency." *Feminist Theory* 1, no. 1 (2000): 59–78.

Passanisi, Alessia, Alessia Maria Gervasi, Carmela Madonia, Giovanni Guzzo, and Davide Greco. "Attachment, Self-Esteem and Shame in Emerging Adulthood." *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 191 (2015): 342–46.

Pattison, Stephen. *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Piers, Gerhart, and Milton B. Singer. *Shame and Guilt: A Psychoanalytic and a Cultural Study.* New York: W.W. Norton, 1971.

Pinkerton, Kevin, and Shuhua Zhou. "Effects of Morbid Curiosity on Perception, Attention, and Reaction to Bad News." *The University of Alabama McNair Journal* (2008): 129–43.

Piran, Niva. *Journeys of Embodiment at the Intersection of Body and Culture: The Developmental Theory of Embodiment.* Waltham: Elsevier, 2017.

Plaskow, Judith. *Sex, Sin, and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich.* Washington: University Press of America, 1980.

Poortinga, Ype H, and Karel Soudijn. "Behaviour-Culture Relationships and Ontogenetic Development." In *Between Culture and Biology: Perspectives on Ontogenetic Development*, edited by Heidi Keller, Ype H. Poortinga and Axel Schölmerich, 320 -40. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Poortinga, Ype H, and Dianne A. Van Hemert. "Personality and Culture: Demarcating Between the Common and the Unique." *Journal of Personality* 69, no. 6 (2001): 1033–60.

Probyn, Elspeth. *Blush: Faces of Shame.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

Prosek, Elizabeth A., Amanda L. Giordano, Jessica M. Holm, Cynthia M. Bevly, Kristy M. Sender, Zachary B. Ramsey, and Meagan R. Abernathy. "Experiencing

Shame: Collegiate Alcohol Abuse, Religiosity, and Spirituality." *Journal of College Counseling* 20, no. 2 (2017): 126–38.

Rees, Emma. *Talking Bodies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Embodiment, Gender and Identity.* Cham: Springer, 2017.

Rembis, Michael, Catherine J. Kudlick, and Kim E. Nielsen. *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Riis, Ole, and Linda Woodhead. *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Roberts, Tomi-Ann. "The Woman in the Body." *Feminism & Psychology* 12, no. 3 (2002): 324–29.

Ruse, Michael, and Robert J. Richards. *The Cambridge Handbook of Evolutionary Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Ryan, Thomas. "The Positive Function of Shame: Moral and Spiritual Perspectives." In *The Value of Shame – Exploring a Health Resource in Cultural Contexts*, edited by Elisabeth Vanderheiden and Claude-Hélène Mayer, 87–105. Cham: Springer, 2017.

Røthing, Åse. *Sex, Kjønn & Kristentro.* Oslo: Verbum, 1998.

Scheff, Thomas J., and Suzanne M. Retzinger. "Shame as the Master Emotion of Everyday Life." *Journal of Mundane Behavior* 1, no. 3 (2000): 303–24.

Scheff, Thomas J. "Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory." *Sociological Theory* 18, no. 1 (2000): 84–99.

———. "Shame in Self and Society." *Symbolic Interaction* 26, no. 2 (2003): 239–62.

Schneider, Carl D. *Shame, Exposure, and Privacy.* New York; London: W.W. Norton & Co, 1977.

Schore, Allan N. *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development.* Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1994.

Schore, Allan N. "Early Shame Experiences and Infant Brain Development." *Shame: Interpersonal behavior, psychopathology, and culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): 57–77.

Schweder, Richard A. "Toward a Deep Cultural Psychology of Shame." *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Social Science* 70, no. 4 (2003): 1109–30.

Searle, John R. *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

———. *The Construction of Social Reality*. New York: Free Press, 1995.

Shea, John J. *Finding God Again: Spirituality for Adults.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

Shreve, Barry W., and Mark A. Kunkel. "Self-Psychology, Shame, and Adolescent Suicide: Theoretical and Practical Considerations." *Journal of Counseling & Development* 69, no. 4 (1991): 305–11.

Shults, F. LeRon, and Jan-Olav Henriksen. *Saving Desire: The Seduction of Christian Theology.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

Siewert, Charles. "Consciousness and Intentionality." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017.

Smiley, Marion. *Moral Responsibilities and the Boundaries of Community.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Spiegel, Joseph. *Sexual Abuse of Males. The Sam Model of Theory and Practice.* New York: Routledge, 2003.

Staub, Erwin. *The Roots of Evil. The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Stets, Jan E., and Michael J. Carter. "A Theory of the Self for the Sociology of Morality." *American Sociological Review* 77, no. 1 (2012): 120–40.

Stolorow, Robert. "Toward a Functional Definition of Narcissism." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 56 (1975): 179–85.

Strickland, Sophie LM. "Conscientious Objection in Medical Students: A Questionnaire Survey." *Journal of Medical Ethics* 38, no. 1 (2012): 22–25.

Stump, Eleonore. "The Atonement and the Problem of Shame." *Journal of Philosophical Research* 19 (2016): 111–29.

Sullivan, Shannon. *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.

Sznycer, Daniel, John Tooby, Leda Cosmides, Roni Porat, Shaul Shalvi, and Eran Halperin. "Shame Closely Tracks the Threat of Devaluation by Others, Even Across Cultures." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2016): 201514699.

Tangney, June Price, Jeffrey Stuewig, and Debra J. Mashek. "What's Moral About the Self-Conscious Emotions?" In *The Self-Conscious Emotions*, edited by Jessica L. Tracy, Richard W. Robins and June Price Tangney, 21–37. New York: The Guilford Press, 2007.

Tangney, June Price, Patricia Wagner, and Richard Gramzow. "Proneness to Shame, Proneness to Guilt, and Psychopathology." *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 101, no. 3 (1992): 469.

———. "Moral Emotions and Moral Behavior." *Annual Review of Psychology* 58, no. 1 (2007): 345–72.

Tangney, June Price. "Conceptual and Methodological Issues in the Assessment of Shame and Guilt." *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 34, no. 9 (1996/09/01/1996): 741–54.

Tangney, June Price, and Ronda L. Dearing. *Shame and Guilt.* New York: Guildford, 2002.

Tangney, June Price, and Kurt W. Fischer. *Self-Conscious Emotions: The Psychology of Shame, Guilt, Embarrassment, and Pride.* New York: Guilford Press, 1995.

Taylor, Charles. *Human Agency and Language.* Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Taylor, Gabriele. *Pride, Shame and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

———. "Shame, integrity, and self-respect." In *Dignity, Character, and Self-Respect*, edited by Robin S. Dillon. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Teroni, Fabrice, and Otto Bruun. "Shame, Guilt and Morality." *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2011): 223–45.

Thomason, Krista K. "Shame, Violence, and Morality." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91, no. 1 (2015): 1–24.

Thomson, Rosemarie Garland. *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body.* New York: New York University Press, 1996.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps.* New York: Metropolitan, 1996.

Tomkins, Silvan S. *Affect Imagery Consciousness.* Electronic resource. New York: Springer Publishing, 2008.

Tomkins, Silvan S., and E. Virginia Demos. *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tomkins.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Tracy, Jessica L., and Richard W. Robins. "Putting the Self into Self-Conscious Emotions: A Theoretical Model". *Psychological Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (2004): 103–25.

———. "The Self in Self-Conscious Emotions. A Cognitive Appraisal Approach." In *The Self-Conscious Emotions: Theory and Research*, edited by Jessica L. Tracy, Richard W. Robins and June Price Tangney. New York: Guilford Press, 2007.

Tracy, Jessica L., Richard W. Robins, and June Price Tangney. *The Self-Conscious Emotions: Theory and Research.* New York: Guilford Press, 2007.

Trzesniewski, Kali H., M. Brent Donnellan, and Richard W. Robins. "Is 'Generation Me' Really More Narcissistic Than Previous Generations?". *Journal of Personality* 76, no. 4 (2008): 903–18.

Twenge, Jean M. "The Evidence for Generation Me and Against Generation We." *Emerging Adulthood* 1, no. 1 (2013): 11–16.

———. *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before.* New York: Free Press, 2006.

———. *I-Gen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood (What This Means for the Rest of Us).* New York: Atria Books, 2017.

Van de Vijver, Fons J.R., and Kwok Leung. *Methods and Data Analysis for Cross-Cultural Research.* Vol. 1.Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997.

van der Kolk, Bessel A. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma.* New York: Viking, 2014.

van der Ven, J. A. *Formation of the Moral Self.* Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998.

Van Huyssteen, J. Wentzel. *Alone in the World?: Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2006.

Vetlesen, Arne Johan. "A Case for Resentment: Jean Améry Versus Primo Levi." *Journal of Human Rights* 5, no. 1 (2006): 27–44.

———. "Det Er Ofrene Som Skammer Seg." In *Skam: Perspektiver På Skam, Ære Og Skamløshet I Det Moderne*, edited by Trygve Wyller. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2001.

———. *Evil and Human Agency: Understanding Collective Evildoing.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

———. *Studier I Ondskap.* Oslo: Universitetsforlag, 2014.

Vignoles, Vivian L., Ellinor Owe, Maja Becker, Peter B. Smith, Matthew J. Easterbrook, Rupert Brown, Roberto González, et al. "Beyond the 'East–West' Dichotomy: Global Variation in Cultural Models of Selfhood." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 145, no. 8 (2016): 966–1000.

Ward, Graham. "Adam and Eve's Shame (and Ours)." *Literature and Theology: An International Journal of Religion, Theory, and Culture* 26, no. 3 (2012): 305–22.

Weitz, Rose, and Samantha Kwan. *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

West, C., and D. H. Zimmerman. "Doing Gender." *Gender & Society* 1, no. 2 (Jun 1 1987): 125–51.

Wettlaufer, Jörg. "Neurohistorical and Evolutionary Aspects of a History of Shame and Shaming." *RCC Perspectives*, no. 6 (2012): 49–54.

Woodhead, Linda, and Paul Heelas: *Religion in Modern Times. An Interpretive Anthology.* Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

Woodhead, Linda. "On the Incompatibility between Christianity and Holistic Spirituality; A Reply to Jan-Olav Henriksen." *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 19 (2006): 49–61.

Wright, David. *Downs: The History of a Disability.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Zahavi, Dan. *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame.* 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.