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### **Shame and the exposed self**

On many standard readings, shame is an emotion that in an accentuated manner targets and involves the self in its totality. In shame, the self is affected by a global devaluation: it feels defective, objectionable, condemned. The basic question I wish to raise and discuss is the following: What does the fact that we feel shame tell us about the nature of self? What kind of self is it that is affected in shame?

#### 1. Shame and self-reflection

My point of departure will be the work of Michael Lewis. Lewis is not only the author of a highly influential monograph entitled *Shame: the exposed self*, he is also the author of numerous articles and book chapters on shame and self-conscious emotions in various handbooks and standard reference works dealing with these topics.

Lewis starts out by arguing that emotions come in many different forms and shapes. Emotion research has spent much time investigating what Ekman called the basic six: joy, fear, sadness, surprise, anger and disgust. Allegedly these emotions emerge early in human development, they have a biological basis, a characteristic facial expression, and are culturally universal. It is fairly obvious, however, that these basic or primary emotions do not exhaust the richness of our emotional life. Think merely of more complex emotions like embarrassment, envy, shame, guilt, pride, jealousy, remorse or gratitude. According to Lewis, one useful way of classifying the different emotions is by operating with a distinction between self-conscious vs. non-self-conscious emotions. Whereas primary emotions do not involve self-consciousness, the more complex emotions do (Lewis 2007, 136). Indeed on Lewis' account, the latter group of emotions involves elaborate cognitive processes, they all come about through self-reflection or introspection (Lewis uses both concepts interchangeably), they all involve and require the concept of self. Thus, a developmental presupposition for experiencing such emotions is that the child is in possession of a self-concept or a self-representation, which according to Lewis only happens from around 18 months of age.

In order to assess Lewis' theory it is necessary to say a few words about his terminology. Lewis basically operates with a distinction between subjective self-awareness and objective self-awareness.<sup>1</sup> On Lewis' account all living systems from the simplest to the most complicated regulate and monitor themselves. Some of the examples he provides concerns the way a body tracks the level of CO<sub>2</sub> in its blood, or the way in which t-cells differentiate themselves from foreign protein (Lewis 2003, 279). For Lewis this self-regulation and self-other differentiation requires a certain amount of subjective self-awareness, but for Lewis, we are here dealing with a form of self-awareness that is unconscious (Lewis 1992, 16, 27).<sup>2</sup> All living systems possess subjective self-awareness, only very few attain the level of objective self-awareness which denotes a much higher representational complexity. The moment this level is attained, however, experiences and emotions become conscious. Only from that moment on are they like something to or for us. Thus, on Lewis' account, it is only when we consciously reflect upon ourselves, only when we direct our attention inwards and internally attend to our own mental states as objects of attention, that they become conscious (Lewis 1992, 29). Lewis illustrates this idea with the following example: A loud noise may put me in a state of fright. But I only consciously experience the state of fright if I reflect upon it. Prior to reflection, the fright remains unconscious. Considered from a developmental point of view, Lewis claims that prior to the emergence of objective self-consciousness, i.e., before the infant develops a concept of self and an objective self-representation, the infant might have emotional states, but none of these states are conscious (Lewis 2004, 273-274), just as it doesn't have any other conscious experiences.

Lewis goes on to distinguish two groups of self-conscious emotions. Both groups involve self-exposure and objective self-consciousness, i.e., self-reflection. But whereas the first involves non-evaluative

exposure, the second involves both self-exposure and evaluation. The first group includes embarrassment, empathy and envy and emerge around 18 month. The second group emerges around 36 months, it includes shame and guilt and requires the ability to appropriate and internalize standards, rule and goals, and to evaluate and compare one's behavior vis-à-vis such standards (Lewis 2007, 135).

Let me quickly summarize Lewis' basic claim. On his view, increasing cognitive capacities allow for objective self-awareness and thereby for self-conscious emotions like embarrassment, empathy and envy. When joined with an even more complex cognitive capacity for standards, rules, and goals, self-conscious evaluative emotions like pride, shame and guilt emerge.

There is much one could take issue with here. Let me focus on Lewis' very distinction between primary and secondary emotions. As Lewis writes:

I suggest that emotions can be classified in relation to the role of the self. The elicitation of fear, joy, disgust, surprise, anger, sadness and interest does not require introspection or self-reference. Therefore, let us consider these emotions as one set. The elicitation of jealousy, envy, empathy, embarrassment, shame, pride, and guilt does require introspection or self-reference. These emotions constitute another set. [...] Thus, I propose that the difference between primary and secondary emotions is that the secondary emotions involve self-reference. Secondary emotions will be referred to as *self-conscious emotions*; shame is a self-conscious emotion (Lewis 1992, 19-20).

But is it really true that primary emotions are non-self-conscious, and that they lack a reference to self? I think this claim can be disputed in at least two ways. The first way is to endorse a notion of pre-reflective self-consciousness, and to argue that our experiential life is characterized by an ongoing sense of self (cf. Zahavi 2005). If one accepts the line of thinking, it makes no sense to single out the complex emotions as self-conscious emotions, since all emotions, in so far as they are experienced first-personally by the subject, are self-conscious. Of course, Lewis might object that emotions like fear, anger, and joy are not consciously experienced by the subject, at least not prior to being taken as objects of reflection, which only happens from when the child is around 18 months of age. But I have to admit that I find this view absurd, especially if we consider that Lewis would also have to deny that infants (and animals) can consciously experience pain, exhaustion, frustration etc. After all, according to Lewis our mental states only become conscious the moment they are introspectively taken as objects. In that sense, objective self-consciousness is a precondition for consciousness. But by arguing in this manner, Lewis is committed to the view, that animals and infants who lack higher-order representational skills will also lack phenomenal experiences.

It is not difficult to detect the influence of both theory-theory as well as higher-order representational theory in Lewis' considerations. This combination is not unique. For comparison, consider Gallup's work on mirror self-recognition. On several occasions, Gallup has argued that conscious experience necessarily presupposes self-awareness. Either one is aware of being aware, or one is unaware of being aware, and the latter amounts to being unconscious (Gallup 1985, 638). In continuation of this line of thought, Gallup then claims that organisms that lack the ability to monitor their own mental states are mindless (Gallup 1982, 243, 245), and that although most organisms behave as if they are conscious and minded (Gallup 1982, 242), prior to the emergence of self-awareness as evidenced from their ability to pass the mirror self-recognition task, they lack conscious experience, and only possess unconscious sensations and pains, etc. (Gallup 1985, 638). This conclusion has rather dramatic implications not only for our ascription of an experiential life to infants, but also to all those animals that remain incapable of recognizing their own mirror image.

But back to Lewis. The second way to question Lewis' distinction is by arguing that emotions – to an even larger extent than perceptions or cognitions – are self-referential and self-involving. Consider that we respond emotionally to that which matters to us, to that which we care about, to that towards which we are not indifferent. In that sense, one might argue that emotions involve appraisals of what has importance, significance, value and relevance to oneself. This doesn't merely hold true for complex emotions like guilt, shame or pride, but certainly also for emotions like joy, disgust, anger and fear. Don't misunderstand me. I am not denying that there are interesting differences between emotions like anger and fear, and emotions like shame and repentance. I just don't think the relevant difference is whether or not the emotions in question are self-conscious or self-referential or not.

But where then should one search for the difference? A possibility would be to claim that the different types of emotions are self-involving in different ways. Consider again, the title of Lewis' book. *Shame: The exposed self*. This is how Lewis explains the subtitle:

The subtitle of this book is *The Exposed Self*. What is an exposed self and to whom is it exposed? The self is exposed to itself, that is, we are capable of viewing ourselves. A self capable of self-reflection is unique to humans (Lewis 1992, 36).

In short, Lewis defines the exposure in question as one of being exposed to oneself. That is, when he talks of the exposed self, he is referring to our capacity for self-reflection. But is this not to basically miss the crucial point? Compare by contrast the following remark by Darwin: "It is not the simple act of reflecting on our own appearance, but the thinking what others think of us, which excites a blush" (Darwin 1872/1965, 325).

## 2. Others in mind

Let me turn to an alternative account that specifically argues that shame rather than merely being a self-reflective emotion, an emotion involving negative self-evaluation, is an emotion that reveals our relationality, our being-for-others. I am of course thinking of the account that Sartre offers in *Being and Nothingness*.

One of Sartre's central claims in that book is that consciousness is essentially characterized by intentionality. Consciousness is as such consciousness of something. Sartre also claims, however, that each and every intentional experience exists in such a way that it is implicitly self-given, or as Sartre puts it, it is "for itself." This self-giveness of experience is not simply a quality added to the experience, a mere varnish; rather for Sartre the very *mode of being* of intentional consciousness is to be *for-itself* (*pour-soi*), that is, self-conscious (B&N: 10, cf. Zahavi 1999). When speaking of self-consciousness as a permanent feature of consciousness, Sartre is, however, not referring to what we might call reflective self-consciousness. Reflection (or higher-order representation) is the process whereby consciousness directs its intentional aim at itself, thereby taking itself as its own object. According to Sartre, however, this type of self-consciousness is derived; it involves a subject-object split, and the attempt to account for *self-consciousness* in such terms is, for Sartre, bound to fail. It either generates an infinite regress or accepts a non-conscious starting point, and he considers both options unacceptable (B&N: 8).

According to Sartre, the right alternative is to accept the existence of a pre-reflective and non-objectifying form of self-consciousness. To put it differently, on his account, consciousness has two different modes of givenness, a pre-reflective and a reflective. The first has priority since it can prevail independently of the latter, whereas reflective self-consciousness always presupposes pre-reflective self-consciousness. So to repeat, for Sartre pre-reflective self-consciousness is not an addendum to, but a constitutive moment of the original intentional experience. If I consciously see, remember, know, think, hope, feel or will something, the experience in question is not like nothing to me, I am not self-blind, rather it is given to me in a non-objectifying, tacit manner.

This is Sartre's basic account. In the third part of *Being and Nothingness* Sartre modifies and complicates matters insofar as he argues that there is a type of self-consciousness that is intersubjectively mediated, i.e., which has the other as its condition of possibility. Sartre initially argues that there are modes of consciousness which although remaining strictly for-itself, i.e., characterized by pre-reflective self-consciousness, nevertheless points to a very different type of ontological structure. More specifically he makes the somewhat enigmatic claim that there are modes of consciousness which although they are mine nevertheless reveals to me a being which is my being without being-for-me (B&N: 245). To better understand what Sartre is up to, let us consider the example he himself introduces, namely the feeling of *shame*.

According to Sartre, shame is a form of intentional consciousness. It is a shameful apprehension of something, and this something happens to be myself. I am ashamed of what I am, and to that extent shame also exemplifies an intimate self-relation. As Sartre points out however, shame is not primarily and originally a phenomenon of reflection. I can reflect upon my feeling of shame, but I feel shame prior to reflecting upon it, shame is, as he puts it, "an immediate shudder which runs through me from head to foot without any discursive preparation" (B&N: 246). Indeed and more significantly, in its primary form shame is not a feeling I can simply elicit on my own through reflection, rather shame is shame of oneself before the other (B&N: 246, 312). It presupposes the intervention of the other, and not merely because the other is the one before whom I feel ashamed, but also and more significantly because the other is the one that constitutes that of which I am ashamed. I am ashamed of myself, not qua elusive first-person perspective, but qua the way I appear to the other. Thus although shame exemplifies a self-relation, we are on Sartre's account dealing with a mediated form of self-relation, one where the other is the mediator between me and myself.

To feel shame is – if ever so fleetingly – to accept the other's evaluation; it is to acknowledge that I am that object that the other looks at and judges. In being ashamed, I accept the judgment of the other.

I *am* the way the other sees me (B&N: 246, 287). Sartre's central claim is consequently that for shame to occur there must be a relationship between self and other where the self cares about the other's evaluation. Moreover, according to Sartre it makes no difference whether the evaluation of the other is positive or not, since it is the objectification as such that is shame-inducing. As he writes:

Pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being *an* object; that is, of *recognizing myself* in this degraded, fixed and dependent being which I am for the Other. Shame is the feeling of an *original fall*, not because of the fact that I may have committed this or that particular fault but simply that I have "fallen" into the world in the midst of things and that I need the mediation of the Other in order to be what I am (B&N: 312).

### 3. Varieties of shame

There are many details of Sartre's analysis that call for further clarification, and his account has not gone unchallenged. Let me first consider a few important differences between his account of shame and an earlier phenomenological analysis, namely the one we find in Max Scheler's long 1913 essay "Scham und Schamgefühl."

In contrast to Sartre, Scheler emphasizes the need for a differentiation between several distinct forms of shame. Sartre only discusses *honte*, but French has the distinction between *honte* and *pudeur*, whereas German has the distinction between *Schande* and *Scham*. Both meanings can be found in the definitions of shame provided by the Oxford English Dictionary. The OED distinguishes the painful emotion arising from the consciousness of something dishonoring or disgraceful in one's own conduct from our sense of shame, i.e., our perception of what is improper or disgraceful. If one accepts this differentiation (and other relevant distinctions such as the one between discretion shame, disgrace shame, anticipatory shame, conformity shame etc.), one would have to reject the idea that shame is a negative and repressive emotion per se, one we should aim to remove from our lives (cf. Schneider 1987). As already Plato pointed out in the *Laws*, shame is what will prevent man from doing what is dishonorable (Plato 647a). Similarly, a sense of shame might also be what allows us to be tactful, to respect the integrity and privacy of others.<sup>3</sup> On his part, Scheler distinguishes the extremely painful experience of repenting shame (*Schamreue*), a burning shame that is backward looking and full of piercing sharpness and self-hatred, from the protecting shame of the blushing virgin which, on his view, is characterized by lovely warmth (Scheler 1957, 140). Moreover, he argues that the occurrence of shame testifies to the presence of a certain self-respect and self-esteem; it is only because one expects oneself to have worth that this expectation can be disappointed and give rise to shame (Scheler 1957, 141, cf. Taylor 1985, 80-81). By comparison, the very notion of shamelessness indicates that the possession of a sense of shame is a moral virtue.<sup>4</sup>

Another important difference is that while Scheler would agree with Sartre that shame is a self-involving emotion, he explicitly rejects the claim that shame is essentially a social emotion, one that by necessity involves others (Scheler 1957, 78). Rather for Scheler, the central feature of shame is that it concerns a tension between our aspirations and ideals on the one hand and our awareness of our finitude and helplessness on the other (Scheler 1957, 68), and he argues that there is a self-directed form of shame which is just as original as the shame one can feel in the presence of others (Scheler 1957, 78). For obvious reasons, Scheler didn't discuss Sartre's concrete analysis, but a more recent and related criticism of Sartre's emphasis on the role of the other can be found in Gabriele Taylor's by now classical contribution *Pride, shame, and guilt: emotions of self-assessment*.

Taylor initially argues that Sartre's account of shame is too simplistic in that it only covers a limited range of cases (Taylor 1985, 59). I would to some extent agree with this assessment, just as I also think, Sartre's analysis could have profited from a more meticulous differentiation between the members of the so-called shame-family of emotions, e.g., shame, embarrassment, humiliation etc. In addition, however, she also raises two more specific objections. She first claims that Sartre is wrong in arguing that shame necessarily entails that the observer is critical of the agent, since positive praise might under certain circumstances also be shame-inducing, and she furthermore denies that shame always entails that the subject in question adopts and accepts the evaluation of the observer (Taylor 1985, 60). Here I would disagree, however. After all, as we have just seen, Sartre's point isn't that the gaze has to be critical in order to be shame-inducing; rather it is its objectifying character that is decisive. As for the claim that one can feel shame when faced with the other's evaluation, even if one doesn't accept or share the evaluation, one kind of example that allegedly would support this view is the following: When giving mouth-to-mouth respiration to a girl after you have saved her from drowning, you are accused by passers-by of taking advantage of the girl.

If this episode were shame-inducing, it might precisely constitute a case where you are shamed by the other's evaluation although you don't share it and know it to be false. However, I think it would be more correct to classify the example as a case of embarrassment than of shame. Why? Because (dis)grace shame in contrast to embarrassment is crucially linked to a decrease of self-esteem, and I don't think the situation in question would occasion such a decrease. To feel ashamed is to feel unworthy, is to feel that the negative assessment of the other is deserved. If one didn't care about the other's opinion, if her (lack of) recognition didn't matter to one, if one held her opinions in contempt, she wouldn't be able to shame us. As already Aristotle points out in his *Rhetoric*, the people we feel shame before are those whose opinion of us matters to us (Aristotle 1384a25).

If we turn to Taylor's positive account, she argues that shame is crucially related to a shift in the agents' perspective on him- or herself; a shift that specifically occasions the realization of an adverse discrepancy between the agent's assumptions about himself till now and the perspective offered by a more detached observer (Taylor 1985, 66). According to Taylor, this shift is typically brought about by the realization that one is or could be the object of another's attention. In contrast to Sartre, however, the other is for Taylor merely a means to this shift. Because although the adverse *judgment* – and for Taylor shame is a rather sophisticated type of self-consciousness in that it amounts to a reflective self-evaluation (Taylor 1985, 67) – is brought about by the realization of how one's position is or may be seen from an observer's point of view, there is in the final self-directed judgment no reference to such a point of view. The final judgment concerns oneself only. One is degraded absolutely and not just relative to a specific observer or audience (Taylor 1985, 68). This latter point is important since it allows for the continuation of the feeling of shame even after a change of situation or context. And for Taylor this points to one of the important differences between shame and embarrassment. In embarrassment the focus is on the agent's appearance to others, on the impression he makes on others in a given situation. Given that the concern is always with one's own position vis-à-vis others, embarrassment is a more social emotion than shame. But this is also what, according to Taylor, makes it a less painful and shattering experience. Given that the focus is merely on how one presents oneself in a specific context vis-a-vis a given audience, the embarrassment can be alleviated by changing the situation and context, whereas shame concerns an absolute failure, an adverse judgment of the person as a whole, which is why it typically persists even after the shame-inducing situation has changed or ceased (Taylor 1985, 70-76).

Although Taylor in the course of her treatment can point to examples of shame where the social dimension is less perspicuous, although she can come up with counter-examples that doesn't easily fit Sartre's model – for instance, by referring to an artist who feels ashamed because his last work doesn't match the quality of his earlier creations (Taylor 1985, 58) -, this doesn't in and of itself show that Sartre's account fails to capture a central type of shame. Indeed, I think one problem with Taylor's account is that she commits the same kind of mistake as Sartre, and offers us an account with too few distinctions.

Let us take the case of a person who has done something he or she believes shouldn't be done (or failed to do something, he or she believes ought to be done). In such a situation, one might indeed feel ashamed afterwards. One might feel guilty about the specific deed in question, but one might also feel ashamed of simply being the kind of person who could do (or fail to do) such a thing. For a concrete and somewhat extreme example, consider a case discussed by Hutchinson. It concerns Léopard, who committed atrocities against innocent individuals during the Rwanda genocide. Several years later, Léopard is interviewed while in prison, and he recounts how he has subsequently come to feel deep shame – despite the fact that this has led to mockery and ridicule from his comrades (Hutchinson 2008, 141-143). It would be farfetched to explain Léopard's shame as the result of his comrades' negative evaluation. But should we then conclude that we here have a form of shame that isn't socially mediated, that doesn't involve others? I don't think the answer to that question is a straightforward yes, and I will come back to that in a moment. For now, however, I just want to contrast this kind of repenting, self-reflective shame with the following examples of shame:

1. When writing your latest article, you make extensive use of passages found in an essay by a little known and recently deceased scholar. After your article has been published, you participate in a public meeting where you are suddenly accused of plagiarism. You emphatically deny it, but the accuser – your departmental nemesis – produce incontrovertible proof.
2. You are still living at your parents' place and have invited a friend home from school. When he arrives, your friend, who is black, is greeted with a racial slur by your father.
3. You are ridiculed by your peers when you show up at a high school party in out-of-fashion clothes
4. You apply for a position, and have told your friends that you are sure to get it, but after the job interview, you are informed by the hiring committee that you simply aren't qualified for the job.

5. You have reached old age, but you spend considerable time applying make-up and dressing nicely in order to keep up appearance. One morning, however, you receive an unexpected and unwelcome early morning call from visitors who see you before you have managed to make yourself presentable.

If we consider these four examples, how plausible is it to claim that others are quite accidental to the emotion in question and that the very same experience of shame could have occurred in a private setting? I don't find such a suggestion plausible at all. Consider also the phenomenal differences. I am not denying that a failure to live up to one's own standards might be shame-inducing, but the accompanying feeling of unease, self-disappointment or even self-loathing, strikes me as quite different from the acute feeling of shame we experience when faced with others. In the latter case, there is a characteristic narrowing of focus. You cannot carefully attend to details in the environment while being subjected to that kind of shame. Rather, the world recedes and the self stands revealed. As Nietzsche puts it in *Daybreak*:

The feeling 'I am the mid-point of the world!' arises very strongly if one is suddenly overcome with shame; one then stands there as though confused in the midst of a surging sea and feels dazzled as though by a great eye which gazes upon us and through us from all sides (Nietzsche 1997, 166).

This exposure is accompanied by an urge to hide and disappear, to become invisible, to sink into the ground. It is hardly insignificant that shame has frequently been associated with nakedness and that the etymology of the word 'shame' can be traced back to the pre-Teutonic term for cover.<sup>5</sup>

In order to capture this acute experience of shame it is, however, not enough to just focus on the fact that the shamed subject is thrown back upon itself. As Seidler points out, and I think this constitutes an essential insight: "Das Schamsubjekt ist ‚ganz bei sich‘ und gleichzeitig ‚außer sich‘" (Seidler 2001, 25-26). This, I think, is also Sartre's basic idea. In his analysis of the different ontological dimensions of the body, Sartre argues that the gaze of the other disrupts my control of the situation (B&N: 289). Rather than simply existing bodily, rather than simply being absorbed in my various projects, I become aware of my body's facticity and being-there. I become aware that my body is something on which others bear points of view. This is why Sartre speaks of my body as something that escapes me on all sides and as a perpetual "outside" of my most intimate "inside" (B&N: 375). To "be embarrassed by one's own body" is, as Sartre continues, an inaccurate expression. The shy person is not embarrassed by his body as it is for himself, but as it is for the other. And when the shy person longs to be invisible and disappear, it is not his body-for-himself which he wants to annihilate, but the alienating dimension of the body-for-the-other (B&N: 377).

More generally speaking, Sartre takes shame to involve an existential alienation. I would agree with this. In some cases the alienating power is a different subject, and Sartre's description of our pre-reflective feeling of shame in the face of the gaze of the other is an example of this. In other cases, the feeling of shame occurs when we sit in judgment on ourselves. But in this case as well, there is a form of exposure and self-alienation, a kind of self-observation and self-distancing.

As should be clear from what I have said so far, I am not denying that you can feel ashamed when you are alone. And of course, Sartre would not deny it either. After all, one of his most famous illustrations of the effect of the gaze, concerns the example of the voyeur who is looking through the keyhole, and who suddenly hear steps. He shudders as a wave of shame sweeps over him, but when straightening up, and looking down the corridor, he realizes that it was a false alarm. There was nobody there (B&N: 301). Sartre's interpretation of this is not that shame is after all something I can attain on my own. Rather he argues that the feeling of shame refers me to the other-as-subject, and that the other-as-subject can be present, even when the other-as-object is absent. There are various things to be said for and against this analysis.<sup>6</sup> For now, I just want to emphasize that Sartre concedes that one can feel shame when alone. But as even Bernard Williams points out – who is otherwise known for having argued contra Kant that shame *can be* an autonomous emotion – to overlook the importance of the imagined other is just silly (Williams 1993, 82).<sup>7</sup> In most cases where the shame-experiencing subject de facto is physically alone and not in the presence of others, he or she will have internalized the perspective of another, he or she will have others in mind, to use Roachat's phrase (Roachat 2009). There might be an imagined interlocutor or the anticipated presence of an audience, and even in those situations where such an audience is missing, we shouldn't overlook the fact that our personal standards are reflections of societal values and that others influence the development and formation of our own norms and values. Finally even if one could argue that the kind of shame you might feel when failing to meet your own standards is not socially mediated in any direct fashion (it is not as if you only feel shameful because you fear being found out or fear losing face) the question remains whether this kind of intrapersonal shame is not always subsequent to (and perhaps even conditioned by) the interpersonal form

of shame. This would be the view, not only of some developmental psychologists, but also of, say, Levinas.<sup>8</sup> Whatever the reply to that specific question turns out to be, however, I think the preceding discussion has shown that it is quite questionable whether the self-relation we find in shame is as self-contained and inward-directed as Gabriele Taylor and Michael Lewis claim. I would consequently dispute the claim that interpersonal shame can be reduced to or explained on the basis of intrapersonal shame.

Lewis has explicitly denied that the issue of public failure has any relevance for the emotion of shame. Rather he defines shame as an intense negative emotion that is elicited when one experiences failure relative to a standard, feels responsible for the failure, and believes that the failure reflects a damaged self (Lewis 1998, 126-127). But one problem with such a definition that focuses exclusively on an individual's own negative self-assessment is that it becomes difficult to differentiate shame from other negative self-evaluations, such as self-disappointment or self-criticism. Another problem with this highlighting of our visibility to ourselves is that it simply doesn't do justice to those undeniably social forms of shame which are induced by a deflation and devaluation of our public appearance and social self-identity, by the exposure of a discrepancy between who we claim to be and how we are perceived by others.<sup>9</sup>

Let me add one further comment concerning the relation between embarrassment and shame. Harré has argued that whereas shame is occasioned by the realization that others have become aware that what one has been doing has been a moral infraction, embarrassment is occasioned by the realization that others have become aware that what one has been doing has been a breach of convention and the code of manners (Harré 1990, 199). We might readily agree that embarrassment is less shattering and painful than shame, that it is more obviously related to awkward social exposure (due to an open fly button, a loud stomach noise, inappropriate clothing etc.) than to the violation of important personal values and that it in contrast to shame, which can be long-lasting and backward looking, is context-bound, short-lived and typically strikes quickly and by surprise. But Harré's definitions and neat distinction are clearly inadequate. Not only doesn't he distinguish between different kinds of shame, he also puts too much emphasis on an actual audience, and finally, the sharp distinction between moral infraction and breach of convention is questionable. As a case in point, consider the following vignette reported by Jacoby: A boy had been on a field trip with his class and was on a train on the way back. He got acute diarrhea, but since the toilet was occupied, he eventually defecated in his pants; something that was noticed and ridiculed by the entire class (Jacoby 1994, 7). As Jacoby goes on to explain, this episode turned out to be a quite traumatic experience for the child, and even as a grownup he remained deeply affected by it. It seems wrong to categorize this experience as a momentary feeling of embarrassment, but on the other hand, it doesn't seem plausible to categorize it either as a moral transgression. Although, one can be ashamed of moral infractions, one can certainly also be ashamed of things that have nothing to do with ethics. Indeed shame doesn't have to be brought about by something one willfully does. One can feel ashamed of one's red hair, one's weight or one's skin color. Thus, rather than linking shame and embarrassment to an infraction of moral values and social conventions respectively (an attempt that also flies in the face of the fact that the same event can be felt as either shameful or embarrassing by different people), a more plausible demarcation criteria is to link shame, but not embarrassment, to a decrease of self-esteem. This would also match well with a perceptive observation by Galen Strawson: whereas past embarrassments can furnish funny stories to tell about oneself, past shames and humiliations do not (Strawson 1994).

#### 4. Back to self

Let me return to the question I started out with: What does the fact that we feel shame tell us about the nature of self? What kind of self is it that is affected in shame?

To answer that question, let us return to Sartre. Whereas Sartre in *The transcendence of the ego* characterized non-egological consciousness as *impersonal*, he went on to describe this view as mistaken in both *Being and Nothingness* and in his important 1948 article "Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self". Although no ego exists on the pre-reflective level, consciousness remains personal because consciousness is, at bottom, characterized by a fundamental self-givenness or self-referentiality which Sartre called *ipseity*:

Thus, the Ego appears to consciousness as a transcendent in-itself, as an existent in the human world, not as *of* the nature of consciousness. Yet we need not conclude that the for-itself is a pure and simple "impersonal" contemplation. But the Ego is far from being the personalizing pole of a consciousness which without it would remain in the impersonal stage; on the contrary, it is

consciousness in its fundamental selfness [ipséité] which under certain conditions allows the appearance of the Ego as the transcendent phenomenon of that selfness (B&N: 127).

When speaking of ipseity, Sartre is referring to something quite basic, something characterizing consciousness as such. It is something that distinguishes my very mode of existence and, although I can fail to articulate it, it is not something I can fail to be. As he also wrote, “pre-reflective consciousness is self-consciousness. It is this same notion of self which must be studied, for it defines the very being of consciousness” (B&N: 100).

I have a lot of sympathy for this basic idea, and I have sought to defend a primitive experiential notion of self in a number of previous publications (cf. Zahavi 2005, 2007, 2009). The point I wish to make now, though, is that a study of shame can demonstrate the limitations of this minimal notion of self. Shame manifests our exposure, vulnerability and visibility, and is importantly linked to such issues as concealment and disclosure, sociality and alienation, separation and interdependence, difference and connectedness. The shamed self is a more complex (and complicated) self than the experiential self. I would consequently argue that the presence of self-conscious – or, to use Reddy’s recent and quite apt term, self-other-conscious (Reddy 2008, 145) – emotions such as shame illustrates the need for adopting a multi-dimensional account of self, i.e., an account that recognizes that the self is a multifaceted phenomenon and that various complementary accounts must be integrated if we are to do justice to its complexity.

Perhaps you are still wondering precisely what I have in mind. Maybe a reference to Mead can make matters more clear. In *Mind, Self and Society*, Mead argued that the self is not something that exists first and then enters into relationship with others, rather it is better characterized as an eddy in the social current (Mead 1962, 182), and he explicitly defined self-consciousness as a question of becoming “an object to one’s self in virtue of one’s social relations to other individuals” (Mead 1962, 172). For Mead, the problem of selfhood is fundamentally the problem of how an individual can get experientially outside itself in such a way as to become an object to itself. Thus, for Mead, to be a self is ultimately more a question of becoming an object than of being a subject. In his view, one can only become an object to oneself in an indirect manner, namely by adopting the attitudes of others on oneself, and this is something that can only happen within a social environment (Mead 1962, 138).

If one compares Mead and Sartre there are of course some marked differences between the two. Whereas Mead distinguishes sharply between consciousness and self-consciousness, and even claims that we prior to the rise of self-consciousness experience our own feelings and sensations as parts of our environment rather than as our own (Mead 1962, 171), Sartre would argue that our experiential life is characterized by a primitive form of self-consciousness from the very start. Despite this important difference, however, both of them highlight the extent to which certain forms of self-experience are constitutively dependent upon others. They call attention to the dramatic way our awareness and adaptation of the other’s attitude towards ourselves contribute to the constitution of self.

Much more could and should be said about shame. Indeed, what I have offered so far barely scratches the surface of this exceedingly complex and intricate emotion. Are emotions like shame, for instance, among the distinctly human emotions, in that they require language, culture and norms to find their full expression and articulation? It is hardly insignificant that these emotions are more culture specific than the basic emotions, and that a cultural perspective is indispensable for an understanding of the full complexity of these emotions. To mention an example, Chinese is supposed to contain 113 shame-related terms, and has for instance special terms for “losing face,” “truly losing face,” “losing face terribly”, “being ashamed to death,” “being so ashamed that even the ancestors of eight generations can feel it” (Edelstein & Shaver 2007, 200).

Time doesn’t permit me to discuss these issues in any further detail. Let me end with a simple question of my own concerning the relation between language and shame. Sartre argues that a linguistic self-description inevitably entails the attempt to grasp oneself through the eyes of others (B&N: 377). As he puts it, language is not just something added on to my being-for-others, but expresses my being-for-others in an original way, because it confers a significance upon me that others have already found words for (B&N: 394-395). A question worth pursuing is to what extent full-blown (disgrace) shame necessarily presupposes language-use or whether it might exist in pre-linguistic forms. This is where a closer look at the developmental literature would be appropriate; something that in any case would be also be required if one were to assess the accuracy of Lewis’ claim concerning the late emergence of shame (cf. Draghi-Lorenz et al. 2001).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Lewis occasionally distinguish two levels of subjective self-awareness, namely reflexive subjective self-awareness and representational subjective self-awareness, but these two levels only differ in terms of complexity (cf. Lewis 1992, 9).

<sup>2</sup> I think it would have been much better if Lewis had spoken of non-conscious self-regulation and self-differentiation rather than of unconscious subjective self-awareness – I find it nonsensical to attribute subjective self-awareness to leukocytes – but let me not dwell on this disagreement.

<sup>3</sup> Izard has argued that shame has two functions. It sensitizes the individual to the opinions and feelings of others and thus facilitates a degree of social conformity and social responsibility. Just think, for instance, of the teenager who carefully selects his clothing in order to avoid being shamed by his peers. To that extent it increases the permeability of the boundaries of the self. At the same time, Izard also takes shame to play a significant role in the development of self-control and autonomy (Izard 1977, 418).

<sup>4</sup> Scheler even argues that this dimension of shame is a requirement of civilization. It is the inhibiting effect a sense of shame exercises over libido that allows us to transcend auto-eroticism and seek sexual interaction with others (Scheler 1957, 111). To be it differently, shame is a condition of possibility for the erotic interest in others and therefore for the survival of the species.

<sup>5</sup> As Sartre remarks, modesty and the fear of being surprised in a state of nakedness are only a symbolic specification of original shame; the body symbolizes our defenseless state as objects. To put on clothes is to hide one's object-state; it is to claim the right of seeing without being seen; that is, to be a pure subject (B&N: 312)

<sup>6</sup> When Sartre advances the claims that the look is merely the concrete occasion of my original being-for-others (B&N 441); that the Other is present everywhere as that through which I become an object; and that this fundamental relation to the Other is the condition of possibility for my particular experience of the concrete Other (which is why the concrete encounter with a particular Other is described as a mere empirical variation of my fundamental being-for-others (B&N: 303-304)), it is difficult not to reproach him for advocating the very kind of apriorism that he was criticizing in Heidegger's account of *Mitsein* (for a more extensive criticism cf. Zahavi 1996, 114-117, Hartmann 1983, 102 and Theunissen 1977, 228-229). More generally speaking, although there are many insights to be found in Sartre's analysis of intersubjectivity, there is also a good deal to disagree with. This would include Sartre's excessively negative assessment and characterization of our encounter with others.

<sup>7</sup> As Williams continues, the internalized other need not be a particular individual, or the representative of some socially identified (significant) group, rather the other may also be identified in ethical terms. He might be conceived as one whose reactions I would respect. Some might claim that if the other is identified in such terms, then he is no longer an other. But as Williams argues, this is the wrong conclusion. Although the other doesn't have to be an identifiable individual, he is still potentially somebody rather than nobody and somebody other than me (Williams 1993, 84).

<sup>8</sup> Levinas has argued that it is the encounter with the other which conditions and makes possible the unnatural movement of reflection. Levinas sees reflection as a suspension of the natural spontaneity. It makes my thought detach from itself and join itself as if it were other to itself. But as he points out, this movement cannot arise out of nothing. It needs an impulse from without. For Levinas, this impulse comes from the ethical encounter with the other, who interrupts and disrupts my tranquility by putting me into question (Levinas 1998, 146).

<sup>9</sup> The social dimension is, of course, also quite manifest in the intricate phenomenon of vicarious shame.

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