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Sociology of shame: basic theoretical considerations

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Sociologists who concern themselves with emotions immediately face the difficulty of expressing themselves properly. Scientific language provides us with neither the vividness nor the sophistication needed if we are to appreciate the full meaning of the reality that a person experiences in all its depth and scope. For some levels of the human stream of experiences, this is even true of language in general. The world of emotions is one of those spheres of our existence that are so close to us that separation by verbalisation hardly appears possible.

The most accomplished pages of literature can at times offer us images which represent emotions that are difficult for us to access by means of language. What Dostoevsky tells of the emotional torment of the 'poor clerk' in the writing rooms of tsarist Russia, what Virginia Woolf reports about the feeling of cruel ridicule after a failed self-presentation, what Stefan Zweig is able to convey about the fear of a hidden tendency of the self being discovered or what Franz Kafka reveals about his shame in relation to his father – these are condensed representations of a collective experience that leaves every single person speechless. In this context, science is but a paltry concentrate that translates the full content of the experiences into meagre concepts and, in doing so, succeeds in capturing neither the acuteness of the inner anguish of shame nor the metaphysical indecisiveness that characterises this sensation of a momentary loss of the world.

We habitually speak of shame as something quite personal that does not really incorporate historical or social aspects. Other than perhaps fear and love, shame is perhaps the emotion that is most closely attached to the character of a person, that is positively inscribed to the body. And yet shame is also a social emotion, which is consistently present in the everyday societies and which, in these societies, plays a crucial role in human self-image and behaviour.

What is common to all emotions is that while feeling them we immediately assign a certain meaning to reality as we experience it. Shame is the feeling of having lost one's self-esteem in this reality.

This is what makes shame a social phenomenon: it arises from the network of social relations and from the low degree of recognition that we receive from others. In the feeling of shame, a person understands that he/she is in a state which he/she perceives as unsatisfactory or undignified. This is what makes shame normative: it presupposes an ideal of one's own self, which a person's actual behaviour or appearance then fails to match. Shame ultimately cannot be separated from the feeling of having violated a norm. This is what makes shame a moral emotion: the loss of personal worth that is felt is always accompanied by a feeling of guilt, by the feeling that the individual is responsible for their own inadequacy.

Shame breeds insecurity and entails a burden; shame isolates: feeling ashamed makes us lonely. It attacks our self-esteem, and we fear others will see this. This is why people tend to keep their feeling of shame to themselves. This may be the reason why sociologists have at times opined that emotions such as shame no longer matter much to life in modern societies.

This hunch is nourished by the fact that – at least in adults – shame is hardly visible in our everyday lives, it appears to be constrained to rare situations that become embedded deep in our memories and that, however, precisely because of this bear witness to the singularity of feeling shame. Everyone can probably recall a situation from their childhood or adolescence when they felt terribly ashamed. Back then, we still had to learn the norms, so there was scope for 'misbehaving'. There is also something old-fashioned about shame. Modern people may be embarrassed, but are they ever ashamed? Being invisible does not mean that something cannot exist. This also applies to shame, perhaps the most private and clandestine emotion in modern society, which not only in itself already bears the desire to hide but which is furthermore hidden itself because it is so strongly at odds with the modern maxims of one's own self-esteem. Being hidden, denied and seemingly entirely personal, the social characteristics of shame only reveal themselves gradually, reluctantly and not without obstacles on the way.

To these difficulties, we may also add something else: 'And they were either of them naked, both Adam and his wife, and were not ashamed' (Genesis 2:25). We know that this state was not to last, which is why shame appears as an ontological topic, being fundamental to an individual as such and therefore rather unsuited for analysis from a societal perspective. So what do we make of shame in a social sense, what are the social properties of shame and, finally, how is it that we are able to discern in the varied manifestations of shame a

consistent pattern of experience that leads us to perceive our own selves as worthless or contemptible, as petty or filthy, as ridiculous or ugly, as shabby or pathetic?

Sociology would be a presumptuous science if it were to attempt answers to these questions that seek to provide a coherent explanation for every single person's feeling of shame. They who do not know the limits of a theory know nothing about life, but equally nothing about science. The sociological perspective itself already constitutes a reduction. It does not strive to discuss the value content of shame, and it cannot say what shame or shamelessness tells us about the inner life of an individual person; however, it will at least be cautious when formulating its own hypotheses about the anthropological origins of shame. In the world of emotions, the sociologist is well advised to treat the object of his research as a 'social fact': socially omnipresent, embedded in norms and interactions, and therefore scarred by the applicable forms of sociation. From this perspective, shame refers to the specifics of each social process that can trigger this feeling and to the consequences for the personal interaction from which the feeling of shame arose.

Norm and identity

Conscious of the resulting limitations, a path to answering the question about the social nature of shame offers itself, and that path leads us to the type of everyday behaviour that has us signalling mutual assessments of one another. As readers will quickly be able to confirm on the basis of their own emotions, and as evidenced by all conceptual variants of shame, the feeling is associated with negative assessments of the nature of a person's own being – whether these assessments are entirely internal or occasioned by someone else. Shame is a feeling of (un) worthiness. It indicates that one's sense of self-worth is depressed or threatened. The loss of worth that we become aware of in a shameful situation presupposes that we have an image of ourselves as altogether sound and likeable – notwithstanding injuries and weaknesses that are incorporated in our image as tacit knowledge. If a person's self-esteem is affected, their whole person, their innermost essence, becomes open to debate. If we find our self-image confirmed or if we at least think it unlikely to be damaged, we feel the security of being able to safely live among others as the person whom others see.

In the throes of feeling shame, that subjective security loses its basis. Undeniably, the self-consciousness becomes aware that it has been depreciated, which calls into question our habitual or expected

participation in life with those around us. According to Sigmund Freud (2014 [1914]), shame is based on the 'social anxiety' of being abandoned or rejected. What matters here is the assessment by others or by the group, irrespective of whether that assessment is real or anticipated in our own imagination. The inner self-perception of being personally devalued then mobilises all the somatic reactions of inner inhibitions including blushing, which by virtue of the feeling of shame are part of the basic anthropological configuration of humans.

According to an expression by the American sociologist Norman Denzin (1984), shame is simultaneously a 'self-feeling' and a 'sensation of the body' – a value-laden emotion centred on one's own self, and a social affect that grows from the fear of losing existential security. The fact that shame still harbours the remains of an instinct also limits our ability to 'control' feelings of shame, to make them accessible to our consciousness. Bodily and existentially, shame overcomes us rather than announcing itself. Shame manifests itself, it is not negotiable; 'controlling one's feelings' (Hochschild, 1983) will typically not work. Sometimes one feels shame about having been shamed earlier. Then our self-consciousness reflects on our own vulnerability and appreciates how fragile and porous the borders of our own self are after all.

The emergence of shame is always tied to a person's self-ideal. This personal ego ideal provides us with a model of our own person, which we would like to see preserved or confirmed in our interactions with others.[1] In the feeling of shame, this ego ideal suddenly collapses. While a minute ago I was quite sure of myself and of the situation I was in, the shameful incident denies the identity that I showed others in my behaviour. A conflict erupts between the claimed I and the actual I, an inconsistency arises that allows others a glimpse down into the abyss of the shamed soul.

Three anxieties govern those who feel ashamed: to have lost their coherence as an actor, their acceptance as a fellow human being and their integrity as a person. In the moment of shame, an individual loses all the protection that he or she was able to build around him/herself. They lose protective distance because strangers have penetrated into hidden spheres. They lose dignity if their body, their urges or their neediness are open for inspection, if the subject was forced to make that 'inner return' (Scheler, 1957, pp 78ff) to their mere bodily existence, which the intellectual-moral person considers to be an inferior mode of being. Finally, he or she loses his/her honour to the extent that his/her claimed status within a group is no longer covered by his/her actual behaviour, jeopardising the basis for mutual esteem.

The occasion for such exposure is usually found in the personal failure to comply with a norm whose observance is part of one's self-image. According to the German sociologist Georg Simmel, shame arises whenever a person experiences 'a rupture between the norm of the personality and its actual state' (Simmel, 1983 [1901], p 142)[2] or if the person violates a norm which with their self-image expects them to comply. This presupposes that the person knows the norm and intends to follow it. Someone who is ignorant or indifferent about a rule lacks the cognitive or moral capacity, respectively, to feel ashamed about breaking the rule. Therefore, a child's shame differs from an adult's: children are uninhibited where older people are embarrassed, they are cruel where an adult shows restraint, yet they are touchy about things which a mature person can easily overlook. A child's inner map has different areas flagged for risk of embarrassment.

The same also applies to those who stand out from others not because of age-related knowledge levels but because of cultural differences, be they due to ethnicity, social position or gender. Different interpretations of life will qualify episodes of the everyday world as harbouring the potential for shame in different ways. For example, according to traditional norms, a man need not be ashamed of his body odour. By contrast, many cultures regard women as fundamentally impure and therefore expect higher standards of physical hygiene of them, which implies that they should feel sustained shame at any bodily uncleanliness. The gender-related shame of a man, by contrast, traditionally revolves around the shame that he brings upon himself through his own cowardice – even though many women hold that a brave man is a rarity anyway. The descendant of the established bourgeoisie, who quite naturally was already familiarised with the world of culture by his musical mother, in turn need not have read every single piece of commentary on the latest opera performance in order to feel at home in legitimate cultural circles – whereas the social climber, the autodidact, who had to work hard for everything he has achieved, is immediately embarrassed by any indication of cultural ignorance. Examples such as these reflect the spirit of historic times, with the patterns of civilisation as they applied then, the self-constraints that they imposed, and the idols, moods and ideals.

The hypothesis of a simple 'advance of the threshold of shame and repugnance', which the sociologist Norbert Elias (2012 [1939], p 457) formulated in his theory of civilisation, ceased to be undisputed long ago. The signum of the history of the development of civilisation appears to be not a constant increase of self-constraints and shame but rather a shift in the objects of shame with respect to which personal

self-constraints must prove themselves. In the development towards a bourgeois society, the self-constraint of persons increasingly found its role model in the ideal of sovereign individuality that everyone should project – a modern ideal that slowly but steadily replaced the priority in terms of public esteem that the group traditionally enjoyed.

Moral and social shame

Whatever flaw may be historically associated with shame, and in whatever form – nudity or uncleanliness, cowardice or greed, sacrilege or poverty (see also Chapter 4), stupidity or failure – the individual who becomes such a disappointment to him/herself that he/she wishes the ground would swallow him/her up implicitly bases this sentiment on a norm whose lack of fulfilment through failure or defeat can give rise their his feeling of shame. It is not the violation of a norm itself that has us blushing, it is the thought that others know of the violation. This is where guilt and shame – the two psychological sentries of a person, which often salute each other – part ways. 'Conscience anxiety', the basis of guilt, does not necessarily require a third party to effectively punish the self. By contrast, 'social anxiety', the basis of shame, only comes to life via the fear of being found out.

Guilt is the feeling of being responsible, through one's actions, for the infringement of a norm; shame is the feeling of having received damage to one's identity. Guilt arises from overstepping rules; shame arises from failing one's own ideals, from the discrepancy between the actual and the ideal self-image. The American psychoanalyst Helen B. Lewis (1987, p 18) has phrased this distinction in the following fitting formula: 'Shame is about the self; guilt is about things.'

Guilt and shame are not absolute opposites; in many situations they will be inseparably linked. However, conscience anxiety eo ipso has a moral quality that shame need not have. Infringements of moral norms, too, cause a feeling of shame only if the individual relates these infringements to the consequences they are expected to have on the way in which others assess him or her. Conversely, not every instance of feeling shame is preceded by an immoral action. We often feel ashamed about something that is not morally reproachable, such as about our looks or a lack of competence. Human shame is directed not just at the wickedness in us, but also at our weakness, ugliness and deficiency.

To facilitate our orientation in the maze of guilt and shame, we may differentiate a moral zone of shame from one that can only be referred to as social.[3] Moral shame corresponds to an internal imperative, social shame to external pressure. In individual cases, it may be difficult to

distinguish between social and ethical, moral and conventional causes of shame. Conventions have a tendency to be moralised; the morals themselves are a product of society, their value content is permeated with social characteristics. Also, any feeling of shame can be an internal call for us to look for a moral transgression as the cause of the ashamedness, to consider the incident that made us ashamed in the light of a personal aspiration or action that is morally reproachable. And yet the distinction between moral and social shame makes sense: it reveals to our attention those processes of social contempt and disparagement whose occasions or causes cannot be ethically assessed for their moral character because they are not due to a damnable, evil action but rather to an infringement of social conventions. Moral shame is the companion of guilt and presupposes action, responsibility, harm to others.[4] By contrast, social shame depends on none of these. It leans on a person's 'appearance', their 'negligence' and their own harm as occasions for their disparagement and lack of self-esteem.

We find occasions for social shame hidden in a range of different contexts and constellations of life. Here they represent a latent undercurrent to our experiences, which is covered by awkward silence because these occasions cannot be shared without depreciating our self-esteem. To use a simple classification, occasions for social shame can arise from a person's body, their personality or their status – the person as reflected in their physical nativeness, in their self-claimed identity and in their social esteem.

Rejection that we experience in our bodiliness or as sexual partners, violence that we physically endure, loss of control in the presence of others – these are experiences that undermine the self-confidence with which we inhabit our bodies. The shameful effect of social degradation is generally at its strongest if it concerns the body, as it affects that sphere of a person that appears most closely associated with their nature. Here the social disparagement is linked organically, as it were, to the individual, which therefore appears fundamentally and altogether worthless. Especially in modern society, which celebrates the body as the last province of meaning of a person's existence, the body carries the symbolic meaning of, in a sense, being the person's decisive representative organ. To look healthy or sick, beautiful or ugly, groomed or sordid, lean or fat is considered a visible expression of a person's inner characteristics, as a merit or a flaw of their being.

A second area of social shame is the disparagement of the identity we claim for ourselves. Unkindness received from an otherwise close person, reproach or derision suffered from others, a tactless invasion of my privacy or insults will damage the integrity of one's personality

and denigrate one. All rites of passage that, for example, a new arrival to a group must endure rely on the temporary destruction of a person's identity, which is exposed, with any flaws put on display for inspection.

Finally, failure or defeat in social competition, poor performance in relation to social norms of achievement or appearance, being discriminated against in lieu of the group that a person belongs to or the deprivation of his or her rights will threaten the status that a person was conceded or has assumed for him/herself. This is why many cultures refer to persons without any status as being 'shirtless' – they have no rights that might cover their human nakedness.

The special burden of shame, however, consist in the fact that it can be 'endless', that it can migrate from one sphere to another and then become generalised. The entire self appears worthless, fraught with errors, flawed. If the feeling of shame is in accordance with norms that a person expects him/herself to uphold, it triggers the mechanism of self-reproach. Even indignation at the disparagement cannot supplant the central experience that the perception of a person's identity in the eyes of others has become the image that this person has of him/herself. In feeling ashamed, we accept the external assessment as our self-appraisal, and we justify our humiliation as self-induced. Jean-Paul Sartre (1992 [1943], p 350) said in this context: 'my shame is a confession' (for an intensive discussion of Sartre's theory see Neckel, 1991; and also Chapter 3). This is why social shame, too, demands its own moralisation: to obtain an explanation for the meaning of the injury that one has received.

Self-confidence and humiliation

If we now enquire about the substantive content that such injuries consist in, we must look for the central experience that the ashamed subject has under the eyes of others. I propose to describe this experience as a loss of esteem, dignity or respect. To be shown respect is an expectation that people naturally have when entering into interactions with others; self-respect is an aim that a person has vis-à-vis their own self. Disrespect in turn signifies that others have thwarted these aspirations. As we feel shame, this lack of respect then manifests itself in our body and in our inner self-perception.

Sociologically, a gain or loss of respect may be reconstructed as the positive or negative prospect of being able to preserve the conditions of one's self-respect in the perception of others. Shame indicates the breakdown of self-respect under the pressure of a situation in which the actual or imagined perception by others has the subject worrying

that they will lose the respect of the group. The need for self-respect may but need not be undermined by the subject himself. It may be subjected to conditions of esteem stated by others, and meeting these conditions then becomes the price of self-esteem. This is the case, for example, with shaming rituals, which typically play off the shamed person's interest in self-preservation against their need for self-respect, so that those who state the conditions can then revel in the subject's lost dignity.

A person may also be denied all respect, which means there is no longer any opportunity for them to experience appreciation through the perception of others. He or she would then recognise the maxims of their own esteem in others, where they serve precisely as the occasion for his or her humiliation. If an individual proudly reveals something about him/herself that others consider ridiculous, then he/she have not deprived him/herself of their self-esteem through their own actions; rather, the condition for the possibility of self-esteem has been taken from them. Again, Jean-Paul Sartre is the modern philosopher on this tragic constellation. He has described like no one else the idea that humiliation is based on making someone the object of their own freedom, so that they lose their freedom and autonomy to the same extent. Humiliating a person is the most subtle form of taking possession of them because it means that the criteria of the person's self-respect have been provided by others.

This is the most negative variant of the basic anthropological situation that the human self-confidence is dependent on the perception of others, and is therefore vulnerable to that perception. A person's self-confidence does not form according to the logic of that person's self. A person's self-confidence takes reassurance from the appraisal of others, and due to them it may perish.

Status and shame

Shame refers to a person's self-esteem, which is inseparable from the esteem that others have for that person. Thus, an individual's feelings of shame always concern the person's position amid a larger social context; they are the emotional nexus between the individual and the social structure, between the social hierarchy and the person's own status position.

Sociology knows four dimensions along which status can be acquired in modern society, and these dimensions at the same time represent the social sources from which esteem in society springs: material prosperity (as evidenced by 'money'), knowledge ('certificate'), and

a person's position within organisations ('rank') and informal groups ('belonging') (see Kreckel, 1982). If we map the occasions of social humiliation ideally to these possibilities of acquiring status in modern society, the following techniques of humiliation can be distinguished:

Firstly, the technique of excluding a person prevents or terminates them belonging to informal groups. Exclusion penalises and at the same time creates strangeness – be it for social, physical or cultural reasons. To label a person as 'strange' is a particularly drastic form of contempt. It can amount to dismissing the last remaining common ground among individuals, or in the words of Georg Simmel (1950 [1908], p 408), to denying another's 'precisely general attributes, felt to be specifically and purely human'.

Loss of respect can grow into an existential feeling of shame, whose archetype is the unloved and unwanted child. The victim of this existential shame is the person who feels useless and worthless, and whose mental state the psychologist Helen Merrell Lynd (1961, pp 46f) has described as follows: 'We have become strangers in a world where we thought we were at home. ... With every recurrent violation of trust we become again children unsure of ourselves in an alien world.'

Secondly, the technique of degrading someone deprives them of the rank they held within a hierarchical organisation. It serves to create subalternity, which can permanently damage a person's sense of social value. Here, shame arises from the discrepancy between a person's self-evaluation and the public role they have been conceded. The public persona undermines the personal ego ideal and obliges the individual to present him/herself to others in a position that is at odds with his/her own maxims of self-respect. In this context, shame comes from the obligation to serve.

Thirdly, examination is the strategy for challenging someone's cognitive competence in order to demonstrate their ignorance to others. For the humiliation to be justifiable in public, the examination must be objective, so its contents must be codifiable, its procedure must be valid and its goal must be formally attainable. It is precisely its objectivity which makes the technique of assessment so effective at obliterating self-confidence – it being an unquestionable institution which in its indifference regarding the candidate's character only pushes that character all the more fiercely into the light of latent denigration. As the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1989, p 387) analysed, the educational system

> transforms social classifications into academic classifications, with every appearance of neutrality, and establishes

> hierarchies which are not experienced as purely technical ... but as total hierarchies, grounded in nature, so that social value comes to be identified with 'personal' value, scholastic dignities with human dignity ... so that privation is perceived as an intrinsic handicap, diminishing a person's identity and human dignity, condemning him to silence in all official situations, when he has to 'appear in public', present himself before others, with his body, his manners and his language.

Finally, social devaluation refers to all processes that deprive a person's work or their needs of social recognition in the form of material values, or that never grant this recognition in the first place (for a detailed discussion of the question of recognition see also Chapter 1). Devaluation ultimately produces poverty, which at the same time stigmatises the affected persons. As we know, Karl Marx stated that wages also have a moral component: someone's pay reflects, not least, the social esteem that is attributed to their work. The material disparagement of the human work effort constitutes a humiliation just as much as the denial of a decent material subsistence for those who cannot make their living from work – those who, before they can expect any help, must have their own weakness appraised by the modern state (see Walker, 2014). From poverty research and from analyses on unemployment and social policy we are familiar with the stigmatising effects of such appraisal systems. The result has been described as a feeling of inferiority in those whose social situation, way of living or competence is characterised as substandard in relation to the prevailing norms. The prototypical situation of such socially caused shame is the 'means test' conducted by authorities before the disbursement of any public welfare. In this situation, the client is in a sense forced to play off his material interests against his claim to personal self-respect. Standing in a line of competing petitioners, he must present himself as someone who is in particular need of assistance with his livelihood, thereby stigmatising himself at the same time.

Humiliations such as these serve as social techniques to preserve one's own benefits in the face of foreign claims, to classify deviant ways of life or characteristics as inferior, to increase one's power in the interaction with others. Situations of shame may be triggered by a person's own actions, by someone else's doing or by random events. For the act of humiliation to achieve its purpose, however, the responsibility for the shameful flaw must be transferred to the person to be humiliated. Throughout history, the criterion of personal

responsibility has been construed quite differently. Only in the modern world have incidents that may be attributed to a person's actions come into focus as justifiable reasons for shaming. Traditional societies derive shame from chance events, which are considered a sign from the gods. In the world of status groups, an individual will blush for his collective. In modern society, by contrast, shaming for random events or 'social circumstances' is questionable, at least officially. This reflects a historical change in the social construction of shame, a change that is internally driven by the development towards the human sense of individuality.

Individualism and self-respect

In a traditional class society, for example, people's shameful faults are only comparable to an extent because each class has its own set of norms to observe. By contrast, in modern Western society, the reference framework for social esteem is standardised to those characteristics that determine the success an individual makes of their life in a market society. In this context, a central role falls to the achievement principle as the formally indifferent but in reality socially selective guiding norm of bourgeois society. If there are no longer any legal barriers based on one's ancestry to accumulating wealth, knowledge, title and competence by virtue of one's performance, then a person's failure to possess certain resources is regarded as their personal flaw. 'Inferiority' (Neckel, 1996) – which in a class society was still a collective status that was due to unequal rights – has now become assignable to a person.

Present-day modern society has dissolved its former social milieus and continues to individualise itself. Individualisation in this context means the liberation of people from the traditions and social references as provided by class cultures, family ties, professional traditions and regional milieus. The experience of inequality and disrespect now receives the social meaning that a deficit in status is in each case attributed to the very particular characteristics of a person's biography. The subjects have the events of their social fate attributed to them as the consequences of their individual decisions. Social forms of shame are based on making social disadvantage the occasion for the moral assignment of personal failure. The individual is forced to explain a personal deficit to him/herself because collective patterns of interpretation of social inequality are losing their persuasiveness. The individual's responsibility for his/her social circumstances is declining but – it appears – so is the responsibility of the social circumstances for the individual.

This process of the individualisation of social status and social consciousness (Beck, 1992) creates the structural conditions under which social shame survives in modern society. As a person's individual responsibility for his/her own biography grows, the fear of personal failure grows by the same measure. As society increasingly sheds its traditions, the social areas in which the validity of a norm is uncertain grow. Because of the 'intersection of social circles' (Simmel 2009 [1908], pp 367ff), the spheres of unquestionable security of behaviour shrink, which increases the risk of misguided self-portrayal and 'inappropriate identities'. A central institution of the distribution of status in modern society is the labour market. In an individualised competition for opportunities in the markets and in life, the characteristics that are relevant to someone's status are not limited to the person's formal qualifications. More than ever, these characteristics refer to the 'whole person', their appearance, their lifestyle and their personal properties such as their demeanour and their communication skills; and this development thoroughly institutionalises the reference frame of shame within the labour market. Social inequality has ultimately become a biographical experience that is subject to cyclical changes over a person's life course. Periods of being tolerably established in the employment and status system more frequently alternate with instances of dropping out of the system, at which point a person will experience at first hand how unequally respect and recognition can be distributed in society. Status anxiety can thus establish itself as a constant background experience in modern life.

Because the value of individuality increases, the subject perceives shame as the sensation of impaired self-worth no less acutely than in times when every person thought of themselves not as an individual but as the representative of a group. Furthermore, the less a moral conscience determines the image of personal identity, the more the ego ideal tends to open up to external influences of social evaluation. Using the example of the American society of the 1950s, this hypothesis of a growing importance of shame in modern society was already formulated by US social psychologist David Riesman (1961), who recognised 'the fear of being shamed' as an attribute of the other-directed personality. This observation was later taken up again by social theorists such as Agnes Heller (1985) and Anthony Giddens (1991).

According to Riesman, Heller and Giddens, everyday life becomes the domain of shame, which in the course of this development once again changes its own nature. Fuelled by the social fear of inferiority, this domain absorbs the values of the societal scale of prestige, which first and foremost rewards success. The feeling of shame loses its meaning

as a virtue and value in large parts of everyday life, just to come to the fore all the more strongly as a social sanction. The modern individual thus faces a widespread expectation of shamelessness. After all, the feeling of shame documents that one is affected by the expectations of others. It means that we have allowed our emotional state to be dependent on the judgement of others, or in other words, that we have not achieved the aspired degree of sovereignty that has become the ideal today. Amid a culture that has created more space than any other for the expressivity of the individual, shame thus becomes the 'secret rest' of the personality, it becomes an unpresentable emotion for which rituals of relief are hardly available any longer. To the same extent that individuality is considered an achievement in its own right today, society expects of an individual creativity, initiative, self-esteem and confidence in their role. In this context, shame assumes the character of a secret emotion that punishes its own expression because it is so strongly at odds with the ideal of self-confident individuality. Shame is covered by awkward, oppressive silence.

Today, the fear of shame pervades modern society because the danger of losing esteem threatens the value of uniqueness. This is precisely where the old technique of social control now ties in, the technique of directing the individual towards conformity by means of signals of contempt. The fact that individualism is the conformity norm of the present age does not disperse the dichotomy of standard and deviance. To appear sufficiently individual becomes the condition for social esteem and personal self-respect. Not being capable of individualisation, be it for material, cultural, cognitive or aesthetic reasons, thus constitutes the most modern form in which shame is associated with a person in social terms. Using the example of a failed personal self-presentation on the occasion of an evening party, Virginia Woolf has left us the soul image of shame in the age of individualisation. In 'The New Dress', she writes about the feelings of her protagonist:

> What she had thought that evening when, sitting over the teacups, Mrs. Dalloway's invitation came, was that, of course, she could not be fashionable. It was absurd to pretend it even ... – but why not be original? Why not be herself, anyhow? ... But she dared not look in the glass. She could not face the whole horror. (Woolf, 1962 [1944], p 49)

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Notes

1 According to Freud, the 'ego ideal' is the mental instance by which an individual 'measures his current self'. It emerges in early childhood and changes from the narcissism of the ego into a normative self-commitment by means of which the ego seeks to preserve its 'self-respect'. The ego ideal is not identical to the superego, the conscience. The latter rather works as an internal censor to ensure that the current ego actually corresponds to the ideal ego (see Freud 2014 [1914]).

2 Translated from the German by the author.

3 The genesis and phenomena of 'social shame' are discussed extensively in Neckel (1991), where the focus of the analysis is on the meaning of social shame in the age of new forms of social competition.

4 See also Heller (1985, pp 4ff), who differentiates 'shame-guilt' as a 'social affect' felt by one's conscience, and thus ties in with ethnological studies that reported on the separation between 'deep shame' and 'shame on skin' in tribe societies. Lewis (1987, pp 15ff) also distinguishes between a 'moral' and a 'nonmoral stimulus of shame'. In the separation proposed in the present contribution between moral and social shame, we do not share the assumptions that already underlie the earlier distinction between cultures of shame and cultures of guilt in cultural anthropology. According to those assumptions, the feeling of shame lacks any internalisation of norms, whereas the sense of guilt is characterised precisely by such internalisation. The objections to this, which have been formulated in disciplines ranging from ethnology to modern psychoanalysis, are overwhelming. They may be summarised to the effect that moral drivers of shame constitute a variant in the triggering of this feeling that is not unknown even to 'primitive societies'.

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