Faculty of Humanities

Self-conscious emotions:
shame and the exposed self

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Seeley and Miller

"Though once relegated to philosophers and mystics, the structure of the self may soon become mandatory reading for neurology, psychiatry, and neuroscience trainees. For the dementia specialist the need for this evolution is transparent, as shattered selves – of one form or another – remain a daily part of clinical practice" (2005, 160)

The complexity of self

- The self as a multifaceted phenomenon

- Various complementary accounts must be integrated

- Two notions have gained prominence
  - Minimal (or core) self
  - Extended (or narrative) self

Are two notions of self sufficient?

- Minimal self = pre-social aspect of experiential life

- Extended self = strong emphasis on language

- Is there a lacuna?

- Are there not pre-linguistic forms of sociality with a direct impact on the formation of self?

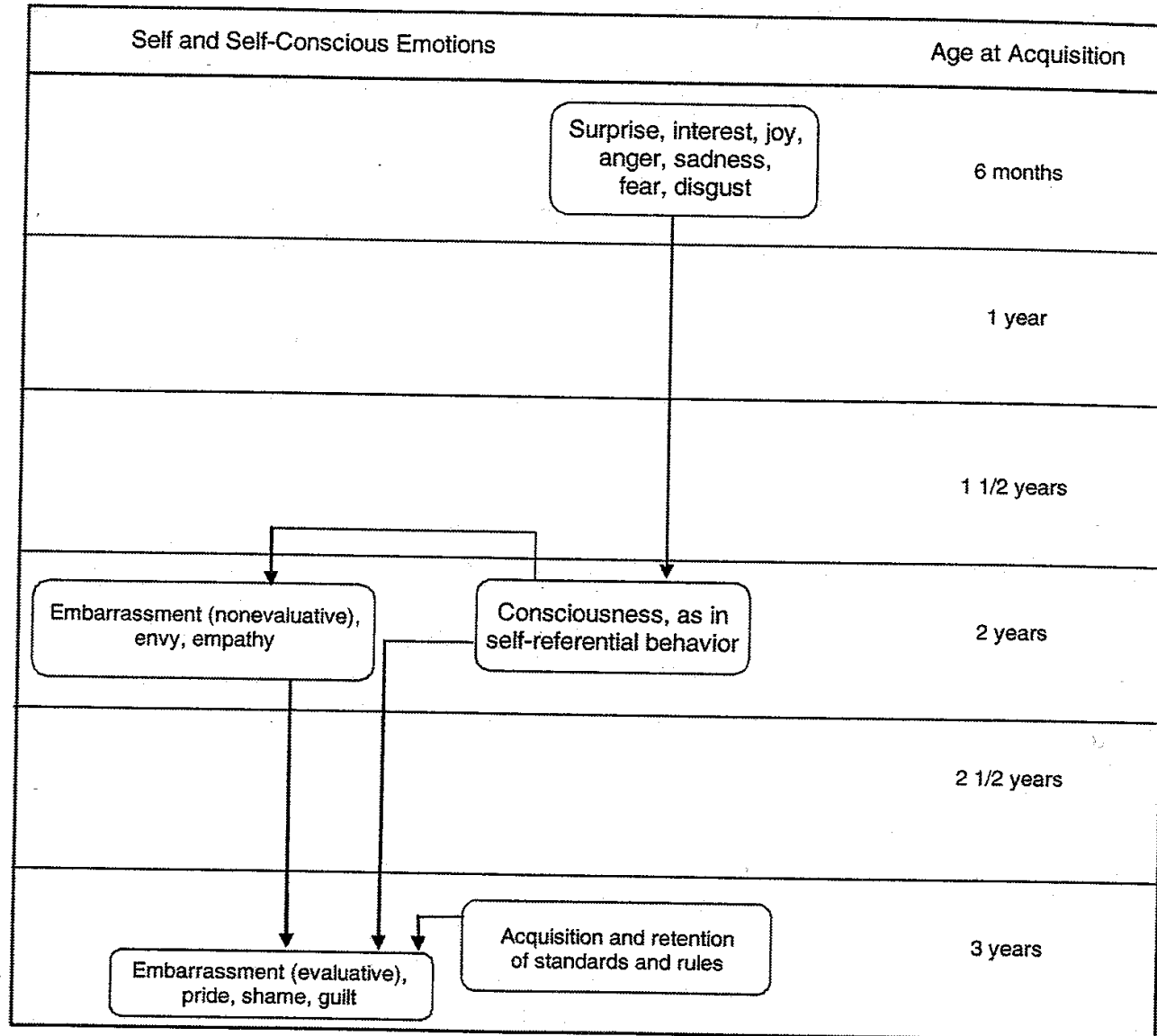- Multifaceted self ≠ multiplicity of co-existing selves.

Michael Lewis

- Basic/primary emotions:
  - Joy, fear, sadness, surprise, anger, disgust

- Complex/secondary emotions
  - Shame, guilt, pride, jealousy, remorse, gratitude

- Non-self-conscious vs. self-conscious emotions

- Self-conscious emotions presuppose a concept of self

Self-Conscious Emotional Development

Self and Self-Conscious Emotions	Age at Acquisition
Surprise, interest, joy, anger, sadness, fear, disgust	6 months
	1 year
	1 1/2 years
Embarrassment (nonevaluative), envy, empathy — Consciousness, as in self-referential behavior	2 years
	2 1/2 years
Embarrassment (evaluative), pride, shame, guilt — Acquisition and retention of standards and rules	3 years

Lewis vs. Solomon

- "..the difference between primary and secondary emotions is that the secondary emotions involve self-reference." Lewis

- "Emotions define our selves and the world we live in." Solomon

Lewis on exposure

"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."

Darwin on blushing

"..it is not the simple act of reflecting on our own appearance, but the thinking of what others think of us, which excites the blush."

Sartre on shame I

- The object of shame is myself

- Pre-reflective forms of shame

- Shame is shame of oneself before the other

- The other constitutes that of which I am ashamed

- To feel shame is to accept the other's evaluation

Sartre on shame II

"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."

Further distinctions

- Shame family of emotions: Embarrassment, shame, humiliation

- Different forms of shame

- Disgrace shame - sense of shame

- Concealing shame – protective shame

- Shame and self-integrity

- Shamelessness and loss of self-esteem

Shame and adverse self-appraisal

- Changed perspective on oneself

- Is there a reference to the other in the final self-directed judgment?

- Shame, finitude and helplessness

- Can one circumvent the social aspect altogether?

The role of others

- Prototypical forms of shame are social
  - Awkward public scrutiny
  - Exposure of discrepancy between who we claim to be and how we are perceived by others
  - Deflation and devaluation of our public appearance and social self-identity

Varieties of shame

- 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.

- You have started to drink a bit too much and each day you venture down to the local drugstore in order to buy a crate of beer. You time your purchase for the middle of the day, when there are fewer customers, but one day your old teacher who lives nearby must have gotten home from work earlier, and he sees you when you are purchasing the beers.

- You are ridiculed by your peers when you show up at a high school party in out-of-fashion clothes

- 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.

- You have a congenital disfigurement – you were born without a nose – and you see yourself in the mirror.

Shame and visibility

- Shame and nakedness
- The urge to hide
- We might feel shame when looked through or overlooked by others.
  - Actual audience
  - Imagined/anticipated audience
  - The social origin of norms and values

Mead

- The self as a eddy in the social current

- Selfhood as a question of becoming an object to oneself

- This can only happen indirectly, by adopting the perspective of others on oneself.

Joint attention

- Varieties of joint attention

- An early form might be evident in complex face-to-face exchanges

Reddy vs. Lewis

- Self-conscious emotions vs. self-other-conscious emotions

- Thoughts about self vs. affective response to the perceived attention of others

- Inward directed attention and self-evaluation vs. sensitivity to the attention of and evaluation by others

Conclusion

- An in-depth understanding of self cannot dispense with a study of our emotional life

- A study of the emotions belonging to the shame family can highlight an interpersonal dimension of self which is more complex than the minimal self while less complex than the narrative self

Question(s)

- Language acquisition and an increased capacity for perspective-switching

- Might our ability to adopt the perspective of the other on ourselves feed into the development of a narrative self?

- Do persons with autism, who have an impaired ability to recognize the perspective of the other on themselves, also have an impoverished narrative self?

Thanks for your attention!