



Faculty of Humanities



Self and other in shame

NormCon – IP3

Dan Zahavi

**Danish National Research Foundation:
*Center for Subjectivity Research***

Department of Media, Cognition and Communication

University of Copenhagen



Shame

- Shame is an emotion that targets and involves the self in its totality
- What does shame tell us about the nature of self?
- What kind of self is affected in shame?



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 self-reflection, a concept of self, internalized standards and goals, and the ability to evaluate and compare one's behavior vis-a-vis such standards



Self-other-conscious emotions

- The exposed and relational nature of self
- Increased sensitivity to another's attention and evaluative appraisal
- “..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.”
Darwin



Various questions

- A multifaceted phenomenon vs. different irreducible forms of shame
- Does self-reflection presupposes the adoption of the other's perspective on yourself
- Is shame an other-mediated form of self-experience
- The role of norms



Interpersonal vs. intrapersonal shame

- Shame vs. self-disappointment and self-criticism
- Deflation of public self-identity
- 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.



Interpersonal vs. intrapersonal shame

- One can feel ashamed when alone
- You have made a firm decision not to touch alcohol again. But in a moment of weakness you indulge your urge and commence on a drinking binge that eventually leaves you senseless. When you emerge from your stupor, you feel ashamed of your lack of self-control, of your surrender to what you consider base instincts.
- One might have internalized the perspective of others



Developmental considerations

- Newen and Zinck: Shame requires a mini-theory
- Scheler: Shame is present in early forms from birth onwards
- Nussbaum: Shame is most fundamentally an awareness of inadequacy, finitude, and helplessness that precedes any particular learning of social standards



Values and Evaluations

- The identity of the audience makes a difference
- Autonomy and heteronomy
- What is the relation between shame, the other's evaluation and the underlying value?



Further cases

- 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.
- You are a thoroughly secular woman. You are met with stern disapproval and condemnation by people, who believe that you ought to wear a headscarf when appearing in public.
- Embarrassment, Shame, Humiliation



Thanks for your attention!

