

USA

“THE SHAME GAME”

JOEL STEIN: ‘The Awesome Column’. The Times/ 4th Feb’13



‘It’s hard to feel bad for Armstrong. But it’s easy to feel great about hating Armstrong.’ (50)

Stein: ‘I believe that interview made us feel better about all the bad things we’ve done, because at least we didn’t cheat at cycling. Even better, it allowed us to avoid asking if we would have. I know I would have if I weren’t so afraid of needles. And exercising.’ (50)

Saying...

‘I’m not a fan of public shaming. Sure, shame is a powerful tool that has helped cut down on smoking, littering, (...)

But it is possible for a culture to *over-shame*: stoning adulterers, putting gossipers in stockade, (...)

Now that we can shame at a distance – via television, Twitter and blogs – we have gone shame crazy.’ (Ditto)

DENMARK



Danish international tennis player, Caroline Wozniacki (22) had been accused of racism when she publicly ‘teased’ (humiliated) American world champ tennis player Serena Williams.

Caroline did the same in 2012 when she danced on the tune of a Rihanna song round the tennis court.

SHAME

“Who am I?”

Is the *core* question we ask ourselves in our search for IDENTITY.

Shame is one of the principle sources of identity – an entrance into the self.

Inner security depends on feeling

- worthwhile,
 - whole and
 - valued from within.
- We all need a sense of **belonging and bonding** with others.

Shame is the *affect* encompassing:

- indignity,
- defeat,
- transgression,
- inferiority and
- alienation.

NO OTHER AFFECT IS CLOSER TO THE EXPERIENCED SELF THAN SHAME.

Shame is thus most central to the process that shapes the self and our identity.

To feel shame – is to feel seen in a painfully diminished way says
Gershen Kauffmann in her book: *Shame – The power of caring.*(1984)

Emeritus Professor of Sociology, Thomas Scheff, says:

‘Seeing one’s self negatively in the eyes of others - was perceived as the
origin of shame or embarrassment by Darwin, Cooley, and Goffman
himself” (4).

Charles Cooley’s said:

‘Since we live in the minds of others, pride and shame (in its broad
sense as bond affect), are the **master emotions of everyday life.**” (Ditto)

.....

Scheff too sees *shame* as the **master emotion** – because he says ... it
has *more functions* than any other emotion:

1. Shame is the key component of conscience; the moral sense. It signals moral transgression even without words.

Scheff calls SHAME *our moral gyroscope*

2. Shame arises when our ‘bond’ in a relationship is threatened – when we realised we are not living up to the other’s expectations.
3. Shame plays a role in all our other emotions – anger, love, fear, grief.

**The relationship between shame, humiliation, embarrassment and
guilt.**

Dr Linda Hartling presents the following brief distinctions regarding the above.

SHAME: 'I'm not worthy.'

- *A painful feeling arising from consciousness of something improper or dishonourable done by oneself or another.*

HUMILIATION: 'I have been made to feel inferior.'

- *To lower the pride or self-respect of; cause a painful loss of dignity.*

EMBARASSMENT: 'I did something inappropriate.'

- *To make uncomfortably self-conscious; cause confusion, shame or to; disconcert; abash;*

GUILT: 'I did something wrong.'

- *A feeling of responsibility or remorse for some offense, crime or wrong – whether real or imagined.*

HISTORICAL SHAME

The crucial role of shame in social systems

German sociologist Norbert Elias' seminal book *The Civilizing Process* (1938), explains how *SHAMING* came to be used as a method of social control in the course of European history. Elias came to the conclusion that the civilising process in Europe was built on two contradictions:

- **Increasing the use of shame as an internal control;
and simultaneously**
- **Increasing the repression of shame. (Taboo on shame)**

Elias: ‘the threshold of shame has been decreasing for hundreds of years, *but at the same time awareness* of this emotion has been **declining**’. (Scheff/12)

SAYS SCHEFF: SHAME IS ...

- **THE GLUE THAT HOLDS RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIETIES TOGETHER –
AND**
- **UNACKNOWLEDGED SHAME THE FORCE THAT BLOWS THEM APART.**

HE WARNS:

THAT WHEN LOVE (THE OTHER MASTER EMOTION) GETS DEFINED VERY BROADLY AND SHAME GETS DEFINED VERY NARROWLY IN A SOCIETY – IT MASKS THE OTHERWISE SHOCKING LACK OF COMMUNITY AND SOLIDARITY IN THE MODERN WORLD. (14)

In **Dr Evelin Lindner’s** view this process of ‘civilizing’ by means of shaming - served to keep underlings in their useful place as ‘*tools in their master’s hands*’ thus preventing them from crossing the ‘boundaries’.

‘Underlings could be ‘manipulated into humility, through shame, in short, “civilized.” she says.’

.....

The Taboo on Shame: Shame about Shame.

The taboo on shame is so strict, says Kaufman (1989/2) that:

We behave as if shame does not exist.

So our shame of what is shameful is hidden.

As such we pretend we are not ashamed – what's more - we are not even aware that we are ashamed, so well we hide it.

So referring to shame becomes taboo!!

Says Scheff: 'we are ashamed to seem evasive in the presence of a straightforward man, cowardly in the presence of a brave one, gross in the eyes of a refined one and so on'.

One way around the taboo says Scheff, is ... we use the *softer less offensive* term...*embarrassment*;

- **Embarrassment** is a weaker and shorter lasting form of shame he says, while ...
- **Humiliation** is a more powerful and often longer lasting form of shame.
- **Shame** presents and can be expressed in one of two ways:
 - a) either as re-assessment in which the anger is directed outward (projected);

or

b) as guilt, and possibly depression, where the anger is turned inward.

Interpersonal transfer of shame

- Rage as defence may lead to revenge feelings; even being acted out towards the humiliator.
- Contempt: becoming judgemental, finding fault or being condescending.
- Striving for power – an effort to compensate for internalised shame.
As power increases, vulnerability decreases to further shame. Power becomes the means we insulate ourselves against further shame.
- Striving for perfection: “If I can become perfect, I’m no longer so vulnerable to shame.” A perfectionist attempt to be everything except simply be who he or she is.
- The transfer, of blame (externalisation of blame). By blaming others the person *avoids feeling internalised shame.*
- However some learn to blame themselves – thus avoiding others blaming them.
- Internal withdrawal again too can become a way to deal with internalised shame.

When is shame good?

Good shame is temporary and moderate.

- **It can motivate Personal Change**
- **It can serve as a Guideline for Living:**

1) In the Principle of humanity (no one is subhuman)

- 2) **The Principle of humility (no person is intrinsically better than anyone else)**
- 3) **The principle of autonomy (we have control over our own actions; little over others actions)**
- 4) **The principle of competence (strive to be good-enough rather than perfect)**

Moderate shame promotes self-awareness and an appreciation of relationships.

Excessive shame lead to people who become shame-based and become:

- **Overly critical of themselves.**
- **Overly self-conscious.**
- **Unconsciously seek relationships that confirm their shame.**

Survival techniques for shame-based individuals:

- **Denial : can't admit shortcomings.**
- **Withdrawal :a protection against being judged and humiliated.**
- **Rage : it works because it drives people away so protecting the individual from revealing or feeling shame.**
- **Perfectionism**
- **Arrogance : contempt for others.**
- **Exhibitionism : A paradox – attempting to shock others, ultimately leading to more shame.**

SHAME DEFICIENCY

- **Self-centred individuals : hiding shame behind false pride**
- **Immodesty : lack of discretion in sharing private information.**
Shame deficient individuals often lack self-awareness and appear emotionally shallow, lacking discretion and tact for boundaries between people.
- **Shame deficiency discourages Mastery; people who cannot feel shame can get trapped in mediocrity and disinterest.**

Moderate shame episodes present opportunities for improvement and revitalization - and ultimately to feel healthy pride.

Shame in our culture is compensated by :

- **Over Achievement-Oriented; always have to be the best/the importance of 'positions' and rank/material possessions/always have to win arguments.**
- **Conformity and the focus on image and appearance.**
- **Prejudice and Discrimination - it promotes shame.**
- **Institutional Shaming : pecking - order at work.**

**Guidelines for healing the wounds of
shame:**

- **Shame heals slowly; be patient.**
- **Become conscious of shame feelings.**
- **Notice your defences against it.**
- **Investigate the sources (origin) of your shame.**
- **Accept shame as part of the human condition.**

One of the most unbearable kinds of shame says Evelin Lindner is when:

***‘Succumbing to humiliation, not resisting humiliation, allowing it to
have a shaming effect’.***

END

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Stein Joel, Time; February 4, 2013.