Vocabulary for the Study of Religion

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P–Z, Index

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Michael Winkelman

Shame

Here, we provide an overview of the psychological perspective on shame, focusing largely on the shame phenomenological experience and its behavioral consequences. Shame belongs to a family of emotions known as "self-conscious" (Tracy and Robins 2004a), meaning that its experience requires self-consciousness—a sense of self-awareness and the ability to reflect upon and judge one's complex self-representations. Like all self-conscious emotions, shame likely exists only in humans; however, its evolutionary predecessor submissiveness can be observed across a wide range of social animal species. Shame is distinct from similar emotions such as guilt, in ways that are important for behaviors resulting from the two emotions and their long-term health consequences. Of all the emotions that are thought to be endemic to our species, shame is least clearly adaptive at either an individual or group-level.

Self-Conscious Emotions

Self-conscious emotions are a unique class of emotions that critically involve self-relevant thoughts, feelings, intentions, and behaviors (Campos 1995; Fischer and Tangney 1995). They drive people to behave in moral, socially-appropriate ways, help them navigate social hierarchies, and, as a result, influence a range of social outcomes. Because these emotions require self-awareness and a high level of cognitive complexity, they tend to emerge later in childhood than more basic emotions such as anger, sadness, and fear. In order to feel a self-conscious emotion such as shame, an individual must focus on the implications of a given event for his or her own self or behaviors. Individuals can feel shame in response to another person's behavior, but in such cases that other person is almost invariably someone with whom the individual is closely affiliated, and thus part of his or her collective or relational self or identity.

Unlike basic emotions, self-conscious emotions are not associated with distinct facial expressions. However, both pride and shame are associated with distinct nonverbal expressions that include facial movements, but also body posture and head movement (Keltner 1995; Izard 1971; Tracy and Robins 2004b). When feeling shame, individuals drop their heads and shoulders, drop their arms to their sides and display a downward gaze. This nonverbal display is reliably identified as conveying shame by individuals across a range of cultures, including individuals living in traditional small-scale societies who do not have access to global media (Tracy and Robins 2008). This expression is also spontaneously produced following failure, by children and adults across a range of cultures, as well as the congenitally blind (Belsky, Domitrovich, and Crnic 1997; Lewis, Alessandri, and Sullivan 1992; Tracy and Matsumoto 2008; Wallbott 1998). The shame display corresponds to submission displays documented in many nonhuman species, suggesting that the display may function to communicate to onlookers that the shamed individual acknowledges his or her defeat, transgression, or failure. The expression may be appeasing; those who view it may be more forgiving of the shameful target (Gilbert 1998; Keltner 1995).

Distinguishing between Shame and Guilt

To many, shame and guilt are the quintessential "moral emotions," inextricably woven with imagery of the repentant sinner. However, though these two emotions are often mentioned in the same breath, an extensive theoretical and empirical literature underscores striking differences in their phenomenology and social and intrapsychic consequences (Lewis 1971; Lindsay-Hartz

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1984; Tangney and Dearing 2002; Wicker, Payne, and Morgan 1983). Both emotions are elicited by similar types of moral transgressions, but the cognitive interpretations individuals make for these transgressions tend to distinguish between the two emotions (Tracy and Robins 2006). Consistent with a suggestion first made by Lewis (1971), numerous studies have shown that shame tends to emerge when individuals blame their stable, global selves—who they are—for a wrongdoing, whereas guilt is more likely to occur when individuals blame an unstable, specific behavior (Tangney and Dearing 2002; Tracy and Robins 2006). Although this distinction may appear subtle, this differential emphasis on self versus behavior sets the stage for very different emotional experiences, patterns of motivation, and subsequent behavior. While both shame and guilt emerge from events that focus attention on the self, guilt is more likely to occur when the event is appraised as an exception rather than reflective of some underlying stable characteristic, and when the individual feels a sense of control over the cause of the event, such that it can be prevented in the future. In contrast, shame is more often triggered in response to behaviors that are perceived to be part of an individual's stable personality, over which he or she has little control (Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, and Gramzow 1992; Tracy and Robins 2004a)

Likely because of its deep impact on one's self-perceptions, studies examining individuals across a diverse range of age groups and populations have found that those who are prone to shame are more likely to experience a host of psychological symptoms, including depression, generalized and social anxiety, low self-esteem, post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, substance abuse, self-injurious behavior and suicidal ideation (see Tangney and Tracy 2012 for a review). Other studies have found that shame-inducing events lead to increased levels of proinflammatory cytokine activity and cardiovascular reactivity, suggesting negative downstream consequences for physical health (see Dickerson, Gruenwald, and Kemeny 2004 for a review; Keltner 1995; Tracy and Robins 2004b). Recovering alcoholics who display shame about their addiction are more likely to relapse in the first months of their sobriety, and tend to experience worsened physical and mental health (Randles and Tracy 2013). In contrast, there is less consensus regarding the implications of guilt for psychopathology. Although guilt is frequently cited in clinical theory as being characterized by chronic self-blame and rumination, Tangney, Burggraf, and Wagner (1995) argue that guilt is most likely harmful when it becomes infused with shame. Empirical results are consistent with this view, with several studies showing that guilt-prone children, adolescents, and adults are not at increased risk for depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and so on when shared variance with shame-proneness is statistically removed.

Some anthropologists have noted that particular cultures appear to emphasize either shame or guilt more clearly in their methods of social control. While some cultures may emphasize shame more strongly (Benedict 1967), the bulk of evidence indicates that shame is universally experienced and present in all societies. The evidence for guilt as a universal emotion is less clear, and it may be reasonable to discuss cultures in terms of their relative reliance on guilt as a control mechanism. However, systematic attention to this question is not currently available.

The Impact of Shame on Social Behavior

One of the consistent themes emerging from research is that, unlike guilt, shame is not likely to promote affiliative and socially-beneficial responses to transgressive behavior. In fact, shame more typically promotes attempts to deny, hide, or escape the shame-inducing situation, whereas guilt is more likely to result in reparative actions such as confessing, apologizing, or undoing (e.g., de Hooge, Zeelenberg, and Breugelmans 2007; Lindsay-Hartz 1984; Wicker, Payne, and Morgan 1983). This contrast may be due in part to the differential effect these two emotions have on perspective-taking and empathy. While individu-

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als who are prone to guilt tend to show high levels of empathic concern, shame-proneness has been associated with an impaired capacity for empathy and a propensity to focus exclusively on one's own personal distress. Similarly, individuals tend to convey greater empathy for others when recalling past guilt-inducing events; in contrast, the induction of shame tends to inhibit empathy (Leith and Baumeister 1998; Tracy and Robins 2006) and perspective taking (M.-L. Yang, Yang, and Chiou 2010).

Shame is also uniquely related to anger, both at the trait level (i.e., those who are dispositionally prone to shame also tend to experience anger) and the state level (i.e., experimental inductions of shame promote anger and blame; Heaven, Ciarrochi, and Leeson 2009; Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek 2007). Additionally, the anger associated with shame tends to lead to direct physical, verbal, and symbolic aggression, as well as indirect aggression (e.g. harming something important to the target), displaced aggression, self-directed aggression and ruminative unexpressed anger (Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall, and Gramzow 1996). Because shame is associated with the belief that one cannot change his or her problematic self, hostility may be a defensive attempt to protect oneself by shifting the blame elsewhere. In doing so, the shamed individual attempts to regain some control or make it difficult for others to challenge him or her, but the long-term costs can be steep. Friends, coworkers and loved ones may feel confused and alienated by apparently irrational bursts of anger. Not surprisingly, shame-prone individuals report that their anger often results in negative long-term consequences for themselves and their relationships.

The bulk of evidence suggests that at an individual level, shame is painful, interferes with perspective-taking and makes people vulnerable to depression. Despite this, shame appears to be a universal emotion, present in humans across all societies and cultural contexts (Tracy and Matsumoto 2008; Tracy and Robins 2008). Why does shame exist so universally if it is so problematic? One possible explanation is that shame functions by motivating people to avoid it; that is, they avoid "doing wrong" to avoid experiencing shame (Barrett 1995). This idea is reflected by public opinion and policies, such as the issuance of marked license plates to those convicted of drunk driving (Nussbaum 2006) and online lists of noncompliant taxpayers (Jacquet, Hauert, Pizarro, and Tracy 2012). States invoking these policies do so with the assumption that onlookers will be motivated to avoid the problematic behavior out of fear of being shamed. However, with only a few recent examples suggesting otherwise (de Hooge, Zeelenberg, and Breugelmans 2011; Jacquet, Hauert, Traulsen, and Milinski 2011), there is almost no evidence to support the view that shame encourages group-cooperation or mending relationships following conflicts. Shame-proneness does not predict whether a person will have more or fewer problems with the law throughout his or her life (Robinson, Roberts, Strayer, and Koopman 2007; Tangney and Dearing 2002), and in fact predicts a higher likelihood of recidivism for those who feel shame about their past crimes (Morrison and Gilbert 2001). In summary, there is little evidence that the propensity to experience shame serves an inhibitory function, and growing evidence to suggest the reverse.

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Daniel Randles & Jessica Tracy

Sign / Symbol

In the field of religion, signs and symbols occur in a rich variety of types. Religious communication makes use of acoustic and visual signs such as the sounds, words, or propositions of → language; relies on visual images and → icons; and employs gestures. Tactile, olfactory or taste-related signs and symbols also come into play when those involved in a particular religious form of life interpret the perceived reality in which they live and seek to orient themselves in their universe of meaning. Thus, a theory which tries to shed light on the use of signs and symbols in religious communication should be able to account for this variety instead of focusing solely on linguistic signs, for example.

This article will confine itself to a philosophical perspective on signs and symbols and take Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Cassirer 1955a, 1955b, 1957; see Höfner 2008) as its starting point. Cassirer's theory of signs and symbols is a good starting point as it avoids the common bifurcation of signs and symbols in favor of a general theory, allows for different types of symbolization, and conceives of symbol systems ("symbolic forms") as comprehensive interpretive schemes constantly refigured in a continuous process of symbolization. It is in need of emendation, however, when we acknowledge the pragmatic use of signs and symbols in religious forms of life.

A General Concept of the Symbolic—Beyond the Bifurcation of Signs and Symbols

In symbol theory, there is a long tradition of sharply distinguishing between signs, on the one hand, and symbols, on the other. Signs, it is argued, are conventional, comparatively simple instruments of designation set apart from the reality they signify. Symbols, by contrast, are seen as nonconventional, comparatively complex entities which carry a "deeper meaning" and partake in the reality they represent. Therefore, it is argued that they not only signify this reality, but make it present and manifest (for this tradition in symbol theory, see Struck 2005). This bifurcation is especially noticeable when it comes to the study of religion. Consider, for example, the claim of Paul Tillich that "the religious symbol … participates in the power of the divine to which it points," while "ordinary" signs are without this ontological relation and are thus arbitrary (1951: 239; cf. 1987). A similar approach is pursued by Mircea Eliade, who contends that religious symbols somehow "contain" the holy essence they represent and therefore have a capacity to reveal a deeper level of reality beyond normal human comprehension (1991). There is certainly a grain of truth in these and similar suggestions to differentiate signs and symbols: the awareness that signs come in different types and that the complex signs called "symbols" play an important role in the field of religion.

The proposed bifurcation of signs and (religious) symbols, however, is problematic for at least two reasons: First, the strategy to define *religious* symbols by contrasting them with "ordinary" signs unduly restricts the study of religion to a set of "complex" symbols that are central for a given religious community, neglecting the role "ordinary" signs play in religious communication. It also depends on an essentialist view of religion as a relation to the Divine or the Holy which, some

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