



Elisabeth Vanderheiden
Claude-Hélène Mayer
Editors

Shame and Gender in Transcultural Contexts

Resourceful Investigations

 Springer

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*To feel nobly, let not shame fade from
the soul.*

Wolfram von Eschenbach (around 1200)

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Chapter 1

Gender-Specific Facets of Shame: Exploring a Resource Within and Between Cultures



Elisabeth Vanderheiden  and Claude-Hélène Mayer 

Abstract Shame is a universal emotion and a social regulator that is closely interwoven with gender subjectification and normative gender binaries. It is culturally constructed and associated with other forms of intersectionality. Shame can create and reinforce social inequalities, but shame can also be used to overcome these inequalities and become powerful as a resource for personal, organisational and societal development.

This chapter introduces the publication, which offers a broad and at the same time deep insight into the topic of gender-specific facets of shame as a resource within and between the new cultures that are emerging from the current processes of transformation in our societies.

The research contributions provide new insights for researchers, lecturers and practitioners in fields such as psychology, sociology, political and educational sciences and gender studies.

Keywords Gender facets of shame · Shame · Shame as resource · Gender scripts · Gender stereotypes · Transformation

I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice. Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue—my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice.

Gloria E. Anzaldúa

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1 Introduction

Shame can be described as a universal emotion and social regulator that is closely interwoven with gender subjectification and normative gender binaries, culturally constructed and associated with other forms of intersectionality. While shame and embarrassment can create and reinforce social inequalities, they can also be used to overcome these inequalities and become powerful as a resource for personal, organisational and societal development. This chapter serves to introduce the publication, which offers broad and simultaneously deep insights into the topic of gender-specific facets of shame as a resource within and between the new cultures that are emerging through the current processes of transformation taking place in our societies.

The research contributions offer new insights for researchers, lecturers and practitioners in fields such as psychology, sociology, political and educational sciences and gender studies.

1.1 Shame Occurs and Is Constructed in Socio-Cultural Contexts

Shame is seen as a complex emotion, one that occurs in and is strongly interdependent with socio-cultural contexts, for example, in terms of its logics, triggers, reception, connotations, expressions and management.

A wide range of research has been able to demonstrate that cultural contexts have a major influence on what is defined as triggering shame, who should react to what with shame and in what form, and how shame itself is evaluated (Vanderheiden & Mayer, 2017; Mayer & Vanderheiden, 2019; Mayer et al., 2021; Sznycer et al., 2018). Shame not only reflects societal values, norms and rules, but is also an expression of individual scripts that are developed on the basis of emotional reactions and which support individuals in developing and displaying socially adequate behaviour (Murphy & Kiffin-Petersen, 2017). It is assumed that in more individualistic societies, the connotations of shame differ from those in community-oriented societies. In individualistic cultures where self-realisation and individual needs are considered particularly significant, shame may be perceived as a phenomenon that limits a person's opportunities and freedom. In such cultures, shame is more often seen as negative and something to be avoided. While various research studies (Wong & Tsai, 2007; Keltner & Haidt, 1999) show that people in Western cultures such as the United States or Western Europe often read shame rather negatively, other research shows that communities in certain Asian, African or Latin American contexts associate shame with positive attributes, as f. e. Wong and Hwang (2021) or Zhang (2020a, 2020b) for China, f. e. Budiarto et al. (2020), Cucuani et al. (2021), (2022), Saraswati (2012) as *isin* or *malu* for Indonesia. Other researchers explored Indian contexts like Bhawuk (2019) as *lajjA* or *izzat* (Singh, 2021; Saria, 2022) and

Vollmer et al. (2021) or also Hamilton (2022) as *sharam*. Research was also done for Latin America (Kerr III, 2020; Nadeau, 2019; Shymko et al. 2022) or African cultures (Matolino, 2020; Mayer, 2020; Mayer & Vanderheiden, 2021; Waghid, 2020).

Researchers therefore assume that the respective socio-cultural orientations of societies lead to different ways of dealing with shame. For example, Young et al. (2021) found that people who are culturally socialised to be more interpersonally orientated are more motivated to take remedial action after shameful norm violations, while people who are culturally socialised to be more individualistic seem to be more inclined to withdraw from such threatening interpersonal situations. At the same time, many studies also emphasise cross-cultural commonalities in relation to shame, such as the negative effects of toxic shame or the link between poverty and shame in diverse cultural contexts (Benjamin, 2020; Gubrium et al., 2014; Gubrium & Pellissery, 2016; Kollareth et al., 2018; Reifová & Hájek, 2021; Zhang 2020a, 2020b).

In addition to the socio-cultural contexts that are central to the experience and perception of shame, the concept of intersectionality emerges as a crucial lens for understanding the nuanced experiences of shame, especially in relation to gender. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), who coined the term intersectionality, describes it as the interconnectedness and interdependence of social categorisations such as race, class and gender. These categorisations result in overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage, profoundly affecting individuals' experiences.

For women, the intersection of gender with other identities, such as race, class or sexuality, often intensifies experiences of shame. Women of colour, for instance, may encounter specific forms of shame that are simultaneously gendered and racialised (Collins 2000). The societal expectations and norms surrounding both gender and race converge, culminating in intricate and often more severe experiences of shame. Similarly, women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds might experience shame differently, their experiences shaped by prevailing societal attitudes towards poverty and gender (Davis 2008).

Research also shows that shame emerges in early childhood and continues to change—contextually—throughout the lifespan (Baatz-Kolbe, n.d.; Bouson, 2016; Curley & Johnson, 2022; Gerlach, n.d.; Gilchrist et al., 2020; Gioia et al., 2020; Orth et al., 2010; Müller-Busch, 2022; Parisette-Sparks et al., 2017; Roth et al., 2022; Ryu & Fan, 2022; Worth, 2021).

Shame appears to vary in its interdependence with class (Metz & Subasi, 2021; Neckel, 1991, 2006; Parschick, 2022), and in relation to economic, participatory and educational resources (Haas, 2021; Schürmann, 2022; Ruff, 2021; Vanderheiden & Mayer in this book). It is also closely related to status and power issues (see chapters of Vanderheiden; Direk; Maire, Charafeddine & Van der Henst; Rodgers and Nowicki; Mandal in this book).

1.2 Shame Is Interwoven with Gender-Related Subjectification and Normative Gender Binaries

Numerous studies show a variety of differences between the genders when it comes to the question of why people feel shame, how shame may or should be expressed, and with what implications on a social, physical and psychological level these are associated (De Boeck et al., 2018; Else-Quest et al., 2012; Ferreira & Mendes, 2020; Nyström & Mikkelsen, 2013; Nyström et al., 2018; Shorey et al., 2011; Street & Dardis, 2018; Werbart Törnblom et al., 2015).

Tangney and Dearing (2002, 154) describe “higher levels of shame” observed in females across all age groups than in their male counterparts. This is confirmed by Riecher-Rössler (2016) who finds that women feel shame more often and more intensely than men, especially in relation to their bodies, their performance and their social competence. A German study from 2014 with almost 2000 respondents showed in all nine categories that women feel ashamed to a greater extent than men. The discrepancy was particularly pronounced in four areas: misfortunes of others (women 49.5%, men 32.8%), being criticised (women 40.8%, men 27.2%), embarrassing relatives (women 42.6%, men 31.4%), talking nonsense (women 42.6%, men 31.4%) and inappropriate clothing (women 35.4%, men 22.9%) (Statista, 2022). This result is in line with the research findings of Kalbe (2002), who concluded in a study that women experience shame particularly intensely when their personal boundaries are violated by others and when they feel helpless and at the mercy of others.

Benetti-McQuoid and Bursik (2005) describe a greater tendency towards feelings of guilt and shame for women, but a stronger tendency towards guilt for men. Miller-Prieve (2016) was also able to show that shame occurs significantly more often in women than in men. She attributes this to social and cultural norms imposed on women, which lead them to a negative self-assessment if these norms are not adhered to. Hafner-Hanner (2020) points out that in the Western context men consider shame to be a rather unmanly feeling.

Research assumes that girls and women feel particular shame with regard to their physicality and bodily functions. As early as the 1990s, Frederickson and Roberts pointed out the phenomenon of sexual objectification in Western contexts in the sense of a pronounced sexualised focus on women’s appearance, which also leads to gender-specific evaluations and expressions of emotion:

having a reproductively mature female body may create a shared social experience, a vulnerability to sexual objectification, which in turn may create a shared set of psychological experiences (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997, 175).

This is confirmed by current research. For example, Huff et al. (2021) understand shame as

a sociopsychological interaction between cultural expectations and the painful emotional experience that occurs when individuals perceive they are failing to meet such expectations (Huff et al., 2021, 414).

Gilchrist et al. (2020) confirm that gender role socialisation shapes the different emotional experiences of men and women, especially with regard to shame. Their results showed that even the idea of a situation that contradicts the social ideal of a slim and trim female body was associated with negative body self-esteem (see Rodgers's and Nowicki's chapter in this book) and shame in adult women.

Some researchers assume that this is mainly due to cultural-historical factors because in many cultures, certain female bodily functions such as menstruation have been linked to negative attributions such as disgust and shame (Bauer, 2019; Benzel, 2019; Kaiser, 2018). The act of childbearing is also often connoted with shame (Barell & Meier, 2019; see also Nel's and Govender's chapter in this book; see also Mandal's, and Rodgers's and Nowicki's chapter in this book). Masturbation, too, is usually shameful—especially with regard to women of advanced age (Rudolph, 2021). Often, women experience body shame because they assume they do not conform to the prevailing notions of beauty, are not athletic enough, not feminine enough, not slim enough (Moya-Garófano & Moya, 2019) or it manifests as weight-related shame (Craven & Fekete, 2019; Mensinger et al., 2018). Keirns et al. (2022) were able to show that men and women internalise obesity differently as a shame-related stigma. Although the men in their study had a higher percentage of abdominal fat, the women were more likely than the men to feel this stigma.

Lietzmann (2003) describes these specific body-related shaming behaviours as universal:

Many bodily functions of the female body—menstruation, pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding—are universal shamanic occasions (Lietzmann, 2003, 190, translated by the authors).

According to Lietzmann, men and women experience shame in different ways owing to socially constructed differences. For example, gender-related norms and values lead to gender-specific shame content (Lietzmann, 2003, 153) and perception. Concepts of shame can also serve to determine gender scripts and gender stereotypes and perpetuate gendered power relations (see Maire et al. in this book, also Rodgers and Nowicki as well as Direk, Jordan and Walker; see Dsouza and Puttaraju in this book).

This cements inequality relationships, as Shefer and Munt (2019) point out:

Shame and shaming are also bound up with social inequality, both reflecting and serving to reinforce, reinstate and legitimise social injustice. Shame is closely entangled with gender subjectification and normative gender binarisms, which are raced, classed and enmeshed with other forms of intersectionalities. (Shefer & Munt, 2019, 145–156).

Nyström et al. (2018) turn their attention to a different aspect of shame. They demonstrate in their studies a close connection between interpersonal sensitivity and the use of shame management strategies and that women generally invest more time and effort in their interpersonal relationships than men, while men are much more concerned with their professional success. Nyström et al. observed gender differences in shame management strategies (attacking oneself and withdrawing) in that women more frequently used these strategies. Women were also more prone to feelings of shame and showed a stronger reaction to shame than men. For men, shame can be an emotional response to feeling threatened or exposed in their conceptions

of masculinity, in addition to escape, avoidance of exposure and externalisation of guilt (Gebhard et al., 2019).

Some studies show that cultural differences in terms of shame and social and cultural background can interact with gender differences (see also Vanderheiden's chapter on education in this book). For example, Iwamoto et al. (2018) found that higher levels of family shame correlate with higher levels of emotional restraint and lower self-esteem in Asian-American men. In Asian-American women, however, there was no significant correlation between family shame and self-esteem. Another study by Mena et al. (2017) examines the relationship between shame, guilt and psychological well-being among Latino men and women. The results showed that feelings of guilt were associated with higher psychological well-being in women, while this was not the case in men. Feelings of shame, on the other hand, were associated with lower psychological well-being in both genders.

1.3 Transformation: Gender Facets of Shame as a Resource

The toxic and stressful dimensions of shame are often highlighted, for instance as “broken positive assumptions about the self” (Thomas et al., 2020, 622). Shame in its toxic form is thought to have a negative impact on mental and physical health (Ferreira & Mendes, 2020; Mayer, 2019; Seah & Berle, 2023), but it can also have a negative impact on whole societies by contributing to the promotion of authoritarianism (Neerdaels et al., 2022) or encouraging radicalisation (Kamir, 2019). Increasingly, however, research papers also explore the positive implications of shame, both for the individual (Lin, 2022; Mayer & Vanderheiden, 2021; Vanderheiden, 2020; Wurmser, 2019) and for organisations (Mayer, 2020). Shame can be a positive force in entire societies, for instance in the interests of human rights (Mayer, 2021; Shefer and Munt, 2019; Smidt et al., 2021; Vadlamannati et al., 2018; Vanderheiden, 2021) or in strengthening ecosystem protection (Jacquet, 2017; Mkono & Hughes, 2020).

Positive psychology in particular (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000) can offer valuable impulses and insights here. It emphasises the cultivation of positive emotions and character strengths, as opposed to merely treating mental illness. In particular, Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory (2004), a cornerstone of positive psychology, sheds particular light on the dynamics of shame in a gendered context. Her approach suggests that positive emotions can expand consciousness and encourage new, diverse and exploratory thoughts and actions. In the context of shame, this approach can transform a potentially paralysing emotion into a force for personal growth and social change, especially for women.

In relation to shame and gender, positive psychology argues that shame should no longer be viewed solely as toxic and negative, but that its potential as a catalyst for personal and collective growth, resilience, empathy and social cohesion should be recognised. By applying the principles of positive psychology, such as resilience and self-compassion, people, especially women, can use shame as a resource to

create well-being, challenge gender stereotypes, promote empowerment and expand their room for manoeuvre.

This publication explicitly aims to make the dimensions of shame—as a resource for individual and collective transformation processes—the object of research while focusing on gender issues. The editors and authors provide researchers, lecturers and students with an overview of and new insights into scientific work on their understanding of shame as a resource in the context of gender. They take into account cultural aspects of shame, as well as positive psychology and resource-oriented concepts such as salutogenesis, resilience, happiness, fortitude, locus of control, faith- or strengths-based approaches and contextualise them in the current processes of social upheaval and transformation.

2 Overview of the Chapters

This publication comprises 16 chapters and is divided into three parts. From different perspectives and research directions, the chapters illuminate formative systemic structural factors of the gender aspects of shame and the intersectionality between them.

In their editorial, **Elisabeth Vanderheiden** and **Claude-Hélène Mayer** introduce the publication and give an overview of the focus of the respective chapters.

Part 1 Structural Dimensions of Gender-Specific Facets of Shame

The purpose of the contribution by **Hélène Maire**, **Rawan Charafeddine** and **Jean-Baptiste Van der Henst** is to investigate the potentially explanatory role of social power in connection with shame. The authors propose that the apparent contradiction of reactions associated with shame (appeasement vs. hostility/aggression) can be resolved by incorporating the role of power, because the social position of the one experiencing shame determines the way it is expressed. They argue that in some circumstances, the lack of power is associated with a form of shame akin to embarrassment, which is accompanied by socially engaging reactions aimed at appeasement. This chapter shows that dominants are not ashamed in exactly the same situations as subordinates and express their shame in ways other than postures associated with subordination, which are inappropriate and too costly for them given their status.

Rachel Rodgers and **Genevieve Nowicki** explore how body shame is embedded in different theoretical concepts and provide empirical evidence of body shame with particular reference to gender. The authors elaborate that body shame has been conceptualised within biopsychosocial and critical concepts that emphasise the role of external pressures in achieving standards of appearance and the psychological, interpersonal and material consequences of the inability to achieve these standards. In addition, they discuss the concept of body capital in the context of body shame.

In her chapter **Zeynep Direk** dives deeper into the political use of the negative effects of shame. This essay is about the meaning and some of the actual

consequences of the re-evaluation of shame in contemporary politics. In her analysis, the author focuses on the question of why contemporary political thought regards shame as a positive resource. She explains philosophical backgrounds and formulated critiques of political rationalism and postmodernism that motivate the turn to affect theory.

In their chapter, **Elisabeth Vanderheiden** and **Claude-Hélène Mayer** examine the interdependencies of shame, poverty and gender. To this end, two case studies from Germany and South Africa are presented, which clarify to what extent and why women experience poverty as an occasion for shame, which individual and cultural framework conditions prove to be relevant in this context and which strategies the women have developed during their lives to deal with these shame experiences and to use them as a resource. The data was collected through guided interviews. The findings are presented and discussed.

Elisabeth Vanderheiden uses the following chapter to focus on shame in educational contexts as a resource for women. To this end, she presents four case studies from research in the German context, investigating conditions for success and obstacles to women's educational stories in relation to their formal educational biography. The interviews demonstrate the ways in which these women succeeded in transforming their painful and stressful experiences of shame and embarrassment into motivators for change processes in the course of their lives. The respective shame events become the central trigger for personal change and the initiator for their own empowerment process. Their transformation leads, in the sense of a complex affirmative repositioning, to achieving the social status and freedom they consider appropriate for themselves.

Part 2 Gender-Specific Facets of Shame Within Specific Cultural Contexts

Claude-Hélène Mayer presents her research on shame and gender among intercultural interaction zones (CZs) during overseas studies. Methodologically, the study is based on qualitative written accounts in which 427 international students between the ages of 18 and 23 participated in a cultural experience study in different CZs in the Netherlands, Portugal, Morocco and Spain. The students were mainly from the United States, but some students were from Asia, Europe and Africa. In her research she explores the sample experience of visiting different countries while studying abroad. Her results show that students have experienced various intercultural difficulties in different countries.

Jihan Zakarriya's chapter examines shame and guilt as the two dominant disciplinary practices of activists in the Middle East in general and in the Arabian Gulf in particular. The violation of women's bodies including sexual harassment, allegations of rape, police detention and imprisonment have disturbing effects on the female activists, their families, relatives and their direct communities who are still dominated by tribal connections and deep-seated sexist traditions and practices. Nevertheless, the post-Arab Spring era has witnessed crucial change in the familial and communal acceptance and celebration of female activism in public spaces in the Arabian Gulf.

Leemamol Mathew and **Sony Pellissery** discuss *izzat* in their chapter and provide an analysis of this concept as a category of positive psychology. *Izzat* is a concept that is closely linked to the social quality of the lives of women in South Asia. It has been translated as “honour” in English. But this simplistic translation masks the notions of morality as shaped by the Enlightenment project. In that sense, *izzat* is very often used as a conceptual category for the social control of women. The authors undertake a newer analysis of the concept of *izzat* from the viewpoint of positive psychology. Their basic argument is that *izzat* cannot be applied to atomistic woman, separating her existence from her community.

In her contribution, **Soma Mandal** focuses on Dalit women in India as a historically oppressed community. From the author’s perspective, a gender analysis of the caste oppression of Dalit women requires a discourse on the double bind of caste and gender structures. Dalit women, as outcasts and untouchables, are affected by this double exclusion, first by caste and second by the nature of gender. They are seen as bearing not only untouchability and impurity, but also the stigma and shame of belonging to a lower caste and being sexually promiscuous. The author coins the term “sexual carrion” to indicate the paradoxical nature of their sexual and gendered position. Dalit women as untouchables are paradoxically sexually violated and embody this image of sexual carrion in which they are simultaneously socially unacceptable, untouchable and dead, but considered sexually available.

Since shame plays a huge role in Indian culture and society **Tony Brian Dsouza** and **Sownya Puttaraju** explore the gender dimension of shame in India. The way shame is processed and expressed in the Indian context has various implications, consequences and benefits. In their study, the authors aim to understand gender-shaming styles and their role as a resource in the Indian cultural context. The shame conceptualisation of 115 male and female Indian individuals who identified as cis-gender was assessed using the latest version of Nathanson’s compass of shame scale, which measures both adaptive and maladaptive styles of shaming.

In their chapter, **Trina Banerjee** and **Jayasankara Reddy K** explore shame among South Asian transmen/transmasc. Transgender persons often experience dysphoria related to their gender identity, and the process of transition helps them to cope. The term “transgender” refers to transmen, transwomen and non-binary or genderqueer individuals. Transpersons are often subject to discrimination, known as “transandrophobia”, which results in shaming, harassment and alienation. Shaming of transmen often comes from family, peers and support systems which affects their mental health in different ways. Their study focuses on understanding the various sources of shame encountered through in-depth interviews with transmen.

Ainurliza Mat Rahim and **Dini Farhana Baharudin** investigate the correlations between the sense of shame and traditional Islamic dress and its symbolic meaning for Muslim women, using the example of the hijab. This chapter explores the concept of shame from an Islamic perspective, the experience of wearing the hijab for new Muslim female converts in Malaysia in everyday interactions, and how this affects their self-concept and the construction of shame. A qualitative methodology is used to explore the objectives, using focus group interviews and text–image analysis from social media.

Rebecca Merkin's chapter focuses on the use of cancel culture and the associated mobbing experiences of shame as a prototypical example of how to apply shame-alleviating strategies as resources when experiencing shame. Examples are provided and the literature on gender differences in coping with stress, bullying and cyber-bullying is discussed. The author also examines and addresses gender differences in responses to shame. A study of "honour culture" men in the context United States is considered representative of how masculine men respond to shame. Based on the previous literature and the study presented, possible strategies for overcoming shame are suggested.

Part 3 Gender-Specific Facets of Shame in Health Contexts

In their chapter, **Daniel Jordan and Jude Walker** examine the role of shame for men in recovery from addictions. They draw on existing literature and their own research to highlight the possibilities of addiction treatment to support the transformative learning of men working through and with shame. First, the authors examine the unique features of men in their experience of shame, paying particular attention to the masculine norms of being independent, in control, productive and strong—with two common responses of anger and social withdrawal when men fail to live up to these standards. The authors further examine the link between addiction and shame, including how public attitudes and the self-stigma associated with addiction have evolved, with three explanatory models of addiction as a moral failing, a biomedical disease, and as psychosocial coping.

In the South African context, **Kathryn Anne Nel and Saraswathie Govender** investigate women's experiences of giving birth and the resulting connections with guilt, shame, resilience and culture related to the "Goddess Myth". Most women worldwide give birth using some form of pain medication. However, in most childbirth literature, natural birth (i.e. without pain medication) is encouraged as being the best for baby and mother. Many women become invested in the idea of having a natural birth. Therefore, if they resort to using pain medication, they feel guilt and shame.

Rudolf Oosthuizen's chapter explores the role of gender and culture in linking emotions to recognised health outcomes, focusing particularly on shame in organisational contexts. The Five Industrial Revolution Organisations (IFAs) form a complex social environment in which people experience various isolated emotions such as guilt, anger and joy. Shame is one of the emotions that is prevalent in the workplace and in the organisation. The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive overview of the gendered aspects of shame in organisations, including its expression in different cultural contexts and its health consequences.

Acknowledgements Such a publication project would be unthinkable without the dedicated collaboration of numerous internationally renowned authors. We would like to thank SpringerNature for their constructive cooperation in this publication project, especially Shinjini Chatterjee. We would also express our gratitude to Mais Termanini for her dedicated assistance with formal corrections. In view of the current and far-reaching transformation processes in our societies, it is of great importance to become aware of how shame and shaming can affect individuals and communities—positively or negatively—and that strategies are developed to use shame in a

resource-oriented and productive way. In this respect, it is hoped that the present publication will succeed in questioning and transforming gender-specific norms, attributions and expectations with regard to shame in order to encourage people to construct their own identities and to create positive life circumstances for themselves and others. Critical discourse on the interdependencies between shame, gender and other socio-cultural factors such as power, status, age, income, education and access to an overabundance of life resources could contribute to creating a more inclusive and just society.

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One of her notable research contributions is her exploration of the concept of shame, specifically its role as a resource in transcultural contexts. She has authored three books on this subject and has two more in the preparatory phase. These works examine the multifaceted nature of shame and its applications in various cultural settings, from identity formation to conflict resolution.

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Part I
Structural Dimensions of Gender-Specific
Facets of Shame

Chapter 2

Is Shame a Female Emotion? The Role of Social Power



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Abstract Shame occurs when individuals feel a discrepancy between the actual self and the desired self. A key factor that influences their experience of shame is the power they exercise or undergo in their relationships with others, which depends in part on social categories such as gender. First, the present chapter aims to outline how the concept of social power can be helpful in articulating two distinct forms of shame: a shame related to subordination and a shame related to dominance. The former manifests itself through prosocial expressions of appeasement akin to embarrassment and reflects a continuity with subordinate status. Conversely, the latter manifests itself through aggressive reactions close to anger and is likely to be experienced in humiliating situations such as temporary loss of status. Second, we believe that this distinction is useful in conceptualising shame in relation to gender, as the gender distinction often coincides with power imbalance. In particular, we propose to examine the greater tendency of females to report shame than males in light of the level of power associated with each gender. The power distinction coincides with different forms of shame that are based on different social gender expectations and differentially encouraged among men and women, both in terms of their triggers and their expressions. While shame related to subordination has often been investigated and may be more prevalent among women, the shame related to dominance may be a male form of shame and has received less attention.

Keywords Gender facets of shame · Shame · Gender · Concept of social power · Gendered socialisation expectations · Gendered-related social expectations · Narratives · Subordination and dominance · Power

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1 Introduction

Shame is a painful emotion that combines feelings of dishonour, unworthiness and distress (Thomas et al., 2018). As a self-conscious and social emotion, it results from an assumed or actual negative judgement of oneself by others (Ausubel, 1955), as if observing oneself from the perspective of another (“*looking-glass self*”, Cooley, 1922, cited by Scheff, 2003). We fear that our physical appearance or personality traits, as reflected in our current behaviours, would be perceived as undesirable and thus result in social rejection or retaliation (Gilbert, 2000). This negative judgement focuses on an aspect of the self that is stable, uncontrollable, global and perceived as incongruent with identity aspirations (Tangney, 1990; Tracy & Robins, 2004).

Two major findings have emerged from the psychological study of shame. The first is the *ambivalence of its expressions* since, on the one hand, shame can be associated with appeasement and submission behaviours and, on the other hand, with antisocial reactions (e.g., hostility, aggressiveness) akin to anger. The second finding is that shame appears to be a more *female* than male emotion. The present narrative review examines these two findings by investigating the potentially explanatory role of social power. Three main databases were used (PsycInfo/ PsycArticle, Semantic Scholar and Google Scholar) with no temporal restrictions and no specific inclusion or exclusion criteria, except for the language in which the article was written (only English and French articles have been reviewed). Keywords used included multiple associations of the terms “shame”, “social power” and “gender”. In the present contribution, the concept of power will serve two related purposes that will be addressed consecutively: i) to provide a better understanding of the ambivalence associated with the expression of shame and ii) to nuance the alleged femininity of shame. Future research directions will then be identified and discussed.

2 Social Power: A Criterion for Distinguishing Between Two Triggers Corresponding to Two Expressions of Shame

The experience of shame seems to have a close relationship with the lack of power. Shame, sadness, fear and guilt have been characterised as “powerless emotions”, i.e. emotions that imply vulnerability or inability to cope with negative events (in contrast to “powerful emotions” such as pride and anger, which reflect power and assertiveness) (Fischer et al., 2004; Niedenthal et al., 2006). The subjective experience of shame is also described as a feeling of smallness, inferiority, worthlessness, and/or powerless (e.g., Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Van Vliet, 2008). Shame has been described by evolutionary approaches as resulting from interacting with a high-ranking individual or from unwillingly being in a position of low status (Fessler, 1999; Gilbert, 2000; Weisfeld & Dillon, 2012). In this context, shame motivates