CHAPTER 13

The Emotional/Relational World

Shame and the Social Bond

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Emotions and relationships have long been recognized in sociology as crucially important, but most references to them lack specificity and therefore are vague. This chapter proposes that shame and the social bond are key components of social connectedness, the dimension of solidarity–alienation. It furthermore is proposed that connectedness, together with power, make up the basic dimensions of social structure.

The emotional/relational (e/r) world is important in classical sociological theory, but contemporary sociology focuses mainly on ramifications of power. I consider contributions by six sociologists to a theory of the e/r world: Georg Simmel, Charles Cooley, Norbert Elias, Helen Lynd, Erving Goffman, Richard Sennett, and Helen Lewis, a psychologist–psychoanalyst. Cooley and Lynd, particularly, contributed to a theory of connectedness. I show that Lewis's idea that shame arises from threats to the bond integrates the contributions of the sociologists. A comprehensive theory of social integration would require attention to both power and connectedness.

ALIENATION IN MARX, DURKHEIM, AND WEBER

Marx believed that most human conduct was a product of political–economic interests, that is, of power. In Marx's analysis of capitalism, power struggles, particularly between social classes, were the dominant forces. Later Marxians, especially Communist theoreticians, elevated this crude proposition to the central core of their theory.

However, Marx himself qualified the proposition. First of all, he allowed that certain middle-class intellectuals, like himself, would forsake their class interests to become the vanguard of the proletariat. What force could bring these intellectuals to forsake their class interests?

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Marx's theory of alienation implies such a force. It suggests that in addition to economic and political causes of class conflict, there are relational and emotional ones. The middle-class intellectuals who formed the vanguard had presumably become alienated from their class. More generally, Marx proposed that persons in capitalist societies become alienated not only from the means of production, but from others and from self. That is, that capitalism reflects and generates disturbances in social relationships and in the self. In his review of empirical studies of alienation, Seeman (1975) found evidence of both kinds of alienation: alienation from others and from self (Seeman referred to the latter as "self-estrangement"). In the discussion below, I call these two forms of alienation isolation (from others) and engulfment [alienation from self: to be loyal to the others(s), one gives up parts of one's self (Scheff, 1990, 1997)].

Marx went on to implicate the emotions that accompany alienation. He proposed that it gave rise to feelings of "impotence" (shame) and "indignation" (anger) (Marx, in Tucker, 1978, pp. 133–134). Marx's theory of alienation proposes that the causes of class conflict are not only political and economic, but also relational and emotional.

Although Marx supplemented his theory of the political–economic causes of class conflict with a theory of emotional–relational causes, there is a great disparity in his development of the two theories. The political–economic theory is lavishly elaborated. The bulk of his commentary on alienation takes place in his early work. Even there, as in later works, formulation of theory of alienation is brief and casual. It is easy to understand why Marx's followers have also made it secondary to material interests.

Suicide, perhaps Durkheim's (1905) most important study, strongly implied that power and connectedness were the basic dimensions of social integration. The dichotomy between anomie and fatalism involves power: a society can under- or overregulate individuals to the point that they commit suicide. But the dichotomy egoism–altruism involves connectedness: individuals in a society may be under- or overconnected, Durkheim's version of the isolation and engulfment forms of alienation.

Weber, the last of the three major theoreticians of classic sociology, also implied that power and connectedness were the basic dimensions of social integration. These dimensions can be found in most of his formulations. For example, the distinction he makes between power and authority implies a dimension of connectedness that is distinct from power. Authority involves the legitimate use of power, that is, subjects feel connected with the state, the chief user of power.

The direction of Weber's thought that most clearly invokes connectedness is his insistence on a *verstehende soziologie*, a sociology that focused on the subjective orientation of actors, not just on their power positions. His idea that real understanding of human action requires empathic understanding implies that societies exist to the point that their members understand each other. This idea links Weber to the tradition of intersubjective understanding manifested in the work of Cooley and Mead, to be discussed below.

I have been unable to find any indication in Weber's work, however, that he proposed the continuum of social integration that I am calling isolation–solidarity–engulfment. This continuum is implied in Marx and Durkheim, as discussed above, and many other sociological theories, but may be absent from Weber. But all three theorists pointed toward connectedness and power as the core dimensions of social structure. Modern sociological theory, however, has focused on the power dimension, since the idea of connectedness has received little further attention. For this reason, this essay will focus on connectedness, the e–r world, arguing that a complete theory of social integration would require that the two dimensions be given parity.

In modern societies, the emotional–relational world is all but invisible, compared to obvious manifestations of power. I propose that studies of shame in social structure and process would make manifest the state of social bonds in relationships and in societies.

EMOTIONS IN CLASSICAL THEORY

Many theorists have at least implied that emotions are a powerful force in social process. Although Weber did not refer to emotions directly, his emphasis on values implies it, since values are emotionally charged beliefs. Especially in his later works, Durkheim proposed that collective sentiments created social solidarity through moral community. G. H. Mead proposed emotion as an important ingredient in his social psychology. For Parsons it a component of social action in his adaptation, goal, attainment, integration, latent pattern maintenance (AGIL) scheme (Parsons & Shils, 1951).

Marx implicated emotions in class tensions in the solidarity of rebelling classes. Durkheim proposed that "... what holds a society together-the 'glue' of solidarity—and [Marx implied that] what mobilizes conflict—the energy of mobilized groups—are emotions" (Collins, 1990, p. 27–57).

WHY SPECIFIC EMOTIONS ARE
NECESSARY FOR THEORY AND RESEARCH

The inclusion of emotions in classical sociology was abstract and therefore virtually meaningless. Generalized emotions have only ambiguous reference. Our knowledge of emotions is not generalized, but particular. For example, we all know a great deal about anger. No doubt some of what we think we know may not be the case. But much of what we know is probably accurate or at least accurate enough to often be able to understand each other. About anger we know or believe we know sources from which it arises, different forms and gradations it can take, and some of the outcomes that it can lead to. We also have similar kinds of knowledge and beliefs about other primary emotions, such as fear, grief, shame, contempt, disgust, love, and joy.

Our knowledge about emotions held in common allows us to communicate with each other on this topic and restrains flights of fancy. The different emotions may have several underlying similarities, but what is much more obvious is the great differences in origins, appearance, and trajectories. It is for this reason that general statements about emotions in the abstract have so little meaning. Some of what Durkheim, Mead, and Parsons said about emotions might appear plausible when applied to one emotion, say anger or fear, but not to most of the others. The sources, appearance, and consequences of anger and fear are so different as to forbid lumping them together.

Treating all emotions together under a single heading amounts to a kind of dismissal. A current parallel can be found in rational choice theory, which divides behavior into the rational and the nonrational. In this theory, attention is given only to rational behavior. As in classical theory, the nonrational, the irrational, and emotional behavior is simply dismissed.

In any case, even the theorists who dealt with emotions explicitly, Durkheim, Mead, and Parsons, did not develop concepts of emotion, investigate their actual occurrence in real life, or collect data that might bear on propositions about the role of emotions in human conduct. Their discussions of emotion, therefore, have not borne fruit.

The researchers whose work I review took the step of investigating a specific and therefore concrete emotion. In their various studies that I will describe, they did not always emphasize the name of the emotion. Sennett and Cobb (1972), for example, in *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, made no move to develop a concept of shame and named it infrequently, but their findings and many of their interpretations clearly imply it. As it turns out, the act of explicitly naming and defining is an important part of investigation. Before turning to these

authors, however, I review the treatment of shame by psychoanalytic authors, in order to show the problem that the sociologists and Lewis solved.

SHAME AND THE SOCIAL BOND
IN PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

The treatment of shame in most psychoanalytic writing is problematic because it leaves out the social matrix. Psychoanalysis predicates individuals rather than relationships. Like most psychological theory, Freud's formulations concern emotions in isolated individuals, ignoring the social context. Individualistic formulations give rise to what might be called the inside–outside problem. If one ignores the context in which emotions arise, it will inevitably be difficult to understand their place in human behavior. Freud's solution to the inside–outside problem was to ignore the outside.

Although in his later work Freud also ignored shame, it had an important role in his first book. In *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud and Breuer (1895) stated early on (p. 40) that hysteria is caused by hidden affects, and named the emotion of shame as one of these affects. Near the end of the book, this idea is urged more strongly: "[The ideas that were being repressed] were all of a distressing nature, calculated to arouse the affects of shame, self-reproach and of psychical pain and the feeling of being harmed" (p. 313).

Note that all of the affects mentioned can be considered to be shame derivatives or cognates. Self-reproach is a specific shame cognate, the feeling of being harmed (as in rejection) somewhat broader, and finally the quite abstract phrase "psychical pain," which, like "hurt" or "emotional arousal" can be applied to any emotion. In this passage and several others, shame is given a central role in the causation of psychopathology. Freud and Breuer also proposed that shame is the inhibiting emotion that leads to repression, therefore giving it a central role in the development and maintenance of psychopathology. The idea that it is shame that causes repression also would give shame the leading role in the causation of all mental illness, not just hysteria, if Freud had stayed with it.

However, in 1905, with the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud permanently renounced his earlier formulation in favor of drive theory, especially the sexual drive. In Freud's thinking, shame was replaced by anxiety and guilt, the appropriate emotions for responsible adults, especially male adults. By this time, Freud had become biased about shame. He thought that it was regressive emotion, seen only in children, women, and savages. His rejection of his earlier work on shame can be seen as a lapse into the ethnocentric and sexist attitudes that prevailed at the time, as well as being psychologistic.

Since 1905, shame has been largely ignored in orthodox psychoanalytic formulations. Although several psychoanalysts made crucially important contributions to shame knowledge, these contributions helped make them marginal to psychoanalysis. Shame also goes unnamed and/or undefined even in these marginal analysts. Alfred Adler, Abraham Kardiner, Karen Horney, and Erik Erikson provide examples.

Adler's formulation of the core position of prestige seeking in human behavior, and his concept of the inferiority complex are clearly shame based ideas. To make the search for prestige and honor a central human motive is to focus on the pride–shame axis, as Cooley did. Similarly, the concept of an inferiority complex can be seen as a formulation about chronic low self-esteem, or the put it more bluntly, chronic shame.

Yet Adler never used the concept of shame to integrate the various dimensions of his

work, as he might have. His theory of personality was that children deprived of love at key periods in their development would become adults with either a drive for power or an inferiority complex. This theory can be restated succinctly in terms of a theory of shame and the social bond: children without the requisite secure bonds will likely become adults whose affects are predominately bypassed (drive for power) or overt shame (inferiority complex) (Lewis, 1971).

Like Adler, Karen Horney (1950) did not name the emotion of shame, but her formulations clearly implied it. Her theory of personality was based on what she called "the pride system." Most of her central propositions imply that pride and shame are the keys to understanding both neurotic and normal behavior. Her concept of the "vindictive personality" seems to imply shame–anger sequences as the emotional basis for vengeful behavior.

Abraham Kardiner was an anthropologist who applied psychoanalytic ideas to his studies of small traditional societies. In *The Individual and His Society* (1939), he offered an extensive analysis of the role of shame in four traditional societies. Unlike Adler and Horney, he named the emotion of shame clearly, and stated directly, like Freud and Breuer, that shame is the emotion that leads to repression. Like Adler, he also gave prominence to prestige as a fundamental human motive. Going further than Adler or Freud, he named shame as the principal component of the superego, that is, of conscience.

Like Kardiner, Erik Erikson (1950) also named shame directly, in his analysis of the relationship between shame and guilt. In his investigation of these emotions, he proposed, again contra Freud, that shame was the most fundamental emotion and that it had a vital role in the developmental stages through which all children must pass. His analysis of shame was an important source for Helen Lynd's work on shame; reading Erikson might have been the beginning of Lynd's interest in shame. Like most theorists who discuss shame, neither Kardiner nor Erikson tried to define it.

The work on shame by these four analysts was not recognized by the psychoanalytic establishment. Both Adler and Horney were excluded for their deviationism. Although neither Kardiner nor Erikson were excluded, there was no response to their contributions on shame, with the exception of Helen Lynd to Erikson. It also is of interest that among the disciples of Adler and of Horney that there was also no response to their work on shame.

Although there has been a reawakening of interest in shame by current psychoanalysts, still only a small minority of analysts are involved. Even in this group, converting from drive theory to shame language is a struggle. The work of Lansky (1992, 1995) on shame preserves drive theory. Morrison (1989) has translated drive theoretic formulations into shame dynamics, trying to bridge the two worlds. Broucek (1991) has rebelled against drive theory, but does not attempt a social formulation of shame. Only Lewis (1971) has succeeded in throwing off drive theory, recasting shame in social terms. I return to her work after considering sociological contributions to the study of shame and the bond.

SEVEN PIONEERS IN THE STUDY
OF SOCIAL SHAME

Five of the six sociologists I review acted independently of each other. In the case of Elias and Sennett, their discovery of shame seems forced on them by their data. Neither Simmel nor Cooley define what they mean by shame. Goffman only partially defined embarrassment. The exception is Helen Lynd, who was self-conscious about shame as a concept. Lynd's book on

shame was contemporaneous with Goffman's first writings on embarrassment and realized their main point: facework meant avoiding embarrassment and shame.

Helen Lewis's (1971) empirical work on shame was strongly influenced by Lynd's book. She also was sophisticated in formulating a concept of shame and in using systematic methods to study it. Sennett's work involved slight outside influence. He approvingly cited the Lynd book on shame in *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (Sennett & Cobb, 1972) and his *Authority* (Sennett, 1980) has a chapter on shame. All six sociologists advanced a theory of shame and the bond, even though all but Lynd focused only on shame.

Simmel: Shame and Fashion

Shame plays a significant part in only one of Simmel's (1904) essays, on fashion.[1] People want variation and change, he argued, but they also anticipate shame if they stray from the behavior and appearance of others. Fashion is the solution to this problem, since one can change along with others, avoiding being isolated, and therefore shame (Simmel, 1904, p. 553). Simmel's idea about fashion implies conformity in thought and behavior among one group in a society—the fashionable ones—and distance from another—those who do not follow fashion—relating shame to social bonds.

There is a quality to Simmel's treatment of shame that is somewhat difficult to describe but needs description, since it characterizes most of the other sociological treatments reviewed here. Simmel's use of shame is casual and un-self conscious. His analysis of the shame component in fashion occurs in a single long paragraph. Shame is not mentioned before or after. He does not conceptualize shame or define it, seeming to assume that the reader will know the meaning of the term. Similar problems are prominent in Cooley, Elias, Sennett, and Goffman. Lynd and Lewis are exceptions, since they both attempted to define shame and locate it with respect to other emotions.

Cooley: Shame and the Looking Glass Self

Cooley (1922), like Simmel, was direct in naming shame. For Cooley, shame and pride both arose from self-monitoring, the process that was at the center of his social psychology. His concept of "the looking glass self," which implies the social nature of the self, refers directly and exclusively to pride and shame, but he made no attempt to define either emotion. Instead, he used the vernacular words as if they were self-explanatory.

To give just one example of the ensuing confusion: In English and other European languages, the word "pride" used without qualification usually has an inflection of arrogance or hubris (pride goeth before the fall). In current usage, in order to refer to the kind of pride implied in Cooley's analysis, the opposite of shame, one must add a qualifier like *justified* or *genuine*. Using undefined emotion words is confusing.

However, Cooley's analysis of self-monitoring suggests that pride and shame are the basic social emotions. His formulation of the social basis of shame in self-monitoring can be used to amend Mead's social psychology. Perhaps the combined Mead–Cooley formulation can solve the inside–outside problem that plagues psychoanalytic and other psychological approaches to shame, as I suggest below.

Elias: Shame in the Civilizing Process

Elias (1994) undertook a ambitious historical analysis of what he calls the "civilizing process." He traced changes in the development of personality and social norms from the 15th century to the present. Like Weber, he gave prominence to the development of rationality. Unlike Weber, however, he gave equal prominence to emotional change, particularly to changes in the threshold of shame: "No less characteristic of a civilizing process than "rationalization" is the peculiar molding of the drive economy that we call "shame" and "repugnance" or "embarrassment" (Elias, 1982, p. 297).

Using excerpts from advice manuals, Elias outlined a theory of modernity. By examining advice concerning etiquette, especially table manners, body functions, sexuality, and anger, he suggests that a key aspect of modernity involved a veritable explosion of shame. I will cite only one of many advice excerpts used by Elias. He first presents a lengthy excerpt from a 19th century advice book, *The Education of Girls* (von Raumer, 1857), that advises mothers how to answer sexual questions. In response to the question, "Where do babies come from," Von Raumer suggests, "Children should be left as long as possible in the belief that an angel brings the mother her little children." If the issue comes up again, the child is to be sternly warned: "It is not good for you to know such a thing, and you should take care not to listen to anything said about it." Von Raumer concludes this passage with advice that both shames the mother and advises her to shame the daughter: "A truly well-brought-up girl will from then on feel shame at hearing things of this kind spoken of" (p. 49).

This advise suggests three different puzzles:

1. Why is the author, von Raumer, offering the mother such absurd advice?
2. Why does the mother follow his advice (as most did, and still do)?
3. Why do the daughters follow their mothers' advice (as most did, and still do)?

Modern feminist theory might respond to the first question that von Raumer's advice arises from his position of power: He sought to continue male supremacy, by advising the mother to act in a way that is consonant with the role of women as subordinate to that of men. That is, he was promulgating the woman's role as "Kirche, Kueche, Kinder" (church, kitchen, children). Keeping women ignorant of sexuality and reproduction would help to continue this system.

This formulation is probably part of a complete answer, but it does not attend to the other two questions. Why do mothers and daughters submit to ignorance and shame? Elias's formulation provides an answer to all three questions, without contradicting the feminist answer. Each of these persons, the man and the two hypothetical readers, the mother and the daughter, is too embarrassed about sexuality to think clearly about it. It could be true that von Raumer's advice is part of his male chauvinist position and also true that he is too embarrassed to think about the meaning of his advice. Thoughts and emotions are both parts of a causal chain.

Elias's study suggests a way of understanding the social transmission of a *taboo* on shame. The adult, the author von Raumer in this case, is not only ashamed of sex, but he is ashamed of being ashamed and probably ashamed of the shame that he will arouse in his reader. The mother responding to von Raumer's text, in turn, will probably react in a similar way, being ashamed, and being ashamed of being ashamed, and being ashamed of causing further shame in the daughter. Von Raumer's advice is part of a social system in which attempts at civilized delicacy result in an endless chain reaction of unacknowledged shame. The chain reaction is both within persons and between them, three spirals (one spiral within each party and one between them). The spiral idea integrates social and psychological

processes and suggests a solution to the usual separation of inside and outside, as I suggest at the end of this chapter.

Elias showed that there was much less shame about manners and emotions in the early part of the period he studied than there was in the 19th century. In the 18th century, a change began occurring in advice on manners. What was said openly and directly earlier begins only to be hinted at or left unsaid entirely. Moreover, justifications are offered less. One is mannerly because it is the *right* thing to do. Any decent person will be courteous; the intimation is that bad manners are not only wrong but also unspeakable, the beginning of repression.

The change that Elias documents is gradual but relentless; by a continuing succession of small decrements, etiquette books fall silent about the reliance of manners, style, and identity on respect, honor, and pride, and avoidance of shame and embarrassment. By the end of the 18th century, the social basis of decorum and decency had become virtually unspeakable. Unlike Freud or anyone else, Elias documents, step by step, the sequence of events that led to the repression of emotions in modern civilization.

By the 19th century, Elias proposed, manners are inculcated no longer by way of adult to adult verbal discourse, in which justifications are offered. Socialization shifts from slow and conscious changes by adults over centuries to swift and silent indoctrination of children in their earliest years. No justification is offered to most children; courtesy has become absolute. Moreover, any really decent person would not have to be told. In modern societies, socialization *automatically* inculcates and represses shame.

Richard Sennett: Is Shame the Hidden Injury of Class?

Although *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (Sennett & Cobb, 1972) carries a powerful message, it is not easy to summarize. The narrative concerns quotes from interviews and the authors' brief interpretations. They do not devise a conceptual scheme and a systematic method. For this reason, readers are required to devise their own conceptual scheme, as I do here. The book is based on participant–observation in communities, schools, clubs and bars, and 150 interviews with white working-class males, mostly of Italian or Jewish background, in Boston for one year beginning in July of 1969 (pp. 40–41).

The hidden injuries that Sennett and Cobb discovered might be paraphrased: their working-class men felt that first, because of their class position, they were not accorded the *respect* that they should have gotten from others, particularly from their teachers, bosses, and even from their own children. That is, these men have many complaints about their status. Second, these men also felt that their class position was at least partly their own fault. Sennett and Cobb imply that social class is responsible for both injuries. They believe that their working men did not get the respect they deserved because of their social class, and that the second injury, lack of self-respect, also is the fault of class, rather than the men's own fault, as most of them thought.

Sennett and Cobb argue that in American society, respect is largely based on individual achievement, the extent that one's accomplishments provide a unique identity that stands out from the mass of others. The role of public schools in the development of abilities forms a central part of Sennett and Cobb's argument. Their informants lacked self-respect, the authors thought, because the schooling of working-class boys did not develop their individual talents in a way that would allow them to stand out from the mass as adults. In the language of emotions, they carry a burden of feelings of rejection and inadequacy, which is to say chronic low self-esteem (shame).

From their observations of schools, Sennett and Cobb argue that teachers single out for attention and praise only a small percentage of the students, usually those who are talented or closest to middle class. This praise and attention allows the singled-out students to develop their potential for achievement. The large majority of the boys, however, are ignored and in subtle ways rejected.

There are a few working-class boys who achieve their potential through academic or athletic talent. But the large mass does not. For them, rather than opening up the world, public schools close it off. Education rather than becoming a source of growth provides only shame and rejection. For the majority of students, surviving school means running a gauntlet of shame. These students learn by the second or third grade that is better to be silent in class than risk humiliation of a wrong answer. Even students with the right answers must deal with having the wrong accent, clothing, or physical appearance. For most students, schooling is a vale of shame.

Helen Lynd: Shame and Identity

During her lifetime, Helen Lynd was a well-known sociologist. With her husband, Robert, she published the first American community studies, *Middletown* and *Middletown in Transition*. But Lynd was also profoundly interested in developing an interdisciplinary approach to social science. In her study *On Shame and the Search for Identify* (1958), she dealt with both the social and psychological sides of shame. She also clearly named the emotion of shame and its cognates and located her study within previous scholarship, especially psychoanalytic studies. But Lynd also modified and extended the study of shame by developing a concept and by integrating its social and psychological components.

In the first two chapters, Lynd introduced the concept of shame, using examples from literature to clarify each point. In the next section, she critiques mainstream approaches in psychology and the social sciences. She then introduces ideas from lesser-known approaches, showing how they might resolve some of the difficulties. Finally, she has an extended discussion of the concept of identity, suggesting that it might serve to unify the study of persons by integrating the concepts of self, ego, and social role under the larger idea of identity.

Lynd's approach to shame is much more analytical and self-conscious than the other sociologists reviewed here. They treated shame as a vernacular word. For them, shame sprung out of their data, unavoidable. But Lynd encounters shame deliberately, as part of her exploration of identity.

Lynd explains that shame and its cognates get left out because they are deeply hidden but at the same time pervasive. She makes this point in many ways, particularly in the way she carefully distinguishes shame from guilt.

One idea that Lynd develops is profoundly important for a social theory of shame and the bond, that sharing one's shame with another can strengthen the relationship: "The very fact that shame is an isolating experience also means that ... sharing and communicating it ... can bring about particular closeness with other persons" (Lynd, 1958, p. 66). In another place, Lynd went on to connect the process of risking the communication of shame with the kind of role-taking that Cooley and Mead had described: "communicating shame can be an experience of ... entering into the mind and feelings of another person" (p. 249). Lynd's idea about the effects of communicating and not communicating shame was pivotal for Lewis's (1971) concepts of acknowledged and unacknowledged shame and their relationship to the state of the social bond, as outlined below.

Goffman: Embarrassment and Shame in Everyday Life

Although shame goes largely unnamed in Goffman's early work, embarrassment and avoidance of embarrassment is the central thread. Goffman's "everyperson" is always desperately worried about his image in the eyes of the other, trying to present herself with her best foot forward to avoid shame. This work elaborates and indeed fleshes out Cooley's abstract idea of the way in which the looking glass self leads directly to pride or shame.

Interaction Ritual (Goffman, 1967) made two specific contributions to shame studies. In his study of facework, Goffman states what may be seen as a model of "face" as the avoidance of embarrassment and losing face as suffering embarrassment. This is an advance, because it offers readily observable markers for empirical studies of face. The importance of this idea is recognized, all too briefly, at the beginning of Brown and Levinson's (1987) study of politeness behavior.

Goffman's (1967) second contribution to the study of shame was made in a concise essay on the role of embarrassment in social interaction. Unlike any of the other shame pioneers in sociology, he begins the essay with an attempt at definition. His definition is a definite advance, but it also foretells a limitation of the entire essay, since it is behavioral and physiological, ignoring inner experience. Framing his analysis in what he thought of as purely sociological mode, Goffman omitted feelings and thoughts. His solution to the inside–outside problem was to ignore most of inner experience, just as Freud ignored most of outside events.

However, Goffman (1967) affirms Cooley's point on the centrality of the emotions of shame and pride in normal, everyday social relationships.

> One assumes that embarrassment is a normal part of normal social life, the individual becoming uneasy not because he is personally maladjusted but rather because he is not ... embarrassment is not an irrational impulse breaking through social prescribed behavior, but part of this orderly behavior itself. (p. 109 and 111)

Even Goffman's partial definition of the state of embarrassment represents an advance. One of the most serious limitations of current contributions to the sociology of emotions is the lack of definitions of the emotions under discussion. Much like Cooley, Elias, and Sennett, Kemper (1978) offers no definitions of emotions, assuming that they go without say. Hochschild (1983) attempts to conceptualize various emotions in an appendix, but does not go as far as to give concrete definitions of emotional states. Only in Retzinger (1991, 1995) can conceptual and operational definitions of the emotions of shame and anger be found.

Lewis's Discovery of Unacknowledged Shame

Helen Lewis's (1971) book on shame involved an analysis of verbatim transcripts of hundreds of psychotherapy sessions. She encountered shame because she used a systematic method for identifying emotions, the Gottschalk–Gleser method (Gottschalk, 1995; Gottschalk & Gleser, 1969), which involves use of long lists of key words that are correlated with specific emotions.

Lewis found that anger, fear, grief, and anxiety cues showed up from time to time in some of the transcripts. She was surprised by the massive frequency of shame cues. Her most relevant findings:

1. *Prevalence*: Lewis found a high frequency of shame markers in all the sessions, far outranking markers of all other emotions combined.
2. *Lack of awareness*: Lewis noted that patient or therapist almost never referred to

shame or its near cognates. Even the word "embarrassment" was seldom used. In analyzing the context in which shame markers occurred, Lewis identified a specific context: situations in which the patient seemed to feel distant from, rejected, criticized, or exposed by the therapist.

However, the patients showed two different seemingly opposite responses in the shame context. In one, the patient seemed to be suffering psychological pain but failed to identify it as shame. Lewis called this form "overt, undifferentiated" shame. In a second kind of response, the patient seemed not to be in pain, revealing an emotional response only by rapid, obsessional speech on topics that seemed somewhat removed from the dialogue. Lewis called this second response "bypassed" shame.

3. *Shame, anger, and conflict*: In her transcripts, Lewis found many episodes of shame that extended over long periods of time. Since emotions are commonly understood to be brief signals (a few seconds) that alert us for action, the existence of long-lasting emotions is something of a puzzle. Lewis's solution to this puzzle may be of great interest in the social sciences, since it provides an emotional basis for long-standing hostility, withdrawal, or alienation.

She argued that her subjects often seemed to have emotional reactions to their emotions, and that this loop may extend indefinitely. She called these reactions "feeling traps." The trap that arose most frequently in her data involved shame and anger. A patient interprets an expression by the therapist as hostile, rejecting, or critical, and responds with shame or embarrassment. However, the patient instantaneously masks the shame with anger, then is ashamed of being angry. Apparently each emotion in the sequence is brief, but the loop can go on forever. This proposal suggests a new source of protracted conflict and alienation, one hinted at in Simmel's treatment of conflict.

Although Lewis did not discuss other kinds of spirals, there is one that may be as important as the shame–anger loop. If one is ashamed of being ashamed, it is possible to enter into a shame–shame loop that leads to silence and withdrawal. Elias's work on modesty implies this kind of loop.

4. *Shame and the social bond*: Finally, Lewis interpreted her findings in explicitly social terms. She proposed that shame arises when there is a threat to the social bond, as was the case in all of the shame episodes she discovered in the transcripts. Every person, she argued, fears social disconnection from others.

Lewis's solution to the outside–inside problem parallels and advances the Darwin–Mead–Cooley definition of the social context of shame. She proposed that shame is a bodily and/or mental response to the threat of disconnection from the other. Shame, she argued, can occur in response to threats to the bond from the other, but it also can occur in response to actions in the "inner theater," in the interior monologue in which we see ourselves from the point of view of others. Her reasoning fits Cooley's formulation of shame dynamics and also Mead's (1934) more general framework: the self is a social construction, a process constructed from both external and internal social interaction, in role-playing and role-taking.

SHAME AS THE SOCIAL EMOTION

Drawing on the work of these pioneers, it is possible to take further steps toward defining shame. By shame I mean a large family of emotions that includes many cognates and variants, most notably embarrassment, humiliation, and related feelings such as shyness, that

involve reactions to rejection or feelings of failure or inadequacy. What unites all these cognates is that they involve the feeling of a *threat to the social bond*. That is, I use a sociological definition of shame, rather than the more common psychological one (perception of a discrepancy between ideal and actual self). If one postulates that shame is generated by a threat to the bond, no matter how slight, then a wide rage of cognates and variants follow: not only embarrassment, shyness, and modesty, but also feelings of rejection or failure and heightened self-consciousness of any kind. Note that this definition usually subsumes the psychological one, since most ideals are social, rather than individual.

If, as proposed here, shame is a result of threat to the bond, shame would be the most social of the basic emotions. Fear is a signal of danger to the body, anger a signal of frustration, and so on. The sources of fear and anger, unlike shame, are not uniquely social. Grief also has a social origin, since it signals the loss of a bond. But bond loss is not a frequent event. Shame on the other hand, following Goffman, since it involves even a slight threat to the bond, is per- vasive in virtually all social interaction. As Goffman's work suggests, all human beings are extremely sensitive to the exact amount of deference they are accorded. Even slight discrepan- cies generate shame or embarrassment. As Darwin (1872) noted, the discrepancy even can be in the positive direction; too much deference can generate the embarrassment of heightened self-consciousness.

Especially important for social control is a positive variant, a *sense of shame*. That is, shame figures in most social interaction because members may feel shame only occasionally, but they are constantly anticipating it, as Goffman implied. Goffman's treatment points to the slightness of threats to the bond that lead to anticipation of shame. For that reason, my use of the term "shame" is much broader than its vernacular use. In common parlance, shame is an intensely negative, crisis emotion closely connected with disgrace. But this is much too narrow if we expect shame to be generated by even the slightest threat to the bond.

An obvious question arises from my description of the zigzag progress of shame studies described above. What gives rise to the slipperiness of the concept of shame? Why did Elias, Sennett, Goffman, and others make fundamental contributions to shame knowledge, yet fail to explicitly name and define the emotion they studied as shame or ignore it in their later work? Why did Mead and Dewey ignore the obvious importance of shame in Cooley? Why did Brown and Levinson recognize the importance of Goffman's concept of face as the avoidance of embarrassment but fail to utilize it in their empirical studies? My description of the history of shame studies by psychoanalysts suggests many similar questions, particularly Freud's early discovery of shame and his later disavowal.

My explanation derives from Elias's idea of the advance of the shame threshold and Lewis's work on unacknowledged shame. Elias's response to his data led him to an analysis of the underlying process in our civilization that was too advanced for his audience. In Western societies, as Elias pointed out, the threshold for shame has been decreasing for hundreds of years but at the same time awareness of this emotion has been declining. As his own analysis could have predicted, in our era the level of awareness of shame is so low that only those trained to detect unacknowledged shame could understand the point that Elias was making. Because Retzinger and I were guided by Lewis's (1971) work, we were responsive to Elias's shame analysis. Within psychology and psychoanalysis, Lewis's work is widely acclaimed but seldom used.

The development of a concept of shame, which includes both analytical and operational definitions of shame, is crucially important for the scientific study of shame. It would appear that subjects' testimony about shame states and indeed the presence or absence of any other emotion may not be valid. Perhaps most emotional states are disavowed or exaggerated.

Following Lewis it would appear that most shame states are not experienced in consciousness but are either unconscious or misnamed [bypassed or overt, undifferentiated shame, in Lewis's (1971) terminology]. For this reason studies that rely on testimony of subjects rather than analysis of their behavior and their discourse are apt to leave out most shame. It also is not clear that subject's reports of their own shame and that of others are accurate. Studies are needed to test the validity of subjective reports of shame. In my view, such a test would mean validating standardized shame measures against analysis of discourse.

To develop a comprehensive theory of social integration, to complement theories of power, the sociology and psychology of emotions should follow up the leads offered by the authors reviewed here. If we could agree on a method for studying shame that would be reliable and valid, we might start by testing the key hypotheses on collective shame Elias stated: shame is increasing in modern societies, but at the same time awareness of shame is decreasing. Another hypothesis, following Sennett and Cobb, is that members of the working and lower classes are shamed by their status. Even though shame is usually unacknowledged, still cues to shame are much more visible than other markers of the state of the bond. A reliable analysis of shame cues could lead to studies of alienation–solidarity in social interaction.

One direction that might take concerns the dynamics of racial, gender, ethnic, and class relationships. In her chapter "Honor and Shame," Howard (1995) proposes that women and blacks are likely to be ashamed of themselves. She suggests that they are dishonored, that their status is consistently derogated. To coordinate their actions in a white male-dominated society, women and blacks must take the role of white males, which leads to seeing themselves as they are seen. She supports this idea by pointing to the amount of "self-mutilation" that women and blacks undergo in attempting to fit themselves into the male or white ideal. She argues that women's sustained attempts to be slender and have small waists and feet, to the point of self-starvation, suggest shame in these women. Similarly, she proposes that hair straightening and the high status of light skin among blacks has the same implication.

Howard's analysis of shame and honor in race and gender relations is suggestive but is only a first step. If her formulation is accurate, it would mean that there is an emotional–relational structure that sustains the domination of white males, in addition to legal, political, and economic causes. In order to test this idea, however, shame would need to be investigated so that its presence or absence in women and blacks could be documented. Retzinger's (1991) theory of conflict and my application of it to collective conflict (Scheff, 1994) suggest that protracted and intense hatred, resentment, and envy derive from unacknowledged shame. Research on gender, race, ethnic, and class emotional tensions and alienation could be inspired by this idea.

CONCLUSION

The classic sociologists believed that emotions and the social bond are crucially involved in the structure and change of whole societies. The authors reviewed here suggest that shame is the premier social emotion. Lynd's work particularly suggests how acknowledgment of shame can strengthen bonds and by implication lack of acknowledgment can create alienation. This idea was developed by Lewis into a theory of shame and social bond, with both conceptual and operational definitions. Lewis's work further suggests how shame–anger loops can create perpetual hostility and alienation. If shame and the bond are the key components of social integration, then acknowledged shame would be the glue that holds relationships and societies together and unacknowledged shame the force that drives them apart.

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