This is about Face

A Study of Internalization and Shame

Jing Iris Hu & Balam Kenter

Abstract:

Is shame an accomplice of external oppressive values or an introspective emotion that reveals one's true moral character? We track these conflicting intuitions about shame and argue that they point to several understudied social features of shame. We then lay out a more nuanced and inclusive view of shame that accounts for meaningful life-long interactions between self and community. This view emphasizes both personal agency in navigating shame-related experiences and the social challenges to such agency, namely the social structures and values that breed shame for some people while exempting others. We argue that individuals demonstrate their agency in managing the emotion of shame not just through their private attitudes, by accepting, negotiating, or rejecting specific values, but also through social action, by identifying with some communities and distancing themselves from others. In pointing out that shame is a double-edged sword—harmful in ways not discussed before, yet also morally potent by propelling individual agency—we hope to add much-needed complexity to the discussion of shame.

Keywords:

shame, internalization, moral emotions, social stigma, social identity

1. Introduction

People are known to have vastly different emotional reactions to similar stimuli: some will react to another person bumping into them in a public shower with a sense of humor, some with embarrassment, and yet others with deep shame and humiliation. What determines people's varying propensity to shame? In this paper, we argue for a concept of shame that takes into consideration social identity and communal affiliation, on the one hand, and personal agency in directing one's individual sense of shame, on the other. We will outline a new analytical approach which focuses on the interactive process by which individuals acquire communal values in and through social practices. Shame is redefined as an emotional phenomenon that in essential ways connects personal psychological factors to communal moral practices. As a first step, let us briefly review the state of the discussion which our approach departs from.

2. Contemporary Debate

Some prominent philosophers, including John Rawls and John Kekes, view shame as the negative emotional response to one's falling short of standards or values that one holds dearly. Take Rawls's statement, for example, that "it is our plan of life that determines what we feel ashamed of" (Rawls 1971, 391). Although this view does not rule out communal components, i.e. the possibility that both one's self-esteem and others' respect may impact one's experience of shame, Rawls ultimately casts the emotion of shame as the result of a "loss to our self-esteem and our inability to carry out our aims" (Rawls 1971, 391). This view seems to make intuitive sense: experiences of shame tend to be intimate

and private, and they do signal a failure of sorts in one's own eyes. Consequently, shame has been characterized as a self-assessing and self-reflecting emotion (Taylor 1976, Haidt 2003). Many other philosophers subscribe to variations of this view, claiming that shame results from falling short of one's personal (including moral) ideals, moral standards, norms, or values (Calhoun 2004, Deonna, Rodogno & Teroni 2012, Richardson 1971, Kekes 1988), with these terms typically being used interchangeably. Without denying significant differences between thinkers, let us refer to this general approach as the *personal ideals view*.

This view faces at least two challenges. The first challenge has to do with conceptual vagueness surrounding the nature of the personal ideals in question—the norms that are perceived to have been violated in the experience of shame. Notably, the origins of these norms are not much dwelled on. Kekes, while discussing the causes of shame, simply refers to the experiencer falling short of "some standard we regard as important…because our conception of a good life requires that we should have lived up to it" (Kekes 1988, 286). In the same context, others refer to "falling short of an autonomously set standard" (Calhoun 2004, 129); "incapacity to exemplify [a] self-relevant value even to a minimal degree" (Deonna, Rodogno & Teroni, 2012, 102); or "failing to attain one's conception of the self's competence, some self-ideal of excellence" (Richardson 1971, 253). And that is where the matter rests. But what does it mean to acquire and maintain a personal standard, commit to a personal value, or accept certain norms as one's own? Obviously, this is a complex topic in its own right. The above descriptions all affirm that personal ideals are important in *some* way to us as individuals, but, perhaps due to the fundamental nature of shame in our moral lives, they do not delve deep into the why and how of this prominent

role. Also, the directionality of the link between personal values and shame—violation of values causing shame—is taken for granted by the authors cited. Yet as a matter of fact, there have been philosophers who give emotions a central status in their moral philosophy and who would explain the importance of certain values in terms of shame, instead of the other way around (e.g. the ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius; 372 BCE–289 BCE). What we argue here is that without understanding the very conception of holding a personal ideal, i.e. through questioning how a person acquires and maintains these values, any discussion of shame would be incomplete.

For one thing, we sometimes experience shame when we fall short of ideals or values we would not, when asked, be willing to own. For example, racialized individuals sometimes experience shame as a reaction to racist attacks against them, even though they themselves are not ashamed of their race or ethnicity and do not subscribe to whatever values the attackers associate with it (Webster 2021). Or, to bring up a scenario explored by Miranda Fricker, even a gay activist may well feel shame over their sexual orientation at some point, in stark contrast to their articulated beliefs and convictions (Fricker 2007). This type of phenomenon poses a direct threat to the personal ideals view. Why would violating values one does *not* hold warrant shame as a response? We would like to highlight a key distinction here: being vulnerable to shame because of certain attributes doesn't always mean being *ashamed of* these attributes. At least at first glance, our vulnerability to feeling shame over things we do not think shameful seems to suggest some kind of failure of personal autonomy—one not foreseen on the personal ideals view (Calhoun 2004, 128). Quite possibly these puzzling cases can be assimilated if one broadens the range of values that might be in play here to include values related to our

universal need of belonging, which we tend not to reflect on consciously (more on this below); but one way or the other, this paper will argue that what is needed here is a more careful examination of the social features of shame. [1]

As to the second challenge: the notion that shame is always an outcome of self-judgment, and is always subjectively experienced as such, simply doesn't seem empirically adequate. Some people perceive shame predominantly as background pressure from their communities and other individuals to conform to certain values. This has not gone unnoticed. Thus, Stephen Bero finds fault with the view of shame as a self-assessing, self-sufficient emotion on the grounds that it leaves no theoretical space for Others (Bero 2020). Cheshire Calhoun similarly criticizes this view for reducing the role of other people's influence on shame to a mere mirror of own evaluations (Calhoun 2004, 129). The phenomenon of 'pervasive shame', also referred to as 'ubiquitous shame', strongly showcases how a focus on the experiencer's own values is not nearly sufficient when accounting for shame. These terms refer to the kind of shame experienced by subjects under conditions of oppression, where shame is a ubiquitous background condition (Mann 2018, 403) and felt as a "pervasive sense of personal inadequacy" (Bartky 1990, 85), rather than a passing emotion experienced as a temporary lapse from personal ideals. It is an affective attunement to one's social environment that places the experiencer in a

[1] Webster (2021) is taking a step in the right direction, in our view, when she argues that the reason individuals would feel shame in responding to racism is rooted in the fact that these individuals are racialized and frequently experience stigma in society. When confronted with racist insults, they are not free to choose whether and how to make their stigmatized race salient, and shame is a result of this inability to choose. This is very much in line with Goffman's (1963) stigma theory, in which "half members" of a community may experience shame and the effects of stigma when their status in society is called out and questioned. In the case of racist insults, racialized individuals are not necessarily made ashamed of their race; instead, they must confront the shaming fact that their status in society is low, stigmatized, and frequently challenged.

subordinated status within a sociopolitical hierarchy (Bartky 1990, 84-85). For instance, as Gail Weiss notes, "women, racial minorities, people with disabilities, and other people with nonnormative bodies that don't readily fit the white, male, thin, able-bodied ideal" suffer shame without engaging in morally transgressive behavior; what they experience is an existential form of shame, one almost "inherited as a birthright" (Weiss 2018, 544). Ullaliina Lehtinen describes this phenomenon as the "shame of the underdog"—the type of typically unreflective shame social subordinates tend to be victims of, as opposed to the self-aware and self-critical "aristocrat's shame" that the personal ideals view is more apt to explain (Lehtinen 1998). This type of diffuse, ongoing shame, often opaque to those experiencing it, is contrasted elsewhere with 'episodic shame', which is not only of limited duration but also usually transparent in the sense that the experiencer can with some certainty pinpoint its cause. A comprehensive account of shame ought to be able to make sense of both episodic shame and pervasive shame. Again, that will require methodological expansion to address the impact of social circumstances directly and prominently.

In sum, the above challenges to the personal ideals approach can be seen to bring out two weaknesses of this approach: the relative vagueness of the notion of 'personal ideals', and the insufficiency of this individual-focused view to explain the contribution of lasting social factors to the occurrence of shame. In response to this situation, we wish to outline what one might call the *Interactive Personal Ideals Model*, which attends to shame in both its social and its personal facets, drawing attention to some features that until now have fallen outside the purview of philosophical discussion.

3. The Interactive Personal Ideals Model

Given the insufficiencies of past conceptualizations of shame laid out above, we propose a focus on the details of the value internalization process by which a person may adopt, reject, or negotiate values they encounter in their moral communities, as part of building and adaptively maintaining their personal ideals. A closer look at this internalization process, pointing to issues that deserve detailed future investigation, is the goal of this section. In Sect. 4 then we will demonstrate how, despite our model's emphasis on social dependency, a role for individual moral agency is retained.

The concept of 'internalization' is centrally referred to by Bernard Williams and Miranda Fricker, but is never operationally defined (see e.g. Williams 1993; Fricker 1995, 2007, 2020). For example, Williams talks about the "internalized other" or "internalizing the gaze of shame", but to him internalization simply and literally means "making something internal." The thrust in this usage is that the experiencer takes an external factor, such as someone else's gaze directed at her, into her inner psychological world, so that the gaze lives on in her as an inner observer without requiring the continued existence of an external stimulus (Williams 1993, 84, 86, 99, 101, 103). In empirical work, the term has also been applied in cases where cultural specifics become integrated into an individual's inner psychological life (Zittoun and Gillespie 2015).

The American Psychological Association defines internalization as "the nonconscious mental process by which the characteristics, beliefs, feelings, or attitudes of other individuals or groups are assimilated into the self and adopted as one's own" (APA Dictionary of Psychology, entry dated 4/19/2018). This seems largely uncontroversial, but there has been some discussion on whether internalization must always be a *nonconscious*

process or whether it can at times involve the experiencer's active participation. This question becomes unavoidable if one includes under internalization cases of active learning, such as children learning from their parents' explicitly instructive communications or modeling, where both parties are consciously participating in the process (Grusec and Goodnow 1994; Hoffman 1994). We will be inclusive here and define internalization as the process (conscious *or* nonconscious) by which individuals assimilate the characteristics, beliefs, feelings, or attitudes of other individuals or groups and come to consider them their own. Psychological internalization is assumed to be a gradual process generally, but can be accelerated by intensely emotional episodes, either experienced directly or witnessed in others; we will assume that this holds for the internalization of moral values as well.

The question may arise, then, at what point a value should be considered *fully* internalized. When is a person reflectively committed to it? When a change in environment cannot (easily) reverse the process any longer? Relatedly, if there is such a thing as partially internalized values, are their behavioral and emotional effects proportionate to the extent of internalization? These are difficult questions, but they should be addressed. If one subscribes to the view that a person's moral self is in constant interaction with the communities they are a part of, then ongoing adjustment of at least some personal moral values would only be expected. At the same time, it is also reasonable to assume that mature moral agents have at least *some* fully internalized, highly stable values that are essential to who they are and define their moral identities. Violation or abandonment of

these values would be predicted to cause great psychological distress. Nevertheless, it does occur.[2]

In the present context, what is of particular interest are cases where a person has not yet fully internalized certain values, yet already feels shame about failing them—or conversely, feels shame prompted by values they have already partially left behind. Also significant here are those situations where an individual's behavior is consistent with certain values, but where they would not reflectively endorse these values (but would perhaps endorse other values that presuppose them). To us, the question of how to recognize cases of fully internalized values that cannot be abandoned, to the extent that such values truly exist, is less important in an interactive model of shame than a proper dynamic account of the stages of value acquisition and change.

No such theoretical scenarios will have much bearing on real-life situations, however, unless we ask how, and by whom, the values to be internalized are presented to the individual. What motivates internalization? And that gets us to the heart of the matter: the social pressure an individual is under to assimilate the values of a dominant group—a pressure due to, presumably, the need to belong or else fear of exclusion or worse. Social pressure, to lesser or greater extent, impinges on the individual's freedom to choose what values to hold or to newly internalize.

[2] We should note here that any realistic model of individual moral development, i.e. the forming and shaping of a comprehensive *set* of personal values, must necessarily capture a more complex dynamic process than the formation of a single value. Whenever one value comes under pressure to change, others that underpin it or hinge on it may need to be realigned as well, yet these may be more resistant to pressure. The subjective experience of this will likely be a feeling of conflictedness and of wanting to negotiate a modified, more "fitting" version of the presented value. The complexity of value revision is very similar to that of belief revision more generally, for which sophisticated models have been developed already; for a recent survey of belief revision theory, see e.g. Lin (2019).

We should point out here that this negative phrasing is not always appropriate. There are many everyday cases of social pressure which one would be more likely to describe as benign social guidance helping the individual make appropriate decisions. In our model as well, vulnerability to shame as a result of social pressure can be of important epistemic value: an acute feeling of shame may provoke its experiencer to investigate her moral bearings and develop judgment about whether she is indeed falling short of important values of her own, or is instead failing values imposed on her (but not yet internalized) as the result of her social identity within a community which she is, or would like to be, an accepted member of. Our vulnerability to shame of this nature serves to alert us to discrepancies between important yet unobvious social and moral values implied by our practices, on the one hand, and our ideals and desired self-image, on the other. [3]

We should also note that enforcing a certain level of social conformity is not always a bad thing; in fact, to some extent it is a necessary condition for communal cohesion (e.g., enforcing basic social manners). The negative connotations of social conformity arise from the situation in authoritarian and oppressive societies, where individuals have, in many spheres of life, lost the freedom to form their own thoughts and moral preferences; instead, they are forced to act on and internalize whichever values are imposed through propaganda, stigmatization, communal and social practice. By contrast, in a more liberal, open environment, individuals can experience a sociality that permits them to formulate communal values and practices that bind members together, but also allows them to depart from these values and communities. Negative connotations also

[3] Relatedly, the notion that shame is an adaptive mechanism that enables a person to realize they might/will be in danger of social ostracism has been explored by psychologists in various cultural contexts (e.g. Sznycer 2016, 2018).

arise, and rightly so, from the injustice observed within strict hierarchical societies, where low-ranking and marginalized members whose social status is not assured are under pressure to conform to and internalize external values—more so than the privileged members of their society, who enjoy greater liberty when it comes to what values they wish to live by.

As will have become clear at this point, the internalization process is important to our understanding of shame because this process is an arena in which communal/external values and personal values interact. Shame arises from violation of values which at some point were internalized; but the individual's freedom and bargaining power with respect to what values are to be internalized—or not—is directly related to their social identity and the power structure in their communities. A moral agent may reject, adapt, or endorse an external value, but these choices do not exist in a social vacuum. And what holds for episodic shame in this regard holds with a vengeance for pervasive shame and stigma, which arise in situations where social factors and structures have prominently and lastingly forced internalization of values that cannot but be failed.

Let us stress here that the internalization or negotiation process is not always transparent to the individuals participating in it; that is to say, the values that are being internalized can sometimes only be articulated upon active reflection, and perhaps not even then. As moral agents, we come into and out of moral practices in the course of daily living in society, not through textbook learning. But a desirable change in values may be helped along if, as part of a first step, current values are made explicit. For instance, those of us who live in heteropatriarchal cultures have come into the practices of heteropatriarchy as children and live, reflectingly or not, as members of such communities. Thus, most of us

didn't consciously begin at some point to make reasoned assumptions about women's abilities in sciences being inferior to men; instead, most of those who hold such assumptions have learned and internalized them through patriarchal socialization. When their beliefs are explicitly, convincingly pointed out to them not only as empirically false but also as being a case of uncritical internalization, these persons will likely revise them—itself an instance of value conciliation. This is perhaps where a feminist practice can, in part, be characterized as the process of *unlearning* patriarchal values by first becoming aware of what has been internalized, instead of merely learning and endorsing "new" egalitarian values.

While the social pressure a group can exert on an individual is of course more powerful in most cases than the pressure an individual can exert on a group, we should bear in mind that when it comes to the negotiation of values, the interaction between individual and society is in principle bidirectional. A single person may come to challenge existing social values and practices because she has acquired, through learning and reflection, acquired new moral convictions, and may be able to argue for them persuasively. More commonly, a person will first notice that her feelings of conflict and alienation are being echoed by others; once a safe and welcoming group environment emerges, its members will then be ready to openly reveal their previously unshared new convictions to society at large. The advantage of forming a group is not just that it allows individuals to challenge existing societal values in coordinated fashion and thus more forcefully, but also, not least, that they are able to support each other as they face shaming and potential ostracism. (We will return to this point in Section 4.) Either way, this process of internal beliefs leading to one's overt challenging of external social and communal

values and practices is a form of what is known as "externalization". We will not go into externalization further here, even though it is a possible reaction to shame. It is an important topic that requires discussion on its own. The general point is that, in principle, the dynamic negotiation of moral values between individual and society can be initiated by either side.

Ongoing internalization of values usually proceeds quietly and subtly, as part of the grooming of individuals for different social roles as they move through the stages of life. But occasionally we may get a clear glimpse of it, namely at times of *lateral transition*, when an individual moves between communities and thus between moral practices. Heidi Maibom gives a perfect example of individuals assimilating to new cultural norms in an unfamiliar environment where their old cultural practices—in this case, handholding between men—are unknown or indeed disparaged:

> In India, a common expression of friendship for men is to walk hand in hand. Being transported to the USA and continuing the practice would likely result in them being ashamed, given the widespread disapproval that they would encounter. The fact that they do not already accept the relevant standards does not insulate them against shame. (Maibom 2010, 573)

Here the very act of handholding signals that the individuals described do not conform to the cultural norms of their new community and are not full members of this community. The fact that Indian men belong to a group of people that is racialized in the North American context adds further complexity to this example. Goffman (1963) offers a rich discussion of how stigma and stigmatization work and affect one's group identity in ways that are keenly relevant to the social emotion of shame—in this example, why Indian men,

having immigrated to the U.S. but continuing to practice Indian customs amongst themselves, would not be immune to experiencing shame over their handholding practice. For these men the practice is tied to the value of overtly expressed companionship, among others; but as they will soon realize, for North Americans it is associated with effeminacy and homosexuality. Importantly, such shame over concrete behavior is compounded by the shame of simply being different—of apparently not knowing how to fit in or perhaps failing to do so while trying. This sort of situation may resolve in several different ways, all of which we have ample opportunity to observe in immigrants. At one extreme, the incoming individuals may choose to actively adopt the behavior of their new neighbors in every respect and to fully embrace their communal values. But another possibility, commonly seen in close-knit groups of immigrants from the same background, is that they reject some of the values of the host society to preserve their own cultural identity. In this case, they are content with the status of half-member or non-member in the new host community, seeing it as the price to pay for continued status in their traditional community.

Similarly, a person transitioning *out of* communities that share values they no longer agree with makes interesting features of internalization more noticeable. For instance, the problematic situation hinted at above, of someone who has adopted new beliefs but still experiences shame as a result of values internalized previously that have not completely "faded away," is topicalized by Fricker, who refers to it as "residual internalization" (Fricker 2007).

> Such a conflicted figure exemplifies the phenomenon of (what we might call) residual internalization, whereby a member of a subordinated group continues as

> host to a sort of half-life for the oppressive ideology, even when her beliefs have genuinely moved on. Sometimes this might simply be a matter of the person's affective states lagging behind their beliefs (a lapsed Catholic's guilty conscience, a gay rights activist's feeling of shame). (Fricker 2007, 37)

It is worth noting that Fricker frames the status of such persons as belonging to a "subordinated group" and having a "half-life for the oppressive ideology" (Fricker 2007, 37). In other words, they are under an inappropriate, objectionable pressure to internalize and assimilate the values and practices of the dominant communities they find themselves in at the time.

Meanwhile, Fricker's characterization highlights that there isn't a clear-cut moment when an individual starts endorsing certain new values as their personal ideals, while at that same moment rejecting the incompatible older values that have now been superseded. There may well be an interim phase of cognitive dissonance, as it were. Thus, someone may have come to consciously hold feminist beliefs, but fail to apply these consistently due to her lasting ties to certain communities and practices that do not support the values she now holds. Again, the general point is that if we take human sociality and dependence on others seriously, then both our assessment of whether we are living up to our personal ideals as well as the social learning leading to occasional changes in these ideals must be deemed lifelong processes. Analysis of the internalization process within and across individuals adds nuance to the traditional personal ideals view: that view, in focusing as it does on the result state of "holding an ideal", glosses over the salience and psychological complexity of the process leading up to this result—a process driven by socialization.

Another recent example which has received considerable scholarly attention is relevant here. One group of individuals that was strikingly caught in the middle of a value change recently—a change in Covid-19-occasioned mask-wearing practice in North America—were international students from Asia. In the early months of the pandemic (around March 2020), most people in North America were still unaware of the scale of the global public health crisis on the horizon; people who wore masks in public were treated to glares, mockery, and ridicule for being overly concerned with their health, uninformed about the ineffectiveness of masks, and more generally self-centered and irrational (Justice 2020; Sonmez 2020; A. Zhou 2020; M. Zhou 2000; Ma & Zhan 2020). Some of this hostility translated into racist attacks, as condescension and ridicule aligned with existing stigma and stereotypes (Jan 2020; Li 2020; Goldberg 2020).[4] Even though these international students firmly believed that masks were essential, they adopted several coping mechanisms that showed an interaction between individual shame and communally significant behavior. Some students hid in their dorms and skipped classes altogether, while others wore masks on the way to class but took them off inside the classroom; as one student poignantly remarked, "This is about face" (Ma & Zhan 2020, 12). That some students chose to take their masks off in the classroom but not elsewhere in public demonstrates that their fellow students' and teachers' attitude towards them was more

[4] Just a few months later, the tables were turned in the US: public information on effective protection caught up sufficiently with the general population so that now those seen *without* masks began to be singled out and considered reckless, irresponsible, and uninformed (Borunda, 2020; Denworth, 2020). It is also worth noting that before Covid, in the West, mask-wearing seems to have had negative ableist connotations, but also associations with anti-sociality, criminality, dishonesty, and secrecy (Ma & Zhan 2020, 4). In East Asia, mask-wearing has connotations of solidarity, community care, and self-care: it might communicate politeness (intent to protect oneself and others from potential infectious disease, or more generally to avoid unnecessary social interaction), the rational need to shield oneself from intense air pollution, or simply the desire to keep one's face warm (Jennings 2020; Leung 2020).

important to their experience of shame and sense of belonging than the attitude of random Americans in the street.

Thus far, we have explained vulnerability to shame in terms of a person's social and communal environment, the social pressures arising from it, and the role these play in the internalization process. We have argued that a person is responsive not only to the values she has securely internalized in the past but also to values she is still in the course of internalizing; this is so especially when her status in a community is questioned either due to her being new to the group or due to problematic, suppressive ideologies such as sexism, racism, classism, or ablism. Compared with established community members whose enjoy unchallenged status, a person who is entering new communities may be more prone to shame (Goffman 1963).

But mature individuals are not solely the product of social circumstances. It is now time to shift our focus to a discussion of individuals' agency in shame and shame-related practices.

4. Agency and Shame

We concur with thinkers like Bongrae Seok, who argues for a "communo-nomous" idea of shame, in which we as moral agents are responsive to social values, but are still capable of deliberate choices as to what values to uphold (Seok 2017, 136). However, we would emphasize that these decisions take place foremost in the course of lived experience, not during private reflections in the abstract. As Calhoun (2004) notes, we don't set out to possess moral values; rather, we set out to practice an occupation, fill a certain role in a group, or take part in some communal activity with others. Moral values come attached to

these practices. Consequently, we most commonly find ourselves not as autonomous evaluators of moral norms, but as willing participants (or not) in pre-existing moral practices (Calhoun 2004, 142). This is another angle from which the relation between personal and communal values requires re-examination. Assuming that social pressures allow for some freedom of choice, conscious adoption or rejection of values is an instance of agentive behavior. But so is the more common choice to participate in an activity with moral dimensions.

In our view, moral agency of this sort also entails some degree of personal agency with respect to one's sense of shame. Contrary to many, we maintain that what makes for a source of shame is not necessarily beyond the individual's voluntary control, not even in seemingly difficult situations. A merit of the present approach, which aims to strike a balance between social and individual aspects, is that it points to ways in which we can, by teaching sharpened observation and understanding of the internalization process, *empower* greater personal moral agency and enhance individuals' control of what they feel—or do not feel—shame over.

One piece of evidence for the role of individual agency is that, as proponents of the personal ideals view have noted, shame is at its most impactful and inescapable when caused by a violation of long-standing personal values (which may of course also be communal values). Consider a well-known saying among Ironman triathletes, quoting founder John Collins: "You can quit if you want, and no one will care. But you will know the rest of your life" (Slater 2019). This quote reflects recognition of an athlete's agency in acting on his or her expectation of private shame or regret: there is no pressure (or at least, there shouldn't be!) from the athlete community to not give up before the end of a race,

because the sport is about challenging oneself and not about impressing others or proving one's affiliation with a community; however, one may feel regret or feel shame for not trying hard enough, or for not pushing oneself to the limit (Slater 2019). The shame implied by Collins is very much reflective, autonomous shame—shame over violating values one endorses oneself and understands as important to oneself (Tiwald 2017). Although these values are nested in complex social lives and are likely the results of co-development and interaction between individual moral cognition and communal values, they are felt to be personally "owned." Abiding by them or accepting the shame that comes with abandoning them are felt to be matters of individual agency and responsibility.

A productive option for a coherent account accommodating both socially prompted internalization and agentive choice will be to take a developmental approach to autonomy, which acknowledges that a person's ability to make decisions and selectively adopt beliefs is a result of extended learning and support from childhood on, especially from members of one's immediate community. A developmental approach can assume that we are deeply social—every decision and judgment we make is formed in part by a history of social dependence—without having to deny that many personal decisions are arrived at in genuinely independent fashion. This has been argued for e.g. by David Wong, who states that we are not sole authors of our self-perception but share "co-authorship" with those around us (Wong 2004, 426). In Wong's view, during one's upbringing and subsequent learning processes that continue into adulthood, one acquires moral knowledge and a sense of who one is through constant interactions with one's communal network. Recognizing one's "co-authorship" of oneself in this sense, as opposed to "sole authorship," may lead to a more insightful self-assessment.

Taking a step beyond self-assessment, to the sociopolitical level, we might say that in the ideal case this awareness of our social circumstances and external "co-authorship" allows us to closely scrutinize whether our society allows all of its members, especially those that are marginalized, to embrace the values they genuinely endorse, instead of values imposed by the pressure of social conformity. We should be able to recognize when the capacity to shame others over values of status and inclusion is concentrated in the hands of an empowered, authoritative minority—or majority, as the case may be—rendering non-dominant subjects particularly vulnerable to shame (Calhoun 2004, 143). In an open society that embraces diversity, proper understanding of the forces and mechanisms involved will allow us to publicly identify and reject external values that make a certain group of people more susceptible to shame.

The psychological reality is, of course, that agentively rejecting shame-inducing values and situations is hard. *How* hard is once again a matter of, not least, social factors. For example, it may be unrealistic to expect of a young woman in the fashion industry, surrounded by unhealthy and unrealistic body images, not to feel shame over her own body. For her, avoiding shame will likely take more than simply deciding to suppress a certain emotional reaction, based on recognition of underlying, internalized values which aren't serving her well. The fight will be less difficult to embark on and to stay with if this young woman seeks out like-minded people in the same situation (perhaps an organized feminist group), or at least a diverse-minded community of friends harboring more than one aesthetic ideal. This may not completely obliterate her experience of shame, but it will provide her with emotional relief, intellectual distance, and perhaps political tools for externalization. And of course, a conscious choice to put up resistance will be strengthened

by awareness of the alternative of opting out, in this case of leaving the fashion industry. Knowing how to create a supportive social environment for oneself is an important way of showing agency.

That such adjustments may at times occur rapidly and collectively, at the group level, was observed in the Asian international students discussed in the last section, whose home values regarding mask-wearing clashed with those of their American host culture. We have already described one behavior of these students that could be viewed as a sign of personal agency, by mentioning that some of them chose to remove their masks in classroom settings; these maneuvers did not alleviate the conflict of values, but they eliminated some of the most shaming situations. Whether or not any belief revision was involved in this we don't know; however, frequent independent decision-making certainly was. Meanwhile, though, these Asian students gave another, very clear demonstration of agency when they proactively changed who they socialized with—whose values and associated behaviors they chose to expose themselves to. Notably, many of them reacted to their alienation from the wider university community by drawing closer to their own cultural community or to international student organizations. This coping strategy is known as "protective segregation": voluntary segregation that protects individuals from shame and further stigmatization (Ma & Zhang 2020). Those Asian students who had the resources and opportunities for such cultural association had the opportunity to communicate regularly with others in the same boat, and were then able to more confidently create their own narratives about their experience, exemplified by the student who said, "Life is more important than how others perceive you" (Ma & Zhan 2020, 14). This case illustrates vividly that personal ideals are not always in the driver's seat in one's

experiences of shame and the behavioral changes arising from it; rather, behavioral changes in particular are the result of negotiations and compromises, conflicts and alignments, with communities one is or might be a member of. What we observe empirically are, not least, changes in the time and intensity a person dedicates to gaining or maintaining membership and status in one or several particular groups.

A last point to make with regard to agency is that an individual who is aware of the forces that drive internalization processes can reflect effectively on ways in which their chosen behaviors might prompt internalization of values in others. A stance of agency in this spirit has been promoted by philosophers of various ancient cultures. For example, Shun (2014; 1997), Hu (2022), Zhao (2018), and Seok (2017) discuss the various methods through which the ancient Confucians, especially Confucius and Xunzi, aimed to make their fellow students more vigilant with respect to their social relationships, community activities, daily practices, and even the jokes they laughed at (cf. the notion of tribalistic schadenfreude; Olberding 2021), all of which were deemed to embody values that practitioners and bystanders might warm up to and internalize. As the Confucians saw it, reflections on one's moral character and moral practice increase one's understanding of deeper concepts relevant to character development and self-transparency—both prominent positive values for them. [5]

As will have become apparent, the approach we are advocating—what we dubbed the Interactive Personal Ideals view—assumes a different kind of agentive subject from

[5] Further particulars of the Confucian view of shame and its appropriate cultivation deserve separate discussion elsewhere. Suffice it to say that the Confucians as well held that under suitable social conditions and with appropriate tools, if we focus on our moral cultivation, we can acquire a relatively autonomous sense of shame that aligns with our deepest convictions about themselves.

some previous views on shame: a subject who only ever becomes autonomous in their choice of moral values or, more realistically, of morally significant practices, *by way of* recognition of their social interdependency. In this conception, the individual is not placed in opposition to the collective but rather in dynamic co-constitution with it. An individual's values are not simply imposed on her from the outside, and her cognitive abilities and agentive freedom mean that she can critique and change her moral practices and her experience of shame; but this is only possible once she is aware of past and present social pressures on her.

It would be a mistake, of course, to assume that the point of agentivity is to eliminate one's openness to shame by whatever means. As noted earlier, the emotion of shame exists because it serves important functions both at an individual and at a societal level. We maintain the view that shame grants us great moral sensitivity—both in our reflective view of ourselves and in our relationship with others in our communities. Shame serves as an appropriate corrective signal, as long as it is a temporary emotion that prompts us to bring our behavior back in line with the values we own, or else to question those values—in other words, to display agency. It becomes damaging when the experiencer is being pressured to internalize destructive values (especially values that are hostile to themselves); and in particular if it becomes chronic because it is tied to an invariant feature of the experiencer's identity or social status—in other words, where agency is absent.

5. Conclusion

This paper started by outlining certain challenges faced by existing theories of shame that define it as the result of a failure to live up to personal moral standards. Aside from the

relatively unexamined nature of the notion of personal ideals involved, these theories have little to say about important social features of shame, such as its pervasiveness among marginalized subjects in society. We also, importantly, looked at internalization as a process that is socially motivated. Incongruous values may coexist for us and affect us not because we somehow intellectually agree with all of them but because they are held and practiced in varied communities we are (or are trying to be) a part of. Being seemingly vulnerable to shame over values we don't genuinely hold ourselves is not a design flaw in the human psyche; instead, it indicates our interdependency and sociality. Consequently, our response of shame should not unreflectingly be perceived as based on personal moral failure. At the same time, we can affirm ourselves in the values we do own by being the agents of our evolving social life: not by withdrawing altogether, but by reorienting ourselves.

Despite the emphasis in our model on social factors and mechanisms in shame—both in its causes and in our reaction to it—we also argued that there is space here for autonomy, and for individual negotiation or rejection of new values we are exposed to and under pressure to adopt. Especially in societies with diverse values and communities, we not only have considerable control over what values we take in and practice (and thus control over the content of our personal ideals), but also agency in navigating potentially shaming situations and in aligning ourselves with different moral practices and communities. This is not to understate the challenges and difficulties individuals may face in this process—none of us live in an ideal society, especially not the many members of modern societies who experience pervasive shame. One implication of the view presented here is, therefore, that we should pay particular attention to marginalized groups and

provide them with the epistemological and community-building resources necessary to understand the psychosocial dynamics involved in shame.

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