Shame and the question of self-respect

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Abstract
Despite signifying a negative self-appraisal, shame has traditionally been thought by philosophers to entail the presence of self-respect in the individual. On this account, shame is occasioned by one's failure to live up to certain self-standards—in displaying less worth than one thought one had—and this moves one to hide or otherwise inhibit oneself in an effort to protect one's self-worth. In this paper, I argue against the notion that only self-respecting individuals can experience shame. Contrary to the idea that shame presupposes the presence of self-worth, I contend that shame merely requires that one have the desire, rather than the expectation, that one is worthy. Furthermore, I suggest that the desire for concealment fueled by shame is not an inherently self-protective mechanism but can alternatively be understood as an effort to safeguard one's connection with others.

Keywords
shame, self-respect, self-esteem, self-worth, Kant, shamelessness, hiding, self-protection, relationality

I. Introduction

As an emotion so intimately tied to the act of self-appraisal, shame has often found itself accompanied by the themes of self-respect and self-esteem in philosophical discussions. In particular, shame is thought to relate to self-respect in the Kantian sense: it is argued that shame, as much as it signifies a negative self-appraisal, actually entails the presence of self-respect, insofar as its occurrence requires an expectation of one's intrinsic worth. On this account, shame results from an incongruence between the worth that one displays and

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the worth that one thought one had—meaning that it is only because a person has an expectation of self-worth that they are liable to feel shame in the first place. If a person does *not* expect themselves to have worth, it is argued, then the feeling that they have displayed a lack of worth would not be an occasion for disappointment—or, therefore, for shame.[1] This way of thinking about shame and self-respect also functions in discussions of shamelessness. Individuals who are typically considered "shameless" are often seen to lack self-respect because they do not have standards by which they are able to accord themselves such respect, nor do they have an expectation they will meet such standards; in other words, they are lacking in commitments, while the self-respecting person commits themselves to certain standards uncompromisingly.[2]

In this paper, I argue against the notion that to feel shame requires the presence of self-respect. Contrary to the idea that one must have a conviction in one's own self-worth in order to feel the disappointment that sparks shame, I argue that shame merely requires that one have the *desire*, rather than the expectation, that one is worthy. A person who does not recognize their own worth may still be disappointed that they have displayed a lack of self-worth if being worthy is something that they desire; in this instance, they are ashamed at the reminder that their wish to be someone of value remains unfulfilled. As for the quintessentially "shameless" individual—who is thought to lack self-respect in that they do not hold, nor adhere to, self-standards—I argue that their so-called shameless behavior does not actually signify an absence of shame, but rather serves to mask shame's presence. Just as the grandiose narcissist conceals their self-contempt with a pretense of self-admiration, so too does the shameless person purport to abandon social values as a way of defending against their own shame. Following these assertions, I contend that individuals do not need to respect themselves in order to feel shame; in fact, it seems likely that self-respecting individuals have significantly fewer encounters with shame.

II. Shame and self-respect: The classic view

In large part, the philosophical focus on the relation between shame and self-respect follows on from John Rawls's conceptualization of shame as it was outlined 50 years ago in his *A Theory of Justice*. Following Kant, Rawls characterized shame as the feeling that one experiences upon suffering a loss of respect or esteem for oneself.[3] Self-respect and self-esteem, in his view, have to do with a person's sense of their own value, this stemming from a secure conviction in, firstly, the merit of their life goals and ideals and, secondly, their capacity to achieve these. On his account, the circumstances for shame are thus those in which we are "struck by the loss to our self-esteem… sens[ing] the diminishment of self from our anxiety about the lesser respect that others may have for us and from our disappointment with ourself for failing to live up to our ideals."[4] In many ways, the Rawlsian account seems to fit with the basic definition of shame that we often find in the philosophical literature: a feeling of self-criticism in which one assesses oneself to be defective or worthless, especially before the judgement of others.[5] It is still a matter of contention as to whether shame results from the disappointment of internal (autonomous) or external (heteronomous) standards. However, in my view it seems plausible that, as philosophers such as Sartre and Dan Zahavi, and psychoanalysts such as Léon Wurmser

and Donna Orange, have argued, shame does not arise exclusively from the judgement of either the self or the Other, but from both at once: originating in our relations with others and subsequently reproduced in our relationship with ourselves.[6]

Many scholars construe shame as primarily an assessment of both one's self-ideal and one's (lack of) fulfilment of that ideal. Andrew Morrison has written that shame "reflects feelings about a defect of the self, a lowering of self esteem," while Zahavi claims that it is this "global decrease" in one's positive self-regard that distinguishes shame from embarrassment, a milder affect which "does not shade into shame until one's discomfort over exposure is joined by a negative self-assessment."[7] Here, the self is evaluated in shame as being less capable or worthy than one had previously thought; in this sense, shame represents a disappointment of the expectations that one had for oneself. Of course, this requires that one have had such expectations in the first place—hence the contention of some philosophers that shame, as much as it signifies a negative self-appraisal, actually requires the presence of self-worth to occur. Although Rawls himself did not distinguish between self-respect and self-esteem in his discussion of self-worth, scholars often maintain that only one of these is relevant to the shame experience.

Despite their shared relation to the notion of self-worth, self-respect and self-esteem are generally taken by philosophers to be recognizably distinct. Although these concepts encompass complex and sometimes overlapping phenomena, this distinction has proved compelling for a large number of moral and political theorists, and is also reflected in the literature on recognition.[8] Indeed, while as many as six different forms of respect have been theorized, most of them are encompassed by the distinction between esteem and respect, or by Stephen Darwall's roughly equivalent distinction between what he terms "recognition" and "appraisal" respect.[9] Esteem, in short, is thought to refer to the favorable regard in which one may hold oneself or others—what we might call *liking*—resulting from a positive evaluation of that person's worth based on their achievements or their distinctive qualities in comparison to others.[10] Respect, on the other hand, is often considered a more neutral, and thus morally useful, form of regard. Following Kantian moral theory, this view of respect is that it confers value on a person by virtue of their essential (human) nature, which is recognized as being valuable in itself, rather than a mere means to an end.[11] Unlike self-esteem, or appraisal self-respect, (recognition) self-respect is thus not contingent upon the quality of one's character or actions, but rather results from a view of oneself as having inherent self-worth. This self-conception is often thought to manifest in some typical ways—for example, Thomas E. Hill Jr emphasizes self-respecting individuals as holding, and adhering to, personal standards and ideals which they see as central to their self-identities, and Gabriele Taylor claims that self-respect involves a desire to protect the self from harm.[12]

Whereas, as Claudine Clucas observes, esteem for self and Other is thought to possess a "stronger evaluative and subjective nature and focus on individual merits," respect seemingly operates outside an evaluative framework, insofar as it is universalistic or unconditional.[13] Perhaps this is why self-respect is usually framed as an asset that one either does or does not possess, while self-esteem is seen to occur in degrees; this difference would also explain the observation, made by David Sachs, that a person can apparently have "too much" self-esteem, yet seldom is it said that a person is too

self-respecting.[14] Despite this common usage, I am inclined to the view that there is little ontological difference in how the two phenomena are experienced. I thus find it plausible that self-respect is, to borrow Joseph Burgo's description of self-esteem, "not a condition that can be permanently attained but one that requires ongoing effort to nurture and sustain."[15] If respect is not an asset that one either possesses or lacks, but rather an attitude to be cultivated within oneself, then this would suggest that self-respect is situational—capable of being exhibited by a person in some circumstances and not in others—and that it occurs in degrees, meaning that someone who exhibits self-respecting behaviors more frequently and in a wider range of circumstances than another can be said to possess a greater tendency toward self-respect.

The prevailing distinction between self-respect and self-esteem has led many to the view that it is only the former which is necessary to shame. On this account, shame is tied to the fulfilment or disappointment of one's self-expectations, so its presence merely requires that one have such expectations—not that one necessarily take a favorable view of oneself.[16] If shame originates in a perceived incongruence between the worth that one expects oneself to have, and the worth that one displays, then it follows that one cannot feel shame without first possessing an expectation of self-worth. This line of thought is reflected in Max Scheler's classic account of shame, in which he argues that "genuine shame is always built upon a feeling of a positive value of the self."[17] Under this view, the experience of shame attests to the ashamed individual's belief in their own self-worth since, in Zahavi's words, "it is only because one expects oneself to have worth that this expectation can be disappointed and give rise to shame."[18]

As I have mentioned, recognition of one's self-worth is central to the Kantian conception of respect for the self. Since the self-respecting individual is someone who expects themselves to meet certain standards, and because shame is that which occurs when such expectations are not fulfilled, then, Taylor concludes, "[a] person has no self-respect if [they] regard no circumstances as shame-producing."[19] Robin Dillon agrees—she writes that recognition self-respect involves two important elements which necessitate one's liability to shame: moral agency, which requires that some actions (and thoughts and feelings) be seen as shameful or degrading, and individuality, which requires that one possess expectations of oneself, "the disappointment of which [one] would regard as shameful or degrading."[20] Hill similarly views shame as evidence that a person both possesses and adheres to certain standards; for him, only someone who acts in such a principled manner truly "puts their sense of self-worth on the line" and can therefore be said to experience self-contempt rather than mere regret.[21] Although it is of course possible to hold oneself to certain standards and ideals that one considers oneself incapable of actually meeting, self-respect in this sense requires us to not only hold such standards but, importantly, to expect ourselves to fulfil them (and, thus, to consider ourselves capable of doing so). As we will see, this way of thinking about shame also functions in discussions of shamelessness.

People who are usually considered "shameless" are those who appear to lack the capacity for self-reflection or due regard for others, especially when engaging in morally blameworthy conduct.[22] In Oscar Wilde's most controversial novel, Dorian Gray cuts a quintessentially shameless figure. As his character becomes increasingly self-indulgent,

obsessed with the pursuit of pleasure and the value of external appearance, his concern for the wellbeing of others diminishes and, with it, his capacity for moral accountability.[23] Eventually, he descends into the kind of moral degradation that is often evoked by the notion of shamelessness. Although we generally deem everyone to be capable of committing shameful acts, what distinguishes the shameless person is that they fail to properly respond to theirs (by feeling shame), and so are in that sense doubly shameful. They transgress and, moreover, they do not feel shame when they ought to.[24] It is for this reason that scholars have suggested that shamelessness is less about deliberately transgressing moral standards than about attempting to evade them altogether—as Jill Locke puts it, the shameful act occurs in violation of the bounds of social and moral norms; the shameless act takes place outside of them.[25] On this view, Dorian's shamelessness is reprehensible not only because it fails to produce in him a particular emotional response toward morally wrong behavior, but because it refuses to evaluate any behavior as morally wrong in the first place. When the painter of his portrait, Basil, suggests that Dorian has become "bad, and corrupt, and shameful," and begs that he attempt repentance, Dorian responds with contempt: "Those words mean nothing to me now."[26] At its core, then, shamelessness as we generally conceive of it involves an absence of self-standards. To be shameless, writes Michelle Mason, is "to regard oneself as beyond the reach of any ideals of character appraisal"—specifically, those ideals that are "recognizable as worthy of a well-lived human life."[27] This is why shameless individuals are thought to lack self-respect: in Dillon's words, they are "committed to nothing"—while self-respect, as we have seen, is that which "requires uncompromised commitments."[28] For Dillon, then, just as the feeling of shame necessitates that one have respect for oneself, shamelessness entails that one does not. For many philosophers, this correlation between shame and self-respect is further evidenced by the ashamed person's desire for concealment.

That shame moves one to hide behaviors or parts of oneself is thought to be explained by understanding shame as inherently self-protective.[29] One explanation for this widely-held contention, put forward by John Deigh, is that the desire to hide that which is shameful functions as a kind of "self-control that works to restrain one from giving the appearance of lesser worth and self-respect that works to cover up shameful things that, having come to light, give one such appearance."[30] Here, the function of shame is "protective" not only in that it ensures congruence with one's self-image, but also because it safeguards one from the undesirable treatment that might be expected in giving the appearance of lesser worth. For Carl Schneider, on the other hand, shame is self-protective because it induces a sense of respect for the boundary between self and Other. This allows us to keep private that which could be harmful to us if exposed before others; as Scheler, who makes a similar argument, explains, "The more danger there is through increased notoriety and general publicity, the more shame veils with its protecting cover life's noblest centers."[31] This alleged function of shame is, as Stephen Pattison observes, also tied to the notion of self-protection since, "Without a sense of shame, the inwardness and integrity of the self might be negated or compromised."[32] Despite their differing conceptions of shame, then, these scholars all agree on one thing: shame protects us from social or physical harm. Self-respect is crucial to this picture because without it there is

apparently no explanation for the ashamed individual's desire for concealment. If hiding and covering are motivated by a desire to protect the self, explains Deigh, then there must be something about the self that is considered worth protecting.[33] Self-respect, since it "is not to think either favourably or unfavourably of the self, but is rather to do that which protects the self from injury or destruction," is therefore thought to underlie this self-protective capacity of shame.[34] For Scheler, this is the "beauty" of shame: "even what is visibly ugly," he writes, "still gains something of the beautiful in expressions of shame, which say, as it were: 'I am not so ugly as you think I am.'"[35] His conclusion is thus the same as that of Rawls, Taylor, Dillon, and Deigh: the individual who experiences shame is only capable of doing so because they possess self-respect.

III. Shame and self-respect reconsidered

In a way, the contention that shame presupposes self-respect strikes me as fundamentally wrongheaded. Arguing that individuals who do not respect themselves, in certain moments or in general, are incapable of feeling shame seems misaligned with the basic notion of what shame is. In other words, there seems something problematic about the idea that a person must possess self-respect—a belief in their own self-worth—in order to be able to experience shame, the feeling that they are worth*less*. Contrary to the idea that shame and self-respect always go hand in hand, I now want to explore the possibility that individuals might feel shame without first possessing an expectation of their own self-worth.

A clinical vignette provided by psychotherapist David G. Kriton offers an interesting example. Kriton's patient "B" suffers from low self-esteem, especially in the context of romantic partnerships. Specifically, she possesses in Kriton's view a deeply-held belief that no partner "could sincerely regard her as worthy of being loved, respected and held in high enough esteem… [for] a long-term, equal relationship."[36] Although she strongly desires to be loved, and to experience herself as worthy of that love through the eyes of another, B does not believe this will happen because she herself does not recognize her own self-worth. She says: "If I open the box of [my] craving it will only end up in a catastrophe, as such an enormous need for love can never be responded to."[37] Engaging in the psychological process of repetition compulsion, wherein a person repeats traumatic past circumstances in an unconscious attempt to "right" them,[38] B continually finds these negative self-beliefs confirmed by those around her: the men she is involved with are only ever interested in brief, exclusively sexual affairs with her, never a romantic partnership. Certainly, B cannot be said to respect herself in the Kantian sense—she does not recognize herself as having intrinsic value equal to other people and, furthermore, she does not expect others to treat her as having such value. If, as Dillon asserts, someone with self-respect "does not acquiesce willingly in the avoidable denial of [their] rights, and resists demeaning or humiliating treatment," then B's participation in relationships in which she is treated "as a passing sexual object" or even subjected to "physical and emotional humiliation" entails that she is not self-respecting.[39] The question that remains, then, is whether B is still capable of experiencing shame.

As Kitron's analysis makes clear, B lacks the sort of self-expectations which are considered central to experiencing shame; in fact, she actively avoids forming them.

This is because those who engage in repetition compulsion, writes Kitron, "[subconsciously] prefer to act in a self-destructive manner—killing their own expectations while they are still young… Because of traumatic past events, such expectations are experienced as bound to end up in unbearable disappointments." And yet, try as B might to avoid this feeling of failure, she experiences it anyway; "disappointment is awaited sooner or later as inevitable."[40] As in the feeling of shame, B believes her whole self is defective and worthless; that "after getting to know her the way she really [is]… nobody could wish, or bear, to be with her."[41] In the case of B, then, we appear to be presented with someone who has no expectations of her own self-worth, nor of it being recognized by others, yet experiences both disappointment and failure of the self as they appear in shame. How is it that B could feel ashamed at her lack of self-worth, when she apparently never expected herself to have worth in the first place? I contend that it is her *desire* to be worthy, rather than her expectation that she is already worthy, which allows her to feel shame. B's inner script that she is worthless, and her tendency to engage others who treat her as such, does not change the fact that she desperately wishes she *were* worthy; as Kriton observes, "the craving for change is always there."[42] When B feels that she has displayed (or rather, revealed) her lack of self-worth, she thus experiences shame at the reminder that her wish to be a person worth loving and respecting remains unfulfilled. This, I argue, is how she is able to lack self-respect and still experience shame.

In my view, such instances of shame in the absence of self-respect are not anomalies; they are, in fact, demonstrative of the fact that those who lack expectations of their own self-worth are more predisposed to shame sensitivity.[43] Indeed, there is reason to believe that the individual who possesses a robust enough sense of their own worth in general has significantly fewer encounters with shame. The widespread observation, in both psychology and philosophy, that feelings of shame are often mitigated through the individual's cultivation of self-acceptance attests to this point.[44] As Cristophe, a client of Andrew Morrison, said of his own newfound self-confidence:

> I wouldn't have thought it was possible that I'd ever feel this good. I was always so down on myself, criticizing everything I did, expecting everyone to think I was an asshole… What's different now is that I can say to myself, 'Hey, that's okay. You're trying hard, and it may not be perfect, but it's pretty good. You may not be like Sylvan [his father], but it's just that you're different from him, not less than him.'[45]

Far from diminishing his capacity for moral accountability, Cristophe's newfound insulation against shame appears to be attended by a greater conviction in his own worth as a person than he has previously ever had. His therapist, Morrison, is similarly critical of the idea that less shame "leads only to a reduction of goals and ideals, lowered standards, and less conscience," arguing that "nothing could be farther from the truth… 'shamelessness', in the sense of being *without conscience*, is not the goal of therapy."[46] Given Morrison's views on shame, I think it is fair to say that he considers the goal of therapy to be a different kind of shamelessness—that is, shamelessness in its literal sense, as an absence of shame. The discrepancy that exists between these two ways of conceptualizing the notion also has an impact on the suggested relation between shame and self-respect.

As we have seen, the typically shameless individual is thought to lack self-respect insofar as their amorality places them outside the bounds of agreed-upon social and moral codes. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that this view of shamelessness employs notably different criteria than that which is used to define shame.[47] In fact, given its relation to the notion of moral conscience, it seems likely that "shameless" behavior relates more to an absence of guilt than of shame. If shame is a feeling that one's whole self is defective or worthless, and that this has been exposed before the judgement of others, then it follows that the inverse of shame would involve feelings of self-acceptance and social belonging. On the contrary, "shameless" is usually employed as a pejorative term which denotes the absence of both of these things. As someone who does not appear to be committed to, nor even recognize, any moral standards of character, the shameless individual is considered to be neither self-respecting nor socially cohesive.[48] Contrary to initial appearances, then, so-called shameless behavior may not necessarily signify an absence of shame.

In fact, I would argue that it often serves to mask shame's presence. Just as the grandiose narcissist masks their self-contempt with the pretence of self-admiration, so too might the shameless person attempt to abandon social values as a way of defending against moral judgment and, thus, shame. It is common knowledge that the body responds to the feeling of shame with self-concealment. Often, we see this in the way that ashamed individuals attempt to hide or disappear by making themselves small—hence Bartky's observation that shame often renders a person, particularly an oppressed one, "weaker, more timid, less confident, less demanding, and hence more easily dominated."[49] But making oneself small is only one way to hide. Another, less widely recognized method for concealing one's shameful self is to develop the pretense that it does not exist; in other words, to become "shameless." This response is reflected in the pathology of grandiose narcissism—also driven by shame—in which one exhibits an exaggerated sense of self-importance in order to compensate for the depth of one's insecurities.[50] As Diane Simmons writes:

> narcissism is not, as is often assumed, a condition of self-satisfaction or self-admiration; it is, rather, a condition of deprivation, producing a personality desperate to find others who will nourish it, constantly dreading an attack that will puncture grandiosity. Such personalities need constant self-display and dominance over others to ward off persistent feelings of vulnerability and worthlessness.[51]

Léon Wurmser made the same observation about shamelessness in his 1981 book, *The Mask of Shame*. Here, he identifies the concept of shamelessness as denoting a form of "value privation"; specifically, a disregard for sentiment, compassion, and commitment in which one is "not ashamed to be seen as ruthless, treacherous, unprincipled, and promiscuous."[52] This privation of values, he argues, does not originate from a "lacuna in conscience and ideal formation" as is commonly thought, nor does it constitute one's "regression to a stage before the establishment of a shame barrier." Rather, such shamelessness is "the outcome of a complex layering of defenses… [which themselves constitute] a reaction formation against shame."[53] More recently in the psychoanalytic

literature, Pentti Ikonen and Eero Rechardt have also identified shamelessness, along with indifference and cynicism, as a common method for avoiding shame, while Salman Akhtar has described what he calls "defense-based" shamelessness as "a transparent fig leaf against the dreaded experience of genuine shame."[54]

That shamelessness could originate in shame itself is reflected in the Faustian pact that Dorian Gray makes in "[selling] himself to the devil for a pretty face"—the split between his inner shame and his outward shamelessness symbolically depicted by that between the decay of his ageing portrait and the youthful beauty of his outward appearance.[55] At first, Dorian believes that the portrait can protect him from experiencing his own shame because it alone reflects the consequences of such feelings, forced "to bear the burden that should have been his own." Eventually, however, he comes to realize that "[h]is beauty has been to him but a mask," and that the portrait in fact reflects his own conscience.[56] Although Dorian ultimately cannot bring himself to accept this realization, attempting to destroy the portrait in order to rid himself of his conscience, this fails, resulting in his unintentional suicide, and the lesson to the reader is clear: the shame has always been his own.[57] In Wurmser's words, his shamelessness thus "bespeaks no less a disdain for the self… than its opposite."[58] If the shameless individual, who cannot be said to respect themselves, is therefore quite plausibly reacting against their own shame, then it seems doubtful that shame requires self-respect in order to occur.

There is also reason to think that the desire for self-concealment which often attends shame can be explained without reference to self-respect. As we have seen, for both Scheler and Deigh among others, the ashamed person's tendency to censure themselves originates in a conviction of their own self-worth. This is because, on their account, shame has a self-protective function: it signals to the ashamed that the danger of an unwanted social exposure has occurred, and subsequently moves them to hide by way of self-preservation. "As a protecting feeling," then, Scheler concludes that "shame can only be related to positive self-values. Only positive self-values require protection."[59] The fundamental issue I take with this conclusion is that it interprets the ashamed person's motivation to hide as necessarily reflecting an intrinsic concern with protecting the *self* from (social or physical) harm and, in doing so, disregards the possibility that hiding could be about protecting one's connection to others.

Given the historical tendency to minimize human relationality, it is perhaps not surprising that accounts of shame as a protective emotion often overlook the primary human motivation to preserve social bonds. As Benjamin Kilborne reminds us, "the very notion of an identity independent of relationships is a fiction, although a powerful one."[60] We are fundamentally relational creatures who from birth experience ourselves in relation to other people. This is why, as Hartmut Mokros argues, "a [person's] sense of identity… is most adequately understood in terms of social bonds."[61] The way we see ourselves is always partly contingent upon how we think we are seen by others. Portrayals of shame as necessarily *self*-protective disregard the role of such relationality, insofar as they neglect the extent to which shame-motivated hiding could be aimed at the preservation of one's interpersonal relations. If our own identity is socially constituted, then it is conceivable that we are both compelled to maintain a certain self-image in order to aid positive connections with others, and moved to hide what is "shameful" because of the threat that

this poses to such connections. This observation, I think, captures the reason that feeling shameful even matters to us in the first place: it threatens to disrupt how we are seen by others and, thus, how closely connected they might wish to be to us. "Through shame," writes Mokros, "we experience separation and distance and the pull toward social re-integration. Shame… brings to awareness one's sense of place and self as contingent, contingent upon others, [and upon] one's place within the social bond."[62] If shame does not necessarily motivate us to protect ourselves, but rather to protect our relations with others, this casts further doubt on the view that self-respect is necessary to shame.

Of course, one might object that a lack of self-respect would also impair our ability to care about our connection with others. Although I agree that the individual who lacks conviction in their own self-worth would rarely, if ever, be motivated to protect themselves from harm, I think it is entirely plausible that they would still desire to protect the wellbeing of their relationships. As B's tragic story illustrated, someone who does not respect themselves may still desire to be respected by other people; in fact, they are perhaps more likely to do so, given that they struggle to properly affirm themselves and are more inclined to look to others for validation. "The more I doubt my own self-worth," explains Mario Jacoby, "the more important the opinions of others become and the more sensitive I will be to the smallest hint of rejection."[63] Instances in which a person does not respect themselves, and yet remains concerned with how they are seen by others, regularly occur in the experience of shame. A fitting example of this occurrence is when the ashamed individual attempts to relieve the pain of their social isolation through self-destructive behaviors.[64] In these instances, escape from one's shame is not enacted through mere hiding, but becomes an attempt to vanish altogether. As Gunnar Karlsson and Lennart Gustav Sjöberg observe, this response to shame "does not give sense to a longing for freedom, indeed one does want to escape and/or annihilate the situation, but it is not a free and developing movement, but rather a search for *disappearing*."[65] In extreme circumstances, this can result in self-harm, or even suicide—responses to shame which are clearly incompatible with a desire for self-protection or, for that matter, the presence of self-respect; and yet, I argue, not incompatible with a concern for one's social ties. This is because, although it permanently severs one's physical connections with others, suicide can be motivated by considerations of how one is seen by others. In some instances, suicide is motivated by a desire to maintain one's reputation, or else to enhance it: some people might see suicide as a way to preserve their honor; others might believe that, in death, they will finally be missed or appreciated by those around them.[66] When Stephen Lewis engaged in self-harming, he experienced at once a wish for self-destruction *and* a desire to be viewed favorably by others:

> Beyond the relief it provided, cutting allowed me to convey and visualize the mental anguish and self-loathing I felt inside. The marks left on my body represented and validated the pain I thought I deserved… I felt utterly alone. I was terrified about the reactions my injuries would elicit from family, friends and professionals. *What would others think of me?* Would they judge me? What if they saw me in the same abysmal light that I saw myself?[67]

From this perspective, concealing, inhibiting, or annihilating oneself in response to shame does not necessarily reveal that one thinks the self-worthy of protecting; rather, it attests to the fundamental human need for emotional connection, and the lengths that we will go to not to endure the intolerable pain of having that need go unfulfilled.[68]

IV. Conclusion

Classically, philosophers have conceptualized shame as resulting from the disappointment of one's own self-standards and as thus being contingent upon the self-respecting notion that one has inherent worth. On this account, shame is occasioned by one's failure to live up to this expectation—in displaying less worth than one expected oneself to have—and feeling ashamed moves one to hide or otherwise inhibit oneself in an effort to protect the self from social or physical harm. Given that both the expectation of self-worth and the desire to protect oneself from harm are seen as hallmarks of self-respect, the experience of shame is therefore thought to be limited to self-respecting individuals. Contrary to this account, I have argued that shame may occur in the absence of a conviction in one's self-worth and that it therefore does not require the presence of self-respect in order to occur. Rather, shame merely requires that one have the wish, rather than the expectation, that one is worthy. As we saw in the clinical case of B, it is possible for a person to lack an expectation of their own self-worth and to simultaneously experience feelings of shame when their desire to be worthy is disappointed. Furthermore, as I have suggested, the desire for concealment that is fueled by shame is not an inherently self-protective mechanism but can alternatively be understood as an effort to safeguard one's connection with others. It is not the case, then, that shame originates in an evaluation of the self as worthy; contrary to classic philosophical accounts, individuals do not need to respect themselves, in certain moments or in general, in order to have experiences of shame.

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Notes

1. Max Scheler, "Shame and Feelings of Modesty," in *Person and Self-Value: Three Essays*, ed., trans. Manfred S. Frings (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 37–38; Thomas E. Hill Jr, *Autonomy and Self-Respect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 22–23; Gabriele Taylor, "Shame, Integrity, and Self-Respect," in *Dignity, Character, and Self-Respect*, ed. Robin Dillon (New York: Routledge, 1995), 160–161; Robin S. Dillon, "How to Lose Your Self-Respect," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1992), 129; John Deigh, "Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique," in *Dignity, Character, and Self-Respect*, ed. Robin S. Dillon (New York: Routledge, 1995), 154; Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding From Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 184; Dan Zahavi, "Shame," in *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology of Emotion*, ed. Thomas Szanto and Hilge Landweer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 355.

2. Dillon, "How to Lose Your Self-Respect," 129.

3. John Rawls, "Self-Respect, Excellences, and Shame," in *Dignity, Character, and Self-Respect*, ed. Robin S. Dillon (New York: Routledge, 1995), 125. See also Deigh, "Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique," 134–136; Sandra Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (London: Routledge, 1990), 87.

4. Rawls, "Self-Respect, Excellences, and Shame," 130.

5. See for example, Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*, 86, 90; Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 89–90; Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, 183; Jill Locke, "Shame and The Future of Feminism," *Hypatia* 22, no. 4 (2007), 149; Peter N. Stearns, *Shame: A Brief History* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 106; Krista Thomason, *Naked: The Dark Side of Shame and Moral Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 66, 104–105; David Hollier, "Shame," in *See What You Made Me Do: Power, Control and Domestic Violence*, ed. Jess Hill (Victoria: Black Inc, 2019), 86.

6. See Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, 1943 (Reprint, London: Routledge, 2003), 302–303; Zahavi, "Shame," 354; Léon Wurmser, *The Mask of Shame* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 45, 49; Donna Orange, "Whose Shame is it Anyway? Lifewords of Humiliation and Systems of Restoration (or 'The Analyst's Shame')," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 44, no. 1 (2008), 85, 90. See also Bartky, "Femininity and Domination," 85-86; Chloë FitzGerald, "Defending Shame," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 12, no. 2 (2015), 230; Alba Montes Sánchez, "Shame and the Internalized Other," Ethics & Politics 17, no. 2 (2015), 188.

7. Andrew P. Morrison, "Shame, Ideal Self, and Narcissism," in *Essential Papers on Narcissism*, ed. Andrew P. Morrison (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 352; Dan Zahavi, "Self, Consciousness, and Shame," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology*, ed. Dan Zahavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 305. See also Susan Miller, *The Shame Experienc*e (London: Analytic Press, 1985), 39–42; Helen Merrell Lynd, *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1958), 23–24; Heidi L. Maibom, "The Descent of Shame," *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research* 80, no. 3 (2010), 566.

8. For use of the esteem/respect distinction in moral and political theory, see Robin Dillon, "Self-Respect and Self-Esteem," in *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. H. LaFollette, 4772–4782 (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); Taylor, "Shame, Integrity, and Self Respect," 158–161; Claudine Clucas, "Understanding Self-Respect and Its Relationship to Self-Esteem," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 46, no. 6 (2020), 839; Zahavi, "Shame," 356fn2. For occurrences of the esteem/respect distinction in recognition literature, see Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognitio*n*: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 128–130; Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25–73; Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge: Harvard University Publishing, 2005), 216–217; Mattias Iser, "Recognition," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, available online: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/recognition/.

9. See Stephen L. Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," *Ethics* 88, no. 1 (1977), 36–49. Robin Dillon also mentions Feinberg's 'reverential' respect for the moral law and for morally good persons,

and she herself theorizes a third kind of self-respect called 'basal self-respect', which involves a fundamental confidence in the rightness of one's being (and which underlies both recognition and appraisal self-respect). See Robin Dillon, "Respect," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, available online: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/respect/; Robin Dillon, "Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect," *Ethics* 112, no. 1 (2001), 68.

10. Anna Bortolan, "Self-Esteem, Pride, Embarrassment and Shyness," in *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology of Emotion*, edited by Thomas Szanto and Hilge Landweer (Abingdon, Routledge, 2020), 358; Clucas, "Understanding Self-Respect and Its Relationship to Self-Esteem," 839; Arto Laitinen, "Social Bases of Self-Esteem: Rawls, Honneth and Beyond," *Nordicum-Mediterraneum* 7, no. 2 (2012), 1; Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 129.

11. Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed., trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6:419; Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 4:427–4:436. See also David Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion," *Ethics* 109, no. 2 (1999), 364; Marguerite La Caze, *Wonder and Generosity: Their Role in Ethics and Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 39–40; Kristján Kristjánsson, "Measuring Self-Respect," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 37 (2007), 225–242; Daniela Renger, "Believing in One's Equal Rights: Self-Respect as a Predictor of Assertiveness," *Self and Identity* 17 (2017), 1–21; Hill, *Autonomy and Self-Respect*, 9, 13.

12. Hill, *Autonomy and Self-Respect*, 20–23; Taylor, "Shame, Integrity, and Self-Respect," 161. I should note here that Hill considers having personal standards or ideals a nonmoral phenomenon, and to thus be categorically different from recognising one's moral rights or human worth. I do not follow this distinction because I think that personal standards are necessarily normative and cannot therefore easily be labelled as nonmoral.

13. Clucas, "Understanding Self-Respect and Its Relationship to Self-Esteem," 840; Laitinen, "Social Bases of Self-Esteem," 1.

14. David Sachs, "How to Distinguish Self-Respect from Self-Esteem," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 10, no. 4 (1981), 347–348. See also Clucas, "Understanding Self-Respect and Its Relationship to Self-Esteem," 840; Julien Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno, and Fabrice Teroni. *In Defense of Shame: The Faces of an Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 94. For a critique on the notion of excessive self-esteem, see William B. Swann Jr, Christine Chang-Schneider and Katie Larsen McClarty, "Do People's Self-Views Matter? Self-Concept and Self-Esteem in Everyday Life," *American Psychologist* 62, no. 2 (2007), 87; Tom Pyszczynski and Pelin Kesebir, "An Existential Perspective on the Need for Self-Esteem," in *Self-Esteem*, edited by Virgil Zeigler-Hill (London: Psychology Press, 2013), 133.

15. Joseph Burgo, *Shame: Free Yourself, Find Joy, and Build True Self-Esteem* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2018), 22. See also Hill, "Self-Respect Reconsidered," 23.

16. Taylor, "Shame, Integrity, and Self-Respect," 158–161. See also Dillon, "How to Lose Your Self-Respect," 129, 133; Matt A. Ferkany, "The Nature and Importance of Self-Respect," PhD Dissertation (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2007), 13–14.

17. Scheler, "Shame and Feelings of Modesty," 37, emphasis removed.

18. Zahavi, "Shame," 355. See also: Nussbaum, *Hiding From Humanity*, 184; Dillon, "Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect,"67fn43.

19. Taylor, "Shame, Integrity, and Self-Respect," 160–161.

20. Dillon, "Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect," 66.

21. Hill, *Autonomy and Self-Respect*, 22–23.

22. Marcia Baron, "Shame and Shamelessness," *Philosophia* 46, no. 3 (2018), 722; Michelle Mason, "On Shamelessness," *Philosophical Papers* 39, no. 3 (2010), 424; Gail Weiss, "'The Shame of Shamelessness," *Hypatia* 33, no. 3 (2018), 545; Burgo, *Shame*, 18.

23. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1908).

24. Dillon, "Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect," 68. See also Baron, "Shame and Shamelessness," 728.

25. Jill Locke, *Democracy and the Death of Shame* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 20. See also Mason, "On Shamelessness," 417; Dillon, "How to Lose Your Self-Respect," 129.

26. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 199, 203.

27. Mason, "On Shamelessness," 417, 423.

28. Dillon, "How to Lose Your Self-Respect," 129.

29. See Deigh, "Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique," 152; Scheler, "Shame and Feelings of Modesty," 38; Taylor, "Shame, Integrity, and Self-Respect," 161; Erwin W. Straus, "Shame as a Historiological Problem," in *Phenomenological Psychology: The Selected Papers of Erwin W. Straus*, ed. Erling Eng, 1933 (Reprint, New York: Basic Books, 1966), 220; Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Die Ehrfurcht: Wesen und Wandel der Tugenden*, 1947 (Reprint, Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 2009), 67, 91; Stephen Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 80; Mario Jacoby, *Shame and the Origins of Self-Esteem: A Jungian Approach*, trans. Douglas Whitcher (London: Routledge, 2003), 55; Carl D. Schneider, *Shame, Exposure and Privacy* (New York: WW Norton, 1987), 38. See also Joel A. Van Fossen, "Nietzsche and Shame," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 50, no. 2 (2019), 236–239; Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 79; Nussbaum, *Hiding From Humanity*, 184; Thomas Nagel, "Concealment and Exposure," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 27, no. 1 (1998), 4, 21.

30. Deigh, "Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique," 152. It should be noted that Deigh characterizes shame as a diminishment to one's *sense* of self-worth, rather than to one's actual self-worth; he thus views shame-inducing circumstances as threatening the diminishment of one's worth, rather than effecting its actual loss [151–153].

31. Schneider, *Shame, Exposure and Privacy*, 38; Scheler, "Shame and Feelings of Modesty," 38.

32. Pattison, *Shame*, 80.

33. Deigh, "Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique," 154.

34. Taylor, "Shame, Integrity, and Self-Respect," 161.

35. Scheler, "Shame and Feelings of Modesty," 38.

36. David G. Kitron, "Repetition Compulsion and Self-Psychology: Towards a Reconciliation," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 84, no. 2 (2003), 437.

37. Kitron, "Repetition Compulsion and Self-Psychology," 437.

38. The term 'repetition compulsion' comes from Sigmund Freud [see Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through: Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-analysis II," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Vol. 12, *The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works*, trans. Joan Riviere, 1913 (Reprint, London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1958)] although there are

varying theories as to its primary motivating force. For my part, I agree with David Kriton's analysis that the compulsion to repeat is motivated by a desire for change or reconciliation [see Kitron, "Repetition Compulsion and Self-Psychology," 428–435].

39. Dillon, "Toward a Feminist Conception of Self-Respect," 293; Kitron, "Repetition Compulsion and Self-Psychology," 437.

40. Kitron, "Repetition Compulsion and Self-Psychology," 428.

41. Kitron, "Repetition Compulsion and Self-Psychology," 437.

42. Kitron, "Repetition Compulsion and Self-Psychology," 428. Fortunately for B, and for us, after some years of therapy she does eventually establish what she calls "a new beginning" for herself, learning to work through her inner scripts of worthlessness and finding a partner who is "caring, respectful, and supportive of her." [Kitron, "Repetition Compulsion and Self-Psychology," 428].

43. See Margaret E. Kemeny, Tara L. Gruenewald and Sally S. Dickerson, "Shame as the Emotional Response to Threat to the Social Self: Implications for Behaviour, Physiology, and Health," *Psychological Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (2004), 154; Hannie Van Genderen, Marleen Rijkeboer and Arnoud Arntz, "Theoretical Model: Schemas, Coping Styles, and Modes," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Schema Therapy: Theory, Research, and Practice*, first edition, ed. Michiel van Vreeswijk, Jenny Broersen and Marjon Nadort (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2012), 30.

44. See for example, Locke, *Democracy and the Death of Shame*, 31–33; Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*, 90; Andrew P. Morrison, *The Culture of Shame* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1996), 104–106; Melvin R. Lansky, "Unbearable Shame, Splitting, and Forgiveness in the Resolution of Vengefulness," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 55, no. 2 (2007), 590; Burgo, *Shame*, 238.

45. Morrison, *The Culture of Shame*, 103–104.

46. Morrison, *The Culture of Shame*, 106, emphasis added.

47. Baron, "Shame and Shamelessness," 726–727. For further criticism on the use of shamelessness as a cultural concept, see Locke, *Democracy and the Death of Shame*, 8, 18–43.

48. Locke, *Democracy and the Death of Shame*, 20.

49. Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*, 97. See also Locke, *Democracy and the Death of Shame*, 34.

50. Support for the link between shame and pathological narcissism can be found in works such as Andrew P. Morrison, *Shame: The Underside of Narcissism* (Hillsdale: Analytic Press, 1989), 50–62; Otto F. Kernberg, *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1975), 227–229; Francis J. Broucek, "Shame and its Relationship to Early Narcissistic Developments," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 63 (1982), 373–374; Michael Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 165–167; Ralf-Peter Behrendt, *Narcissism and the Self: Dynamics of Self-Preservation in Social Interaction, Personality Structure, Subjective Experience, and Psychopathology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 275.

51. Diane Simmons, *The Narcissism of Empire: Loss, Rage and Revenge in Thomas De Quincey, Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling and Isak Dinesen* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2007), 6.

52. Wurmser, *The Mask of Shame*, 258. See also his later related essay, Léon Wurmser, "Shame: The Veiled Companion of Narcissism," in *The Many Faces of Shame*, edited by Donald L. Nathanson (New York: The Guilford Press, 1987), 64–92.

53. Wurmser, *The Mask of Shame*, 85–86, 260–261. A similar idea is suggested in Otto Fenichel, "The Ego and the Affects," *The Psychoanalytic Review* 28 (1941), 57; Burgo, *Shame*, 93; Aneta Stępień, *Shame, Masculinity, and Desire of Belonging: Reading Contemporary Male Writers* (London: Peter Lang, 2017), 204.

54. Pentti Ikonen and Eero Rechardt, *Thanatos, Shame, and Other Essays: On the Psychology of Destructiveness* (London: Karnac Books, 2010), 113, 124; Salman Akhtar, "Shame and Shamelessness," in *Shame: Developmental, Cultural, and Clinical Realms*, ed. Salman Akhtar (London: Karnac Books, 2016), 103.

55. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 247.

56. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 182, 283.

57. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 286.

58. Wurmser, *The Mask of Shame*, 259.

59. Scheler, "Shame and Feelings of Modesty," 37–38, emphasis added.

60. Benjamin Kilborne, "On Dreams, Imaginative Knowing and Not Knowing: Appearance, Identity, and Shame," *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 79 (2019), 1.

61. Hartmut Mokros, "Suicide and Shame," *American Behavioral Scientist* 38, no. 8 (1995), 1095. See also D. W. Winnicott, *The Child and The Outside World: Studies in Developing Relationships*, ed. Janet Hardenberg (London: Tavistock 1957), 5, 21; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 36.

62. Mokros, "Suicide and Shame," 1096.

63. Mario Jacoby, *Shame and the Origins of Self-Esteem: A Jungian Approach*, viii. See also: Jeffrie Murphy, "Forgiveness and Resentment," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (1982), 505; John Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 165; Benjamin Kilborne, *Disappearing Persons: Shame and Appearance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 92.

64. See David Lester, "The Role of Shame in Suicide," *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 27, no. 4 (1997), 359–360; Mokros, "Suicide and Shame," 1096; Melvin R. Lansky, "Shame and the Problem of Suicide: A Family Systems Perspective," *British Journal of Psychotherapy* 7, no. 3 (1991), 230–241; Wurmser, *The Mask of Shame*, 82–84; Morrison, *Culture of Shame*, 7.

65. Gunnar Karlsson and Lennart Gustav Sjöberg, "The Experiences of Guilt and Shame: A Phenomenological-Psychological Study," *Human Studies* 32, no. 3 (2009), 346. See also Wurmser, *The Mask of Shame*, 83; Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 89.

66. See for example, M. Iga and K. Tatai, "Characteristics of Suicides and Attitudes Towards Suicide in Japan," in *Suicide in Different Cultures*, ed. N. L. Farberow (Baltimore: University Park Press, 1975), 255–280; Jeremy Holmes, "Suicide and Deliberate Self-Harm: When Attachments Fail," in *Phenomenology of Suicide: Unlocking the Suicidal Mind*, ed. Maurizio Pompili (Cham: Springer, 2017), 115–116.

67. Stephen Lewis, "Cutting Through the Shame," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 188, no. 17–18 (2016), 1266, emphasis added.

68. See Mokros, "Suicide and Shame," 1096; Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, ed. George Simpson, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson, 1897 (Reprint, New York: The Free Press, 2010), 209–210.

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