

Discussion

Inherited condition

“shame as a painful emotion grounded in the recognition of our own non-omnipotence – a kind of primitive shame at the very fact of being human and incomplete underlies the more specific types of shame that we later feel about handicaps and inadequacies (Nussbaum: 2001:7)

“Shame never fails to remind us how mediated our autonomy really is – and we see in its manifestation the ‘eyes of the other’ as an authority external to self (Seligman 2000:82)

Inherited condition

Shame is an intangible attitude or feeling that affects people's lives – it is something a person carries around in his/her head that makes that person feel bad about themselves and it is a restrictor for appearing in public places where there is a risk of ridicule or embarrassment (Goldin 2005)

Shame and capable agency are incongruous and shame perpetuates social exclusion

As there are linkages between intangible and tangible goods it reduces opportunities for economic gain

In cases where people lose confidence in their own capacity they cease also to insist on their rights (Mistzal 1996)

Positive attributes of shame

Durkheim (1897) analysed the occurrence of suicide and reached the conclusion that in Catholic countries, where individualistic tendencies were suppressed, there were fewer suicides than in Protestant countries where there is less conformity and less outer deference

Scheff (1990) proposes that the compelling drive to conform to society is an emotional response and that social experience, particularly when there is conflict, is constrained by emotions

Deference-emotion system functions virtually continuously and acts as a determinant of social interaction

Elster's 'The Cement of Society' refers to as a code of honour (Elster (1995) – with the tangible gains that come with this

External authority – inside/outside

- Shame emphasises an individualistic evaluation, the idea that one has failed its own standards

Shame is relational – linked to external authority

Heller (1985), Seligman (2000), Bickford-Smith et al (1999), Ross (1999), Tisseron (1992), Williams (1993)

Seligman calls this communal referent – Bickford-Smith virtues and values

Durkheim & conformity (conform even when don't want to – internal constraining mechanisms)

Negation of self – tension between two authorities extreme

Regulator of behaviour: being different remains shameful given that success as the measure of everything is imposed on individuals as the external authority (Heller: 1985)

Shame, humiliation, guilt?

- Scheff (1990) uses shame as a generic: family of emotions
- Includes feeling words like 'insecure, awkward, uncomfortable, embarrassment and humiliation
- With shame there is an inevitable derogation in one's status as a person: with guilt one's status is intact but one's relationship to others is affected: the shameful is no worthy of association; the guilty is still worthy but a price must be paid (Seligman 2000:18)
- Humiliation: driver to action, anger, protest, against unjust, unfair treatment
- Derogation of self – driver to inaction, produces dysfunction, withdrawal, silence, exit

Stigma and shame

- Although Goffman (1963) tends to collapse stigma and shame the divide between shame and stigma unclear:
 - Farmer (1999), Levine & Ross (2002) describe stigma and AIDS
- Infected people feel their fault, they brought something on themselves
 - Political prisoners on Robben Island felt stigmatised – but also felt shame (Naidoo 2000)
 - Stigma different to shame because outward sign, a blight/diseases

Long term consequences

- Negative chain reaction – not just transitory: does not impact just on personal in social spheres
- Repercussions on larger systems and institutions

Positive attributes of shame

Core component of a decent life is one with no humiliation

- Positive consequences for social action:
 - Guards integrity of individual immersed in unfair system
 - Instrumental value – ensures individuals don't engage with external reality in conflict with moral codes
 - Can strengthen in-group networks, shared differences (Naidoo 2000)
 - Street-level trust, honour of vendors (Jacobs 1961 & Scott 1999) and Elster (1995)
- Oppressive regimes use it: opposite attributes – honour (Lynd 1958) or pride (Scheff 1990) would unite activists
 - Shame used to smash coherence (Ruiters 1996, Marais 2001)

Measurement challenge

- Nature of shame to stifle its own discourse
- shame ‘...cross-eyed and shy, stalks the post-colonial world broken mirror in hand, reproducing itself in puzzling distortions’ (Wicomb 1998)
- Social capital indices – trust/shame
 - risk
 - in-group/out-group
 - knowledge
 - embeddedness
 - mobility