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ON SHAME AND THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

HELEN MERRELL LYND

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TO

my Students and Colleagues

Past and Present

at Sarah Lawrence College

Foreword

When should cumulating speculations on a subject be gathered together for publication? This book if published a year or two years from now would doubtless be different in many ways. But if it were not published for another ten years, it would still contain unresolved contradictions, and would take the form of questions and suggestions, not of final conclusions. One reason for publishing it now is to invite comment on the questions it raises.

The thought of a number of persons with whom I have discussed these questions over a period of years, including that of my son Staughton Lynd, is deeply woven into the entire book. More recently, I have had important criticisms on the manuscript before its final revision from Elizabeth Barnes, Robert K. Merton, David Riesman, and Lee R. Wolin. The usual disclaimer that much of the thought of others enters into whatever is of value in these pages but that the shortcomings are my own is more than usually relevant.

To Margaret Marshall I am doubly indebted. As Book Review Editor of *The Nation* she gave me an opportunity to do review articles that helped me to bring certain ideas into focus. On this book, she not only gave me valuable specific suggestions but had the imagination to create an atmosphere in which one's best work can be done.

Lucy Lowe has struggled with the typing of succeeding ver-

sions of this book. Her care and patience in this and in the preparation of the index have been invaluable.

HELEN MERRELL LYND

Sarah Lawrence College
January, 1958

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and the Search for Identity

ONE

Introduction

Contemporary Search for Identity

In every age men ask in some form the questions: Who am I? Where do I belong? The degree of awareness and the kind of emphasis with which these questions are asked vary at different periods. Times of swift change and social dislocation bring them to the fore, against the background of whatever personal hopes and social harmonies an earlier period has cultivated.

Such times of change appear primarily as periods of dissolution or of new birth according to the particular view of individual values and historical sequences from which they are interpreted. To Burckhardt the Middle Ages was a time of "childish prepossession" happily succeeded by the "flowering of free personality" of the Renaissance. Other writers would single out other periods also in the history of the West as times of heightened awareness of individual identity: the transition from the age of Hesiod to fifth-century Greece and the period of the Hebrew prophets beginning in the seventh century,[a] the period of Plotinus, or of Rousseau, or of the nineteenth-century Romantics. Some would question Burckhardt's evaluation, and maintain that the insights of St. Augustine at the threshold of the Middle Ages held greater promise for the flowering of personality than the more exclusive forms of Renaissance ration-

[a] The notes begin on page 261.

alism. Whether in subsequent appraisals the stress falls on the loss of an earlier integration or on the shaping of new social forms, the individual man living through periods of transition is impelled to a fresh questioning of himself in relation to the world.

Certainly our own age is another such time. People of any period tend toward a kind of temporal centrism, which may be as confined in outlook as ethnocentrism. At present we may find it hard to believe that for St. Augustine or for Erasmus the discovery of identity was as important or as difficult as it is for us—just as we may learn with surprise that the coins of Hadrian in the first century were inscribed *Humanitas, Libertas, Felicitas.*

But whatever our limitations of outlook, it is manifest that the recurrent question of self-identity is today in the forefront of awareness. Today might be dated from the Copernican Revolution, from the Renaissance and the Reformation, from the French and Industrial revolutions, or from the First World War. I refer particularly to the last half, and especially the last quarter, century, when thinking people have had to attempt to assimilate the implications of an economy of potential abundance, of communication among all parts of the world, of colonial revolutions, world war, and concentration camps, of atomic energy, of the theories of Darwin, of Marx, of Freud, of Planck. Each of these historical developments has given our search for identity special possibilities, special difficulties, and our own peculiar version of its importance.

So great has been the impact of the changes of recent years that it is possible for an innovating Freudian psychoanalyst, Erik H. Erikson, to say that the search for identity has become as strategic in our time as the study of sexuality was in Freud's time. "The patient [or person] of today suffers most under the problem of what he should believe in and who he should—or, indeed, might—be or become; while the patient of early psychoanalysis suffered most under inhibitions which prevented him from being what and who he thought he knew he was." [a]

This search for identity, as will be apparent from all that follows, is a social as well as an individual problem. The kind of answer one gives to the question Who am I? depends in

part upon how one answers the question What is this society —and this world—in which I live?

We might assume, on first thought, that if the question Who am I? is of particular importance at present, it is also receiving more than adequate attention as a matter of specialized study. Social scientists, psychologists and psychoanalysts of all schools, poets and novelists observe, describe, dissect, analyze, and bring the resources of technical skill and artistic insight to bear upon rediscovery of the meaning of individuality, upon the experiences of the individual in his attempt to attain a sense of himself and a place of anchorage in the world.

Above all, they *name* different aspects of these experiences. It is hard to find any phase of personality development or of social life that has not acquired a label with its rapidly codified weighting of association and meaning. The study of instincts may give way to the study of traits, and this, in turn, to the study of drives, motives, vectors, or variables as the terminology in favor changes; but it would seem that whatever the human experience, or aspect of personality, it could not escape being caught in the mesh of some scheme of codification.

Our period of history, too, is marked by self-conscious labels. It is called a new period of failure of nerve, an age of conformity, a period of *anomie* or cultural chaos, of escape from freedom, a new age of treason, an age of longing, a decline of the West. Much is heard of the dilemma of liberalism, the distrust of the democratic process, the revolt of the masses, the failure of self-determination, the loss of command over the environment. We who live in this time are described as alienated, estranged, isolated, alone, a lost generation, depersonalized, other-directed, double men.

However much we may question or qualify any particular label, there is a sense in which the fact of the labeling itself remains, in de Tocqueville's sense, a living witness to the concern with personal identity and social anchorage. The soberly academic statement "The child is born without an identity; he achieves one through his contact with the world around him," [a] and the darting insight "Life is . . . the oddest affair; has in it the essence of reality. I used to feel this as a child—couldn't step across a puddle once, I remember, for thinking how strange

—what am I?" [a]—each bears the peculiar mark not of any time, but of our time.

Elaboration of research methods in psychology and social science has kept pace with the proliferation of labeling. Observations, categories, techniques for the study of human nature were never so abundant; there were never so many people engaged in using them. If understanding of identity and of ways of realizing it could be discovered by such means, this strategic problem of today would seem assured of solution.

But since every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing, it is possible that the very multiplication of categories and the very precision of techniques may sometimes act as barriers instead of as means of access to understanding. Reliance on accepted categories and methods may mean that certain phenomena essential for understanding identity escape attention. In the present climate of psychological thought any observed human characteristic speedily acquires a label, which encases it within one of the experimentalists' or the clinicians' categories. Extensive as these categories are, applied to some life situations they may be more constricting than informing.

Certain pervasive experiences, not easily labeled, may slip through the categories altogether or, if given a location and a name, may be circumscribed in such a way that their essential character is lost. Habituation to such usage may blind us still further to the necessity of searching more deeply into the nature of these experiences.

Among such experiences are the diffused sensations of early childhood,[b] and other experiences that may occur in some form at many stages of life—shame, anxiety, joy, love, sense of honor, wonder, curiosity, longing, certain kinds of pride, self-respect. Of these, only anxiety has been the subject of extensive specialized study. (I do not include guilt among these pervasive phenomena for reasons that will appear later.) Such experiences tend to elude codification whether of the experimentalist's laboratory or of the psychoanalyst's schema. They are inaccessible to certain kinds of methods of precision. Since certain of these experiences, which are hard to isolate and confine, have a peculiarly close relation to the sense of identity it is important to look at them more carefully, both in a personal search for

identity and in an effort to gain greater theoretical understanding of what identity means.

In these pages I shall attempt tentative exploration of one such experience—shame—familiar in name but far from clear in meaning. Most psychologists would agree that the cluster of phenomena roughly described as shame needs further study. There would be less agreement on the nature of these phenomena or with the suggestion that some of our current assumptions and methods in psychology and social science tend to block understanding of them.

I became interested in experiences of shame through coming to recognize that concepts of guilt as they are currently used, under a variety of names, are inadequate to explain certain types of experience and certain types of personality which they are assumed to include. They and their derivatives, moreover, leave much of the sense of identity unexplained and perhaps unexplainable. It then occurred to me that further exploration of experiences of shame might help to explain some neglected aspects of personality development and lead toward greater understanding of a sense of identity.

At this point I shall mention only briefly some of the things that drew my attention to differences between what I may call the guilt-axis and the shame-axis interpretations of personality.* The elaboration of these and of other aspects of guilt and shame as they are related to developing a sense of identity is the substance of this book.

The concept of guilt is much used at present as a general interpretation of the human situation. Protestant theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Anglo-Catholics such as T. S. Eliot believe that the attempt to substitute an optimistic humanitarianism for man's consciousness of guilt is one of the reasons for the present plight of the world. Freudians and some existentialists believe that a sense of guilt pervades life and is one of man's tragedies. They debate among themselves as to whether this feeling of guilt is particularly characteristic of heirs to the Puritan tradition, of Western society, or of all humanity.

* These two interpretations or emphases, as will appear in the following discussion, are not mutually exclusive but complementary.

Although the concept of guilt is prevalent in philosophical explanations of man's lot, contemporary methods of child rearing, of teaching, of social counseling—except perhaps in some religious groups—do not ostensibly attempt to develop and make use of a sense of guilt. Terms associated with guilt have tended to be dropped as inciters to desirable action. Sophisticated parents, teachers, or therapists no longer say that a child is good or bad. But the words good and bad have been replaced by mature and immature, productive and unproductive, socially adjusted and maladjusted. And when these words are used by the teacher, the counselor, or the therapist they carry the same weight of approbation and disapprobation as the earlier good and bad. The prescriptions for being mature are as specific as the earlier prescriptions for being good. It is mature to handle money and work effectively, to adjust to reality, to take responsibility, to be decisive in action, to make vocational choices commensurate with one's ability, to be successful in what one undertakes, to use leisure productively, to have friends of both sexes, to have at the appropriate age heterosexual relations. This is being mature in terms of the demands of what is variously described as the achievement, performance, or success norms or the market-place psychology of our contemporary society.[a] (I am not now questioning specifically any of these criteria; I am simply pointing out that together they constitute as rigid a code as that of any church or creed.) The reverse of these things is immature or bad; and an individual feels the appropriate guilt if he does not attain maturity in the prescribed manner. Adjustment in terms of the realities of our present society sometimes appears to have replaced hope of heaven as the supreme good.

But one may follow all the precepts laid down by teachers, social scientists, social workers, and psychoanalysts and still feel that something is lacking—that the central core of the self is untouched. On the other hand, one may transgress no code, commit no proscribed act, meet all the standards of society and of the experts in personality and yet feel a meanness or inadequacy which violates the core of oneself. This is truer for some people than for others; for some the codes of mature adjustment and the purposes of the self more nearly coincide.

It was this impression of the insufficiency of the guilt-axis interpretation of personality, by whatever name it goes, that sent me searching for other possible ways of approaching personal identity, for other concepts and emphases that might more fully account for some experiences and for some people.

It was when I began to search for significant experiences omitted by interpretations based on the guilt axis alone, and for other ways of approaching the development of the sense of self, that it occurred to me that experiences of shame are relatively little studied and that they might offer important clues for the understanding of the sense of identity. They are obviously only one source of such clues, but I thought they might prove to be a particularly significant one. With all our apparatus of psychological investigation, shame is relatively little studied because in our society it is so easily linked with or subsumed under guilt. The questions of why it is so early absorbed by guilt in our society and why our methods of inquiry lead us more readily to the study of guilt than of shame invite further consideration.

The word shame—or talk of being ashamed of ourselves—does not occur as frequently in conversation today as it did, for example, in the conversations of Tolstoy's characters. We do not verbally "shame" our children, although in less obvious ways we may make them ashamed. We strive for self-enlightenment, we attempt to accept the limitations of ourselves and of reality, and to live up to the standards derived from therapy and from theories of social adjustment.* These "realistic" emphases may tend to keep us from confronting shame.

But it is doubtful whether the sense of shame has disappeared from actual experience to the extent that it has disappeared from our speech and from the forefront of our consciousness. It may be that the experience is no less common than at some other periods but that it is more elusive and that we are more loath to recognize it.

It is no accident that experiences of shame are called *self*-consciousness. Such experiences are characteristically painful. They are usually taken as something to be hidden, dodged, cov-

* These do not always coincide. There are some psychoanalysts who do not make social adjustment central in therapy.

ered up—even, or especially, from oneself. Shame interrupts any unquestioning, unaware sense of oneself. But it is possible that experiences of shame if confronted full in the face may throw an unexpected light on who one is and point the way toward who one may become. Fully faced, shame may become not primarily something to be covered, but a positive experience of revelation.

In this first chapter I shall deal briefly with the derivations and usages of the two words shame and guilt. In the next chapter I shall attempt a more detailed description of experiences of shame. The third chapter will examine some of the assumptions that underlie prevailing methods of study in psychology and social science which lead to the neglect of such a pervasive experience as shame and its absorption into guilt in contemporary study. The fourth will examine some newer methods coming into use which may throw more light on experiences such as shame and the sense of identity. The final chapter will explore the implications and point the meaning of the preceding discussion for the development of a sense of identity.

Discussion of these questions in the third and fourth chapters involves dealing with the materials and methods of psychology and of the social sciences. The aim, however, is not appraisal of these different areas of study, but seeing—in regard to the experiences of shame and identity—what light these disciplines can throw on the nature of human beings, of their relations to each other, and of their relations to the world. These might be called essentially questions of philosophy, or of social philosophy. It has always been the function of philosophy to push questions beyond accepted barriers. In doing so it has always inevitably made use of what can be learned from more specialized fields of study.

The Concepts Shame and Guilt

The reason for considering meanings associated with the word shame is not to engage in a linguistic exercise but to discover a possible clue to the experience. From the outset we encoun-

ter difficulties about the meaning of the word. Although it may have somewhat dropped out of popular usage, it appears frequently in social science and psychological discussion. But it carries no clear or consistent meaning. Often it is coupled with guilt, and the phrase "shame and guilt" is used as if it were one descriptive term. Again, and sometimes by the same persons who use this coupling phrase, shame and guilt are contrasted in ways that have become widespread conventions. Thus Freud says that self-reproach (for a sexual act in childhood) can easily become shame lest another person should hear about it.[a] Guilt, or self-reproach, is based on internalization of values, notably parental values—in contrast to shame, which is based upon disapproval coming from outside, from other persons. Ruth Benedict makes a similar distinction. She contrasts guilt, a failure to live up to one's own picture of oneself (based on parental values), with shame, a reaction to criticism by other people.[b]

This distinction between guilt and shame—as oriented respectively to oneself through the internalization of identifications with one's parents and to others through their expressed ridicule or scorn—has been until recently the basis of the most widely accepted definitions of the two terms.[c]

Involved in this distinction between guilt as response to standards that have been internalized and shame as response to criticism or ridicule by others are several important assumptions, sometimes made explicit but more often unstated by the persons who use them: that shame is a more external experience than guilt, one that does not exist apart from the expressed scorn of other persons, if not in their actual presence; that there is a basic separation between oneself and others; that others are related to oneself as audience—whether the audience gives approval or disapproval.

Although the distinctions between shame and guilt that Freud and Benedict made are still those most commonly accepted by writers who use the two concepts, these distinctions and the assumptions that have led to them are beginning to be questioned. Among some psychoanalysts and social scientists there is recognition that important differences may be confused and that certain aspects of shame may be neglected altogether

if current usage in distinguishing it from guilt is followed.

The different attempts to discover other and possibly more fruitful ways of describing experiences of shame and guilt do not discard insights gained from earlier formulations. Rather, they call attention to neglected aspects of these experiences and point toward a variety of other ways of approaching them. These recent suggestions include distinctions: between the content of the experience (what it is about which one feels shame or guilt) and the source of the disapproval (primarily oneself or primarily other persons);[a] between the forbidding and the sanctioning or goal-creating aspects of what Freud called the superego;[b] between the feeling of inferiority and the feeling of wrongdoing;[c] between feelings of inferiority for not meeting standards set by the culture and feelings of inferiority in relation to values that are wider than those of a particular culture.[d]

One of the most interesting of the recent formulations of the differences between shame and guilt is that of Gerhart Piers. In Piers' view the crucial distinction between guilt and shame is not that between self-criticism and criticism by others but between transgression of prohibitions and failure to reach goals or ideals.

> Whereas guilt is generated whenever a boundary . . . is touched or transgressed, shame occurs when a goal . . . is not being reached. It thus indicates a real "shortcoming." Guilt anxiety accompanies transgression; shame, failure.[e]

A somewhat similar distinction is made by Franz Alexander. Guilt, he believes, gives rise to the feeling "I am no good" in contrast to the feeling in shame "I am weak" or inadequate. A sense of guilt arises from a feeling of wrongdoing, a sense of shame from a feeling of inferiority. Inferiority feelings in shame are rooted in a deeper conflict in the personality than the sense of wrongdoing in guilt; feelings of inferiority, in this view, are presocial phenomena, whereas guilt feelings result from efforts for social adjustment.[f]

It is implied by the recent approaches from different directions to experiences of shame and guilt that the same situation may give rise to both shame and guilt; that shame and guilt may sometimes alternate with and reinforce each other;[g] and

that a particular situation may be experienced by an individual as shame or guilt or both according to the nature of the person, the axis on which he habitually behaves, and the nature of his relation to other persons who may be involved. Shame and guilt are in no sense—either in the older or in the more recent conceptions of the experiences—antitheses, or at opposite poles from each other. Rather, they involve different focuses, modes, and stresses. Often they overlap, and it is partly for this reason that the study of shame has been subsumed under, or neglected in, the study of guilt.

The importance of reconsideration of the meaning of shame does not, as noted above, lie in the redefining of a particular word. The question is whether customary definitions and usage have led to the neglect of significant experiences that may be of special relevance for the understanding of identity. Goethe once remarked that the greatest difficulty about a problem lay in where one did not search for it. It is the sense of the importance of shame as an area where one should search that has led me to this further exploration.

The word shame has a long history in the nontheoretical, literary record of human experience. Both shame and guilt derive from Old English roots; but shame appears in some form in all Germanic languages, while there is no cognate word for guilt in other languages. The root meaning of shame is to cover up, to envelop; in some languages, as in much literary association, it also carries the meaning of wound. The Old English root of guilt carries the double meaning of guilt and debt.

Through all the root meanings of guilt runs something that corresponds closely to Piers' conception. Guilt is centrally a transgression, a crime, the violation of a specific taboo, boundary, or legal code by a definite voluntary act. Through the various shadings of meaning there is the sense of the committing of a specific offense, the state of being justifiably liable to penalty. In the usual definitions there is no self-reference as there is in shame.

Both the Freud-Benedict and the Piers conceptions of shame go far back in the meaning of the word. Like honor, shame is a multifaceted word. It includes the subjective feeling of the person and the objective nature of the act. Shame is defined as a

wound to one's self-esteem, a painful feeling or sense of degradation excited by the consciousness of having done something unworthy of one's previous idea of one's own excellence. It is, also, a peculiarly painful feeling of being in a situation that incurs the scorn or contempt of others. The awareness of self is central in both conceptions, but in the second the feeling or action of others is also a part of shame. There is no legal reference as in guilt, no question of a failure to pay a debt, and less implication of the violation of a prescribed code.

English and German each have one word for shame (shame in English, *Scham* in German) that combines the meanings of shame in one's own eyes with shame in the eyes of others. German reflects the self-reference of shame and the external obligation implied in guilt: *Ich schäme mich,* but *Ich bin schuldig.** *Schuldig,* guilty, means also owing a debt, duty, or obligation.

French and classical Greek each have two words for shame, connoting respectively its more private and its more public aspects.[a] *Pudeur* in French is associated particularly with the covering up of sex; it is modesty, bashfulness. *Honte* adds to these disgrace, a loss of honor in the eyes of others. *Pudeur* may keep one from an act; *honte* may be felt after an act.[b]

Aidos as used by Homer made little distinction between private and public shame; between respect for gods and for custom. Later, *aischyne* was differentiated from *aidos. Aidos* continued to be what one felt when confronted with the things nature tells one to revere not violate, such as shame related to sexual matters. *Aischyne* was associated with dishonor, with the emphasis on man-made codes. *Aidos* linked shame to awe.[c]

Further insight into the different associations carried by the words guilt and shame comes from the very different meanings of guiltless and shameless. Guiltless is quite clearly an honorific term. To be guiltless is to be free from guilt, innocent, blameless. Shameless, however, is a term of opprobrium. To be shameless is to be insensible to one's self; it is to be lacking in shame, unblushing, brazen, incorrigible.

> The unjust knoweth no shame.[d]

* A similar distinction is reflected in German between anxiety and fear: *Ich ängste mich* but *Ich fürchte etwas.*

> As you were past all shame,—
> Those of your fact are so,—so past all truth[a]
>
> A wisp of straw were worth a thousand crowns
> To make this shameless callet know herself.[b]

In the courts of Attica the defendant had his place beside a stone dedicated to *aidos;* the stone of the prosecutor on the opposite side was dedicated to *anaideia,* shamelessness. The one was entitled to conceal, the other obliged to unmask.[c]

The word guilt occurs twice in the Old Testament,[d] and guiltiness occurs twice,[e] neither is found in the New Testament. Both are associated with the shedding of blood. Guilty is used in the sense of having committed a crime. Guiltless is always used in the sense of innocent.

Shame appears frequently in both the Old and New Testaments. It is contrasted with glory.

> . . . how long will ye turn my glory into shame?[f]

> Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame.[g]

It is associated with confounding and confusion.

> Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it; let them be driven backward and put to shame.[h]

Shame is also associated with covering the face.

> We are confounded, because we have heard reproach; shame hath covered our faces.[i]

Acceptance of shame is the ultimate in commitment.

> . . . rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer shame for his name.[j]

> Jesus . . . who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame. . . .[k]

Shakespeare uses shame about nine times as often as guilt.[l] Guilty, guiltiness, guiltless, and other derivatives are used altogether slightly more than the various derivatives of shame, including shamed, shameful, shameless, shamefaced, and its other

form, shamefast. Shame is contrasted not with right-doing, nor with approval by others, but with truth and honor.

> And I can teach thee, coz, to shame the devil
> By telling truth. "Tell truth and shame the devil."
> If thou have power to raise him, bring him hither,
> And I'll be sworn I have power to shame him hence.
> O, while you live, tell truth and shame the devil! [a]

> Thou dost shame thy mother
> and wound her honour with this diffidence.[b]

> So shall my virtue be his vice's bawd;
> And he shall spend mine honour with his shame,
> As thriftless sons their scraping fathers' gold.
> Mine honour lives when his dishonour dies,
> Or my sham'd life in his dishonour lies.[c]

> No more my King, for he dishonours me,
> But most himself if he could see his shame.[d]

> I do shame
> To think of what a noble strain you are,
> And of how coward a spirit.[e]

In the same way that both the wounding of one's own self-ideal and disgrace in the eyes of others inhere in conceptions of shame, so, also, does honor include the contrasting meanings of self-realization which may be unknown to others and of public acclaim. To Hotspur honor embodies the chivalric ideal of personal glory in the eyes of others, a view that Falstaff's speech on honor echoes. But to Prince Hal honor is more than renown, or outward show in the eyes of men; as long as he has proved himself worthy in his own eyes he cares nothing for recognition from others.[f] This is the counterpart of shame.

The association of the word shame with loss of honor and of self-respect suggests why shame may be felt as something different from the guilt involved in failure to pay a debt, in violation of a prohibition, or in transgression of a boundary. The close association of shame with the self suggests also why further study of experiences of shame may lead to more understanding of the meaning of identity.

TWO

The Nature of Shame

In this chapter I shall attempt to enter further into the nature of the feeling of shame. I am not trying to build up any logical, or perhaps even consistent, definition of shame. Rather, I shall approach the feeling of shame from different directions and in different ways, and present situations that have been described by various writers as giving rise to a sense of shame. This assumes that there are some common characteristics of the feelings of shame that may occur in a variety of circumstances, and possibly some common characteristics among these diverse circumstances.

The different aspects or characteristics of shame, mentioned separately for purposes of examination, are so intermeshed with each other that each can be fully perceived and understood only within the context of the whole experience.

Exposure, Particularly Unexpected Exposure

Experiences of shame appear to embody the root meaning of the word—to uncover, to expose, to wound. They are experiences of exposure, exposure of peculiarly sensitive, intimate, vulnerable aspects of the self.* The exposure may be to others

* See pp. 166-71, 204-07 for the different ways in which the terms self, ego, and personality are used.

but, whether others are or are not involved, it is always, as will be shown more fully below, exposure to one's own eyes.

The particular aspects of the self especially vulnerable to exposure differ in different cultures.* Adam and Eve felt shame in becoming aware of their own nakedness. Throughout our Western civilization shame is related to the uncovering of nakedness. The terms *Scham* and *Schamgefühl* in German carry the implication of uncovered nudity, and *Scham* is part of the compound words referring particularly to the genitals.

In other societies shame may be more related to exposure while eating, to exposure of certain kinds of contact with kinfolk or with certain kinfolk, to exposure in initiation ceremonies or other stylized rituals surrounded with special sanctions, and to a whole range of patterns of social intercourse and social custom that it does not occur to us to cover up. This would suggest that there is a recognizable feeling of shame that arises in different societies, although the particular aspects of the self related to that feeling and the situations that give rise to it differ widely from one society to another.

Even within our own Western society there are wide individual differences as to what it is most shameful to have uncovered. For Philip in *Of Human Bondage*[a] it was his clubfoot, still more his feeling about allowing it to be exposed. For Virginia Woolf it was her writing and her ability, as a writer, to stand aside and observe the misery of others: "Is the time ever coming when I can endure to read my own writing in print without blushing—shivering and wishing to take cover?"[b] For Rousseau it was his lie accusing the maid of having stolen Mademoiselle Pontal's ribbon, which he himself had stolen.[c] For Kitty in *Anna Karenina* it was the open exposure of her love for

* The terms culture and society are sometimes used by anthropologists and other social scientists as virtually synonymous, and writers who do differentiate them have no common usage. I use the two terms in this book in ways that do not require fine distinctions between them. In general, I use society for the organized institutions of a social group that constitute its functioning and provide for its survival as a group; culture for the shared, learned traditions of a group that are passed on from one generation to the next. But in some places it seems appropriate to use culture in the wider anthropological sense that includes both the functioning society and its traditions.

Vronsky which was unreturned;[a] for Anna herself it was the secret recognition within herself of her love for Vronsky.[b] Dmitri Karamazov, on trial for murdering his father, suffered his greatest misery at having to take off his socks.

> They were very dirty . . . and now everyone could see it. And what was worse he disliked his feet. All his life he had thought both his big toes hideous. He particularly loathed the coarse, flat, crooked nail on the right one, and now they would all see it. Feeling intolerably ashamed . . .[c]

Not wholly dissimilar was the experience of Mr. Pinkerton, the gray little amateur detective. All his life ashamed of penury, he preferred to be hanged for murder rather than to produce his alibi which would have involved the admission of mousy economy—that he had gone to a sixpenny rather than a shilling washroom. Freud pointed out that in some people shame may be excited less by feelings associated specifically with sex than by certain other feelings one is loath to admit to oneself.[d]

Closer examination of some of these experiences raises further questions about the nature of shame. For Rousseau, as for Dmitri Karamazov and for Mr. Pinkerton, exposure or fear of exposure to other persons certainly added to the sense of shame. But I think that this public exposure of even a very private part of one's physical or mental character could not in itself have brought about shame unless one had already felt within oneself, not only dislike, but shame for these traits. It is also true that if one discovered that one was not alone in having these traits shame would in one sense be alleviated by being shared; but if one still felt these characteristics as mean and ugly no matter how many people had them, shame would in another sense be extended.*

Philip's exposure of his clubfoot also raises the question of the relation of exposure to others and to oneself. After the school bully had twisted his arm until Philip put his foot out of bed to let the boys see his clubfoot

> Philip . . . had got his teeth in the pillow so that his sobbing should be inaudible. He was not crying for the pain they had caused

* Cf. discussion of shame for others, pp. 53-63.

him, nor for the humiliation he had suffered when they looked at his foot, but with rage at himself because, unable to stand the torture, he had put out his foot of his own accord.[a]

Exposure to others was less painful to Philip than the exposure to himself of his own weakness. This incident also raises the questions, discussed later, of the extent to which an experience of shame is the result of a voluntary action which one brings on oneself or something which comes on one from without, and of the importance of the element of the unexpected in shame. Both deliberate and involuntary action may be involved. Maugham does not say whether the yielding to pain came suddenly for Philip. But it is more than possible that the final giving in and showing of his foot was unexpected, and that each time it occurred it had an element of surprise as if it had happened wholly against his will.

Anna Karenina lays bare wide varieties of shame experienced by very different kinds of people. In all of them, though other persons are sometimes present and involved, it is the exposure of oneself to oneself that is crucial. No one but Anna knew of her feelings as she recalled her encounters with Vronsky.

[On the train returning from Moscow she] reviewed all her memories of her visit . . . they were all pleasant and good. She remembered the ball, she remembered Vronsky . . . she recalled all her relations with him; there was nothing to be ashamed of. But at the same time in these reminiscences the sense of shame kept growing stronger and stronger . . . that inward voice, whenever she thought of Vronsky, seemed to say: "Warmly, very warmly, passionately." [b]

No one but Anna knew of the unmerited sharp reproof she gave to her dressmaker, nor of the shame it brought to her because she knew it resulted from her thoughts of Vronsky.[c] The shame that Anna and Vronsky felt after their first intercourse was shame that each felt differently and that was unshared.

. . . There was something horrible and revolting [to each of them] in the memory of what had been bought at this fearful price of shame. The shame in the presence of their physical nakedness crushed her and took hold of him.[d]

It was Anna alone who knew of her shame and alarm "at the new spiritual condition in which she found herself. She felt as though everything were beginning to be double in her soul." [a]

Levin felt not only the shame of rejection by Kitty, these "wounds that never healed," but also the shame known only to himself that followed a "fall" from chastity.[b] (This last is similar to the shame Philip felt in showing his clubfoot, a deliberate act which was, nevertheless, each time unexpected.) Kitty, recalling painfully to herself a year later the loving glance she had cast at Vronsky at the ball, said that she had acted "worse than badly,—shamefully." [c]

Dostoevski, who knew so many hidden aspects of shame, recognized that the deepest shame is exposure to oneself even though no one else may pay any attention to or even know of it.

> Even in forty years I would remember with loathing and humiliation those filthiest, most ludicrous, and most awful moments in my life. No one could have gone out of his way to degrade himself more shamelessly.[d]

The Scarlet Letter, an unfolding of shame, does not fail to note that the deepest shame is not shame in the eyes of others but weakness in one's own eyes. Public exposure may even be a protection against this more painful inner shame. Dimmesdale said, "Happy are you, Hester, that wear the scarlet letter openly upon your bosom! Mine burns in secret!" [e] This raises the question of when public knowledge re-enforces and when it is an easing of shame known to oneself.

However much schools of psychoanalysis may differ in their explanations of fear of exposure, shame, humiliation, there can be no doubt of the extent to which shame operates in the analytic hour, nor of the intensification of shame if there is a lack of understanding, or any sign of contempt, on the part of the analyst. But, here again, shame is the outcome not only of exposing oneself to another person but of the exposure to oneself of parts of the self that one has not recognized and whose existence one is reluctant to admit.

There is a particularly deep shame in deceiving other persons into believing something about oneself that is not true.

No one else knows of it; one has lied to oneself. This comes about in part because one doesn't know how to fit shame into the network of other emotions with which it is interwoven. It is closely associated with anger and bitterness, emotions that according to our code should be repressed, and may be turned against the self. Not knowing what should be done with shame one's first impulse is to conceal it, and this may produce further shame.

The exposure to oneself is at the heart of shame. In reviewing Stendhal's *Diaries,* Auden expressed surprise that Stendhal found it hard to admit certain things to himself and asked, "How can admitting anything to oneself be daring?" [a] In raising this remarkable question Auden reflects the extent to which many people at present have become insensitive to the experience of shame and to the deep ambiguities in human nature in which it is rooted.

More than other emotions, shame involves a quality of the unexpected; if in any way we feel it coming we are powerless to avert it. This is in part because of the difficulty we have in admitting to ourselves either shame or the circumstances that give rise to shame. Whatever part voluntary action may have in the experience of shame is swallowed up in the sense of something that overwhelms us from without and "takes us" unawares. We are taken by surprise, caught off guard, or off base, caught unawares, made a fool of. It is as if we were suddenly invaded from the rear where we cannot see, are unprotected, and can be overpowered.[b]

Kafka's *The Trial* is a study of the shame and bewilderment that may come from being taken by surprise, unprepared. "One is so unprepared," says K. He felt "the shame of being delivered into the hands of these people by his sudden weakness." " 'I don't know this law,' said K"; ". . . this unexpected question confused the man, which was the more deeply embarrassing as he was obviously a man of the world"; "One day—quite unexpectedly—some Judge will take up the documents . . . and order an immediate arrest." [c]

As in the case of Philip's suddenly giving in and showing his clubfoot, the phenomenon of unexpected yielding to phys-

ical and mental torture has been observed in the extreme conditions of concentration camps when persons felt the shame of being helpless and defeated, of being betrayed by their own bodies and minds.[a] ". . . victims of the Nazi inquisition have [said] that the moment of surrender occurred suddenly and against their will. For days they had faced the fury of their interrogators, and then suddenly they fell apart. 'All right, all right, you can have anything you want.' " [b]

Blushing manifests the exposure, the unexpectedness, the involuntary nature of shame. One's feeling is involuntarily exposed openly in one's face; one is uncovered. With blushing comes the impulse to "cover one's face," "bury one's face," "sink into the ground." "When the heart's past hope the face is past shame," says a Scottish proverb.

This association of shame with involuntary exposure of the face appears in both the Old and the New Testaments.

They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.[c]

[I] said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee . . .[d]

Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush . . .[e]

Shakespeare associates changes of color in the face with the uncovering of shame.

> No, Plantagenet,
> 'Tis not for fear but anger that thy cheeks
> Blush for pure shame to counterfeit our roses,
> And yet thy tongue will not confess thy error.[f]

> Thou changed and self-cover'd thing, for shame!
> Bemonster not thy feature! [g]

Different as are the varieties of shame experienced by the different persons in *Anna Karenina,* all are accompanied by blushing.

"My words must make a deep impression on you, since you remem-