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Shame

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This article is about psychological, philosophical, and societal aspects of shame. For other uses, see [Shame \(disambiguation\)](#).

Shame is, variously, an [affect](#), [emotion](#), [cognition](#), [state](#), or [condition](#). The roots of the word *shame* are thought to derive from an older word meaning "to cover"; as such, covering oneself, literally or figuratively, is a natural expression of shame.^[1] Nineteenth century scientist [Charles Darwin](#), in his book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, described shame affect as consisting of [blushing](#), confusion of mind, downward cast eyes, slack posture, and lowered head, and he noted observations of shame affect in human populations worldwide.^[2] He also noted the sense of warmth or heat (associated with the vasodilation of the face and skin) occurring in intense shame.

A "sense of shame" is the consciousness or awareness of shame as a state or condition. Such shame [cognition](#) may occur as a result of the experience of shame affect or, more generally, in any situation of [embarrassment](#), [dishonor](#), disgrace, inadequacy, [humiliation](#), or [chagrin](#).^[3]

A condition or state of shame may also be assigned externally, by others, regardless of one's own experience or awareness. "To shame" generally means to actively [assign or communicate a state of shame](#) to another. Behaviors designed to "uncover" or "expose" others are sometimes used for this purpose, as are utterances like "Shame!" or "Shame on you!" Finally, to "have shame" means to maintain a sense of restraint against offending others (as with [modesty](#), [humility](#), and [deference](#)) while to "have no shame" is to behave without such restraint (as with [excessive pride](#) or [hubris](#)).

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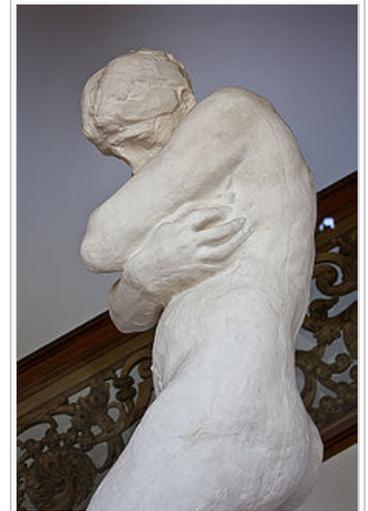
Comparison with guilt and embarrassment [edit]

The location of the dividing line between the concepts of shame, [guilt](#), and [embarrassment](#) is not fully standardized.^[4] According to cultural anthropologist [Ruth Benedict](#), shame is a violation of cultural or social values while guilt feelings arise from violations of one's internal values. Thus shame arises when one's 'defects' are exposed to others, and results from the negative evaluation (whether real or imagined) of others; guilt, on the other hand, comes from one's own negative evaluation of oneself, for instance, when one acts contrary to one's values or idea of one's self.^[5] (Thus, it might be possible to feel ashamed of thought or behavior that no one actually knows about (since one fears their discovery) and conversely, to feel guilty about actions that gain the approval of others.)

Psychoanalyst Helen B. Lewis argued that, "The experience of shame is directly about the self, which is the focus of evaluation. In guilt, the self is not the central object of negative evaluation, but rather the thing done is the focus."^[6] Similarly, Fossum and Mason say in their book *Facing Shame* that "While guilt is a painful feeling of regret and responsibility for one's actions, shame is a painful feeling about oneself as a person."^[7]

Following this line of reasoning, Psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman concludes that "Shame is an acutely self-conscious state in which the self is 'split,' imagining the self in the eyes of the other; by contrast, in guilt the self is unified."^[8]

Clinical psychologist Gershen Kaufman's view of shame is derived from that of [Affect Theory](#), namely that shame is one of a set of instinctual, short-duration physiological reactions to stimulation.^{[9][10]} In this view, guilt is considered to be a learned behavior consisting essentially of self-directed [blame](#) or [contempt](#), with shame occurring consequent to such behaviors making up a part of the overall experience of guilt. Here, [self-blame](#) and [self-](#)



Eve covers herself and lowers her head in shame in Rodin's *Eve after the Fall*.



Person hiding face and showing posture of shame (while wearing a [Sanbenito](#) and corza hat) in Goya's sketch "For being born somew here else". The person has been shamed by the [Spanish Inquisition](#).

contempt mean the application, towards (a part of) one's self, of exactly the same dynamic that blaming of, and contempt for, others represents when it is applied interpersonally.

Kaufman saw that mechanisms such as blame or contempt may be used as a defending strategy against the experience of shame and that someone who has a pattern of applying them to himself may well attempt to defend against a shame experience by applying self-blame or self-contempt. This, however, can lead to an internalized, self-reinforcing sequence of shame events for which Kaufman coined the term "shame spiral".^[9]

One view of difference between shame and embarrassment says that shame does not necessarily involve public humiliation while embarrassment does; that is, one can feel shame for an act known only to oneself but in order to be embarrassed one's actions must be revealed to others. In the field of ethics (moral psychology, in particular), however, there is debate as to whether or not shame is a heteronomous emotion, i.e. whether or not shame does involve recognition on the part of the ashamed that they have been judged negatively by others.

Immanuel Kant and his followers held that shame is heteronomous (comes from others); **Bernard Williams** and others have argued that shame can be autonomous (comes from oneself).^{[11][12]} Shame may carry the connotation of a response to something that is morally wrong whereas embarrassment is the response to something that is morally neutral but socially unacceptable. Another view of shame and embarrassment says that the two emotions lie on a continuum and only differ in intensity. Simply put: A person who feels guilt is saying "I did something bad.", while someone who feels shame is saying "I am bad". There is a big difference between the two.

Subtypes ^[edit]

- **Genuine shame:** is associated with genuine dishonor, disgrace, or condemnation.
- **False shame:** is associated with false condemnation as in the double-bind form of false shaming; "he brought what we did to him upon himself". Author and TV personality **John Bradshaw** calls shame the "emotion that lets us know we are finite".^[13]
- **Secret shame:** describes the idea of being ashamed to be ashamed, so causing ashamed people to keep their shame a secret.^[14]
- **Toxic shame:** describes false, pathological shame, and Bradshaw states that toxic shame is induced, inside children, by all forms of child abuse. **Incest** and other forms of **child sexual abuse** can cause particularly severe toxic shame. Toxic shame often induces what is known as *complex trauma* in children who cannot cope with toxic shaming as it occurs and who **dissociate** the shame until it is possible to cope with.^[15]
- **Vicarious shame:** refers to the experience of shame on behalf of another person. Individuals vary in their tendency to experience vicarious shame, which is related to **neuroticism** and to the tendency to experience personal shame. Extremely shame-prone people might even experience vicarious shame even to an increased degree, in other words: shame on behalf of another person who is already feeling shame on behalf of a third party (or possibly on behalf of the individual proper).

Narcissism ^[edit]

It has been suggested that **narcissism** in adults is related to defenses against shame^[16] and that **narcissistic personality disorder** is connected to shame as well.^{[17][18]} Psychiatrist **Glen Gabbard** suggested that NPD could be broken down into two subtypes, a **grandiose**, arrogant, thick-skinned "oblivious" subtype and an easily hurt, oversensitive, ashamed "hypervigilant" subtype. The oblivious subtype presents for **admiration**, envy, and appreciation a grandiose self that is the antithesis of a weak internalized self which hides in shame, while the **hypervigilant** subtype neutralizes devaluation by seeing others as unjust abusers.^[17]

Social aspects ^[edit]



This section **possibly contains original research**. Please **improve it** by **verifying** the claims made and adding **inline citations**. Statements consisting only of original research may be removed. *(September 2007)*

Shame is considered one aspect of **socialization** in all societies. According to the anthropologist **Ruth Benedict**, **cultures** may be classified by their emphasis on the use of either shame or guilt to regulate the social activities of individuals. Shared opinions and expected behaviours and potential associated feelings of shame are in any case proven to be effective in guiding behaviour of a group or society.

Shame may be used by those people who commit **relational aggression** and may occur in the workplace as a form of overt social control or aggression. Shaming is also a central feature of **punishment**, **shunning**, or **ostracism**. In addition, shame is often seen in victims of **child neglect** and **child abuse**.

Shame campaign ^[edit]

A **shame campaign** is a tactic in which particular individuals are singled out because of their behavior or suspected crimes, often by marking them publicly, such as **Hester Prynne** in **Nathaniel Hawthorne's** *The Scarlet Letter*. In the **Philippines**, **Alfredo Lim** popularized such tactics during his term as mayor of **Manila**. On July 1, 1997, he began a controversial "spray paint shame campaign" in an effort to stop drug use. He and his team sprayed bright red paint on two hundred squatter houses whose residents had been charged, but not yet convicted, of selling prohibited substances. Officials of other municipalities followed suit. Former Senator **Rene A. Saguisag** condemned Lim's policy.^[19]

Despite this criticism, the shame campaigns continued. In January 2005, Metro Manila Development Authority Chair **Bayani Fernando** announced a shame campaign to target jaywalkers by splashing them with wet rags. Sen. **Richard Gordon** disagreed with the shame tactic, and Rep. **Vincent Crisologo** called this approach "martial law tactics". Rep. **Rozzano Rufino Biazon** argued jaywalkers were being treated like cattle.^{[20][21]}

Research ^[edit]

Psychologists and other researchers who study shame use validated **psychometric testing** instruments to determine whether or how much a person feels shame. Some of these tools include the Guilt and Shame Proneness (GASP) Scale,^[22] the Shame and Stigma Scale (SSS), the Experience of Shame Scale, and the Internalized Shame Scale. Some scales are specific to the person's situation,

such as the Weight- and Body-Related Shame and Guilt scale (WEB-SG), the HIV Stigma Scale for [people living with HIV](#) and the Cataldo Lung Cancer Stigma Scale (CLCSS) for people with [lung cancer](#).^[23] Others are more general, such as the Emotional Reactions and Thoughts Scale, which deals with anxiety, depression, and guilt as well as shame.

See also [edit]

- [Badge of shame](#)
- [Cognitive dissonance](#)
- [Lady Macbeth effect](#)
- [Name and shame](#)
- [Psychological projection](#)
- [Scopophobia](#)
- [Shame society](#)
- [Slut-shaming](#)

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External links [edit]

- Brene Brown *Listening to Shame*, TED Talk, March 2012
- [Sample chapter from Phil Hutchinson's book Shame and Philosophy](#)
- [Understanding Shame and Humiliation in Torture](#)
- [US Forces Make Iraqis Strip and Walk Naked in Public](#)
- [Shame](#)
- *Humiliation is Simply Wrong* (USA Today Editorial/Opinion)
- [Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law](#)

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