SHAME AND CONFORMITY: THE DEFERENCE-EMOTION SYSTEM*

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This article proposes a unitary explanation of social control for normal and rigid conformity. Conformity may arise from the interaction of deference with normal pride and shame; rigid conformity from chain reactions of shame. I show that Darwin, Cooley, and others suggested the same context for pride and shame: self's perception of the evaluation of self by other(s). *Their work, which assumes a continuous social monitoring of the self from the standpoint of others, suggests a puzzle: If social monitoring is continuous and causes either pride or shame, why are so few manifestations of either emotion visible in our lives? One possible explanation is that pride and shame usually have very low visibility. I call this the Cooley-Scheff conjecture. Goffman's work on "face" implies this conjecture and Lewis's discovery of unacknowledged shame confirms it. Her analysis of hundreds of clinical interviews demonstrates that low-visibility shame was present in every session, though neither therapist nor patient seemed to be aware of it. Drawing on Lewis's exact description of the markers of various manifestations of shame and Goffman's analysis of the relation between deference and embarrassment, a deference-emotion system is described. Members perceive this system as compelling conformity to norms exterior to self by informal but pervasive rewards (outer deference and its reciprocal, inner pride) and punishments (lack of deference, and the inner shame that is its reciprocal). I show how Asch's study of conformity and independence illustrates the role of shame in compelling conformity to exterior norms.*

Durkheim ([1897] 1951) bequeathed to modern social thought a theoretical building block: the idea that the force of social influence is experienced by individuals as *exterior and constraining*. Although he argued that the individual experiences social influence as an absolutely compelling force exterior to self, he did not spell out the causal sequence implied. What are the steps that lead individuals to experience social control as exterior and constraining? This is an important question because exterior constraint has become a basic premise for modern sociologists. Yet, an adequate model has never been conceptualized, much less proposed in an operationally definable way. Conformity poses

a central problem for social science not only in its normal, but also in its pathological, form. What gives rise to excessive and rigid conformity? This is the question posed by the many modern analyses of bureaucracy and authoritarian forms of social organization. In this article I will outline a model that speaks to both forms of the problem.

There is wide agreement that conformity is encouraged by a system of sanctions: we usually conform because we expect to be rewarded when we do and punished when we do not. However, conformity usually occurs even in the absence of obvious sanctions. Durkheim's formulation refers to the ubiquity of conformity. The reward of public acclaim and the punishment of public disgrace rarely occur, yet the social system marches on. Formal sanctions are slow, unwieldy, and expensive. In addition to the formal system, there must be a complex and highly efficient system of informal sanctions that encourages conformity.

A clue to this puzzle can be found in Goffman's treatment of interaction ritual (Goffman 1967). He notes that *the emotion of*

embarrassment or anticipation of embarrassment plays a prominent role in every social encounter. In presenting ourselves to others, we risk rejection. The form rejection takes may be flagrant, but it is much more frequently quite subtle, perhaps only a missed beat in the rhythm of conversation. Depending on its intensity and obviousness, rejection usually leads inevitably to the painful emotions of embarrassment, shame, or humiliation. By the same token, when we are accepted as we present ourselves, we usually feel rewarded by the pleasant emotions of pride and fellow feeling.

I propose that the degree and type of *deference* and the attendant *emotions* of pride and shame make up a subtle and pervasive system of social sanctions. This system leads to experiencing social influence as compelling. Our thoughts and perceptions of social expectations only set the stage for social control. We experience the system as so compelling because of emotions—the pleasure of pride and fellow feeling on the one hand, and the punishment of embarrassment, shame, or humiliation on the other.

The deference-emotion system may take formal and public forms: the ceremony for awarding the Congressional Medal of Honor confers the highest degree of deference and may be assumed to arouse pride in the recipient. At the other extreme, an impeachment proceeding takes away deference and presumably would arouse shame in the defendant. Disgrace subsumes both public and private sides—outer demotion and inner shame.

But formal rewards and punishments are infrequent, even rare. The deference-emotion system functions virtually continuously, even when we are alone, since we can imagine and anticipate its motions in vivid detail. Systematic research has been unable to document this system; it is too subtle and ubiquitous for laboratory experiment or social survey. Since it often functions outside of awareness, qualitative fieldworkers have not yet been able to catch the details.

Unlike the system of formal sanctions, the deference-emotion system is virtually instantaneous and invisible. Its invisibility makes it difficult to describe. Although shame and pride are implied in Durkheim's writing about social influence, they are never named. Shame appears to be profoundly taboo (Scheff 1984); it is not mentioned even when

it is being used as an explanation. Asch's discussion of his findings (see below) illustrates this evasiveness in a modern study of conformity.

Even Goffman, whose analysis of the role of embarrassment is a tour de force, falls far short of a complete analysis. Although he points to the ubiquity of embarrassment in social encounters, he restricts his purview to the *social* aspects of embarrassment, to what is going on *between* interactants, and excludes any psychological components (1967, p. 108).

Limiting his analysis to outer behavior in the social domain pays rich dividends in certain areas, e.g., the contagion of embarrassment between interactants. Goffman's treatment of social embarrassment is subtle and evocative; but since he does not attempt to explain the interaction between outer and inner processes, he is unable to convey the explosive force of the deference-emotion system. One difficulty is that his analysis completely separates embarrassment ("the social organization of embarrassment") from anger and hostility, which he treats in "character contests" such as duels and vendettas ("where the action is") (1967).

It is constructive to contrast Lewis's (1971) treatment of shame with Goffman's, since it is the photographic negative of his. She treats only the inner process. In analogy to his use of the metaphor of contagion between persons, she points to what she calls a *feeling trap*, i.e., inner contagion. In Goffman's analysis, one becomes ashamed that the other is ashamed, who in turn becomes ashamed, which increases the first person's shame, and so on—an *interpersonal* feeling trap. In Lewis's analysis, one becomes ashamed that one is ashamed, an inner loop which feeds on itself—an *intrapersonal* trap. Unlike Goffman, however, she does not separate her analysis of shame from her analysis of anger. She postulates an affinity between the two emotions, with shame usually followed by anger. This loop, which can go on indefinitely, is usually experienced as though it were a single affect, "helpless anger," or, in a more intense form, "humiliated fury."

By combining Goffman's social analysis with Lewis's psychological one, it is possible to convey the extraordinary power of the deference-emotion system. This system occurs both *between* and *within* interactants. Ordinarily it functions so efficiently and

invisibly that it guarantees the alignment of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of individuals. Mutual conformity and respect lead to pride and fellow feeling, which lead to further conformity, which leads to further positive feeling, in a system that seems virtually automatic.

However, when there is a real and/or imagined rejection on one or both sides (withdrawal, criticism, insult, defeat, etc.) the deference-emotion system may show a malign form, a *chain reaction* of shame and anger between and within the interactants. This explosion is usually brief, perhaps a few seconds. But it can also take the form of bitter hatred and can last a lifetime. It can occur not only between individuals, but also between groups, or even nations. I refer to such explosions as *triple spirals* of shame and anger (one spiral within each party and one between them). A chain reaction between and within groups can last longer than a lifetime, handed down from generation to generation; I interpret Franco-German relations (1870–1945) as an extended spiral of this kind (Scheff 1987; forthcoming).

For all its brilliance, Goffman's analysis of interaction ritual implies that such matters may be fateful, at most, only to individuals, but not in larger arenas. Embarrassment, he seems to imply, can be exquisitely painful, but it is personal and transitory and not relevant to larger social institutions. His behavioral analysis, which excludes the psychological domain and separates embarrassment from anger, is too specialized to capture the larger implications of his vision.

Lewis's specialization, equal but opposite to Goffman's, also precludes her from drawing out the social implications of her work. Although she is aware that her concept of the feeling trap has implications beyond neurosis, there is little development in this direction in her written work. Only by combining her and Goffman's partial analyses can their implications be seen.

Because of the ubiquity of shame and shame/anger sequences, *all* social and societal interaction can instantly become what Goffman calls a character contest. When chain reactions of shame or shame/anger occur between and within interacting persons or groups, there is no natural limit to the intensity and duration of arousal. *The unlimited fury of shame/rage in a triple spiral may explain why social influence can be experi-*

enced as absolutely compelling. The emotion-deference system, as represented in the sequence of honor, insult, and revenge, may decide the fate, not only of individuals, but of nations, civilizations, and, in our nuclear era, of all life on earth.

By analysis of *sequences* of interaction ritual and emotion in concrete episodes, it may be possible to enlarge on Durkheim's [1897] 1951) investigation of suicide. In another place, I outline a model of the way in which a class-based insult led to suicide in a classic work of fiction (Scheff and Mahlendorf 1988). As mentioned above, I also interpret the bizarre and highly self-destructive behavior of France and Germany in terms of the interaction ritual between the two countries. French and German politics and diplomacy from 1870–1945 appear to be extremely irrational and perhaps may be understood as a character contest, even at the risk of self-destruction. With analyses of the interaction between deference and emotion, it may be possible to develop Durkheimian ideas of social influence into a comprehensive study of interaction at both the interpersonal and institutional levels.

THE SOURCES OF SHAME: BIOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL

In modern societies shame is considered rare among adults. This belief is reflected in the division made in anthropology between shame cultures and guilt cultures, with traditional societies relying on shame for social control, and modern societies, guilt. A matching premise is found in orthodox psychoanalytic theory, which places almost total emphasis on guilt as the adult emotion of self-control, with shame thought of as "regressive," that is, childish. (An early attempt to break away from both restrictive premises can be found in Piers and Singer [1953].)

For many years, however, there has been a continuing suggestion in the literature that shame is the primary social emotion, generated by the virtually constant monitoring of the self in relation to others. Such monitoring, as suggested in my reference to Goffman, is not rare but almost continuous in social interaction, and, more covertly, in solitary thought. *If this line of thought is correct, shame would be the most frequent and possibly the most important of emotions, even*

though it is usually almost invisible. Threads of this idea can be found in Darwin (1872), Cooley (1922), MacDougall (1908), and, more recently, in Lynd (1958), Lewis (1971), and Goffman (1967).

In *The Expression of Emotions in Men and Animals* (1872), Darwin devotes a whole chapter to blushing and its relation to shame. He states his thesis quite simply: blushing is caused by "shyness, shame, and modesty, the essential element in all being self-attention." For my purposes here, the important proposition comes next in his text, where he explains what he means by self-attention: "It is not the simple act of reflecting on our own appearance, but the *thinking what others think of us, which excites a blush.*" (emphasis added, p. 325) His discussion suggests that blushing may be caused by perceptions of other people's evaluation of the self, whether positive or negative.

Darwin's argument about the relationship between blushing and self-attention can be restated as two propositions connecting blushing with what might be called, in current terms, emotions, on the one hand, and social perception, on the other. First, *blushing is caused by shame* (as discussed below, "shyness" and "modesty," Darwin's two other causes of blushing, can be considered shame variants [Lewis 1971] or cognates [Wurmser 1981]). Second, and more importantly, *shame is caused by the perception of negative evaluations of the self*. Blushing is only one of several visible markers of overt shame, and therefore is not a primary concept for a theory of social influence. The second statement, however, contains the basic proposition for the whole theory: shame is *the* social emotion, arising as it does out of the monitoring of one's own actions by viewing one's self from the standpoint of others.

Shame as a crucial emotion for adults is prominent in the work of William MacDougall (1908). He thought of shame as one of the "self-regarding sentiments," perhaps the most important one: "Shame is the emotion second to none in the extent of its influence upon social behavior" (p. 124). Like Darwin, he seems to have understood that it arises as a result of self-monitoring. He also makes another important point, that, although shame undoubtedly has a biological basis that we share with the higher mammals, the human emotion of shame in adults is considerably more elaborate and complex (p. 56).

THE COOLEY-SCHEFF CONJECTURE

We next turn to Cooley (1922), who considers pride and shame as the crucial "social self-feelings." At some points he seems to regard as a self-feeling *any* feeling that the self directs toward itself. This passage about the extraordinary importance of self-feelings in human behavior seem to be in this key: ". . . with all normal and human people, (social self-feeling) remains, in one form or another, the *mainspring of endeavor and a chief interest of the imagination throughout life.*" (emphasis added, p. 208)

Cooley continues:

> As is the case with other feelings, we do not think much of it (that is, of social self-feeling) so long as it is moderately and regularly gratified. Many people of balanced mind and congenial activity scarcely know that they care what others think of them, and will deny, perhaps with indignation, that such care is an important factor in what they are and do. But this is illusion. If failure or disgrace arrives, if one suddenly finds that the faces of men show coldness or contempt instead of the kindliness and deference that he is used to, he will perceive from the shock, the fear, the sense of being outcast and helpless, that he was living in the minds of others without knowing it, just as we daily walk the solid ground without thinking how it bears us up. (p. 208)

Although neither pride nor shame is mentioned in this passage, they are implied, *especially the almost continuous presence of low-visibility pride in ordinary discourse.* Cooley thought of pride and shame as the crucial self-feelings.

This idea is continued in the concept of "the looking-glass self," his description of the social nature of the self. He thought self-monitoring has three steps:

> As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be; so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it.
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> A self-idea of this sort seems to have three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification. (p. 184)

In this passage he restricts self-feelings to the two he seems to think are the most significant, pride and shame (considering mortification to be a shame variant). He mentions shame three more times in the passage that follows (emphasis added):

> The comparison with a looking-glass hardly suggests the second element, the imagined judgment, which is quite essential. The thing that moves us to *pride or shame* is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind. This is evident from the fact that the character and weight of that other, in whose mind we see ourselves, makes all the difference with our feeling. We are *ashamed* to seem evasive in the presence of a straightforward man, cowardly in the presence of a brave one, gross in the eyes of a refined one, and so on. We always imagine, and in imagining share, the judgments of the other mind. A man will boast to one person of an action—say some sharp transaction in trade—which he would be *ashamed* to own to another. (pp. 184–85)

What is unfamiliar about the looking-glass self, perhaps shockingly so, is that Cooley is implying that society rests on a foundation of pride and shame. His analysis of the social nature of the self can be summarized in two propositions:

1. In adults, social monitoring of self is virtually continuous, even in solitude. (We are, as he put it, "living in the minds of others without knowing it.") (208).
2. Social monitoring always has an evaluative component, and gives rise, therefore, to either pride or shame.

Together these propositions suggest a puzzle. If social monitoring of self is almost continuous, and if it gives rise to pride or shame, why do we see so few manifestations of either emotion in adult life? Among possible answers is that the pride or shame is there, but has such low visibility that we do not notice it. This answer gives rise to a third proposition, which I will call the Cooley-Scheff conjecture:

3. Adults are virtually always in a state of either pride or shame, usually of a quite unostentatious kind.

This proposition is a step toward an exact definition of a concept that has been so far undefined: *level of self-esteem.* Such a definition would concern the balance between pride and shame states in a person's life, taking into account both duration and intensity. This issue will be the topic of a future article.

In his discussion of grief (he calls it distress-anguish), Tomkins (1963) notes a parallel puzzle: "The reader must be puzzled at our earlier affirmation that distress is suffered daily by all human beings. Nothing seems less common than to see an adult cry. And yet we are persuaded that the cry, and the awareness of the cry, as distress and suffering, is ubiquitous." (p. 56)

His answer also parallels the one I have suggested: "The adult has learned to cry as an adult. It is a brief cry, or a part of a cry or a miniature cry, or a substitute cry, or an active defense against the cry, that we see in place of the infant's cry for help." (p. 56) He goes on to discuss various substitutes for, or defenses against, crying that adults employ. For example, an adult suffering in the dental chair might, instead of crying, substitute muscular contractions: clamping the jaw, tightly contracting the muscles in the abdomen, and rigidly gripping the arms of the chair (p. 59). As an example of defending against the cry, Tomkins suggests masking the facial expression of sadness with one of anger, becoming angry as well as sad (pp. 64–65). Most men in our society use this transformation, but many women do the opposite, masking anger with grief.

One way of summarizing the gambits that adults use when they are suffering is that most adults' grief is of a type with low visibility because its manifestations have been disguised or ignored. Tomkins' question and answer with respect to adult grief are exactly parallel to the ones I have derived from Cooley's treatment of adult shame.

What may be the most dramatic of Cooley's views on shame, and the one which brings him closest to my position is his use of an autobiographical excerpt to illustrate the power of what he calls "social fear":

> Social fear, of a sort perhaps somewhat morbid, is vividly depicted by Rousseau in the passage of his *Confessions* where he describes the feeling that led him falsely to accuse a maid-servant of a theft which he had himself committed. "When she appeared my heart was agonized, but the presence of so many people was more powerful than my compunction. I did not fear punishment, but I dreaded *shame:* I dreaded it more than death, more than the crime, more than all

the world. I would have buried, hid myself in the center of the earth: invincible *shame* bore down every other sentiment; *shame* alone caused all my impudence, and in proportion as I became criminal the fear of discovery rendered me intrepid. I felt no dread but that of being detected, of being publicly and to my face declared a thief, liar, and calumniator. (p. 291, emphasis added)

Rousseau's phrase, "invincible shame," will stand us in good stead in the reinterpretation of the Asch study I undertake below. Notice also that Cooley suggests this instance is an example of "morbid" (i.e., pathological), rather than normal, shame. I use a similar distinction in my discussion of the Asch experiment.

Cooley's discussion of the social self in terms of self-monitoring (the movement now called "role-taking") clearly invokes pride and shame as the basic social emotions. At this point, intellectual history takes a surprising turn. G.H. Mead and John Dewey based virtually their entire social psychology on the process of role-taking, the ability of humans to continuously monitor their own selves from the point of view of others. Yet neither Mead nor Dewey ever mention what was so obvious to Darwin, MacDougall, and Cooley — social monitoring gives rise to feelings of pride or shame. Mead and Dewey treat role-taking, their basic building block of human behavior, as almost entirely a cognitive process. Neither has anything to say about pride and shame, as if Darwin, MacDougall, and Cooley never existed. Social psychology has yet to recover from this oversight.[1]

In modern societies, adults seem to be uncomfortable manifesting either pride or shame. *The emotions of shame and pride often seem to themselves arouse shame.* (This proposition explains Darwin's observation that both positive and negative evaluations can give rise to blushing.) It seems likely, as both Darwin and MacDougall suggest, that shame has a biological basis and is genetically programmed, not just in humans, but in the higher mammals. It may also be true, as recent infant-caretaker studies suggest, that for infants and very young children, the

arousal of shame is largely biological. For adults, however, it also seems certain that shame is not only a biological process, but also an overwhelmingly social and cultural phenomenon. The discussion so far has suggested that adult shame is doubly social: shame arises in social monitoring of the self, and shame itself often becomes a further source of shame, depending on the particular situation and normative structure of the culture.

The second social aspect of shame, its recursiveness, can give rise to *pathological* shame, a potentially limitless spiral, (Scheff 1987). As will be suggested below, the concept of pathological shame may explain the Asch effect, and more broadly, all excessive or rigid conformity.

LOW-VISIBILITY SHAME

If, as I have suggested, shame is strongly recursive in modern societies, we would expect most shame and pride to have very low visibility. Even if shame and pride were widely prevalent, persons who were proud or ashamed would be ashamed of their state and attempt to hide it from others and from themselves. If this is the case, how can one study pride and shame if they are usually hidden?

I know of no systematic studies of pride, but a beginning method for detecting low-visibility shame was developed by Gottschalk and Gleser (1969). Their procedure for extracting emotions from verbal texts includes a long list of sentences containing words they consider shame markers. These sentences are listed under five categories (I provide a few of their examples under each category.):

1. *Shame, embarrassment:* "I feel funny . . ." ". . . I had behaved improperly. . ." (and other sentences using terms such as *disconcerting, discredit,* or *unworthy*).
2. *Humiliation:* "I don't know what was wrong with me letting myself go like that . . ." (other sentences involve such terms as *humbling, degrading,* or *little self-respect*).
3. *Ridicule:* "He twitted me about being fat . . ." ". . . I really feel utterly ridiculous in a situation like that . . ." ". . . They stared at me and laughed . . ."
4. *Inadequacy:* "Where was I when brains were passed out? I feel stupid . . ."
5. *Overexposure of deficiencies or private details:* "I don't even know how to wipe my ass.

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[1] A prior attempt to rectify Mead and Dewey's oversight can be found in Shibutani (1961), particularly chap. 13, "Self-esteem and Social Control," which implies, in part, the thesis of the present article.

I didn't want to talk about such personal things." (pp. 49–52)

Although Gottschalk and Gleser do not discuss the matter or refer to any of the shame theorists discussed above, a few of the sentences contain explicit references to shame. Instead, most of their examples assume what the shame theorists posited to be the basic context for shame—a perception of negative evaluation of the self by self or others, even if the negative evaluation is somewhat indirect. Nor do the authors attempt to include nonverbal markers of shame.

In her pioneering analysis of clinical dialogues, Lewis (1971) takes up the issue of shame markers much more explicitly and broadly than Gottschalk and Gleser. Her work is both theoretical and empirical, tying broad concepts and hypotheses to concrete episodes of behavior. In this capacity she is the heir of Darwin, MacDougall, and Cooley. She advances our knowledge of shame, however, because, unlike either the original theorists or the more recent advocates (Lynd [1958], Tomkins [1963], and Goffman [1967]) who use carefully selected examples only in an illustrative way, she conducted a systematic analysis of shame content in complete episodes of real social interaction: entire clinical sessions. Her laborious, word-for-word analysis of these sessions led her to the discovery of what she calls "unacknowledged" shame, the low-visibility shame predicated here.

Lewis first distinguishes acknowledged and unacknowledged shame. She shows that in hundreds of clinical sessions, most of the shame episodes were virtually invisible to the participants, unacknowledged by either the patient or the therapist. She divides these episodes into two basic types: *overt, undifferentiated* shame and *bypassed* shame.

Overt, undifferentiated shame involves painful feelings that are not identified as shame by the person experiencing them. These feelings are instead referred to by a wide variety of terms that disguise the shame experience: feeling foolish, stupid, ridiculous, inadequate, defective, incompetent, awkward, exposed, vulnerable, insecure, having low self-esteem and so on.

Lewis classified all these terms as shame markers because each occurred in conjunction with (1) *contexts* in which the patient appeared to perceive self as negatively evaluated, either by self or other(s), the

central context for shame; and (2) a change in the patient's *manner,* characterized by nonverbal markers such as speech disruption (stammering, repetition of words, speech "static" like "well," "uhhhh," long pauses, etc.), lowered or averted gaze, blushing, and, especially noticeable, a sharp drop in volume, often resulting in inaudibility.

Both the verbal and nonverbal markers of overt shame can be characterized as forms of *hiding* behavior. The verbal terms disguise shame, and the nonverbal forms suggest physical hiding: averting or lowering the gaze to escape the gaze of the other, hiding behind a mask-like blush, and hiding the meaning of speech and thoughts behind speech disruption and inaudible speech.

To summarize, overt, undifferentiated shame occurs when a person (1) feels the self negatively evaluated, either by self or other; (2) manifests hiding behavior (speech disruption, lowered or averted gaze, blushing, or barely audible speech); and (3) labels or associates the painful feeling with undifferentiated terms such as those listed above. In these instances, although the negative evaluation of self appears so painful as to interfere with the fluent production of thought and/or speech, the pain is mislabeled.

In addition to the overt, undifferentiated pattern, Lewis describes the second pattern of unacknowledged shame, *bypassed* shame. Like the overt pattern, bypassed shame always begins with a perception of the negative evaluation of self. Where the markers of undifferentiated shame are flagrant and overt, those of bypassed shame are subtle and covert. Although thought and speech are not obviously disrupted, they take on a speeded-up, repetitive quality that Lewis refers to as *obsessive.*

Typically, patients repeated a story or series of stories, talking rapidly and fluently, but not to the point. They appeared to be unable to make decisions because of seemingly balanced pros and cons ("insoluble dilemmas"). Patients complained of endless internal replaying of a scene in which they felt criticized or in error. Often they report that when they first realized the error, they winced or groaned, then immediately became obsessed with the incident. The mind seems to be so taken up with the unresolved scene that one is unable to become adequately involved in the present, even though there is

no obvious disruption. One is subtly distracted.

The two patterns of shame appear to involve opposite responses. In overt, undifferentiated shame, victims *feel* emotional pain to the point that it obviously retards or disrupts thought and speech. They seem to be trying to hide the painful state from themselves as well as from others. In bypassed shame, the victim appears to *avoid* the pain through hyperactive thought, speech, or actions. These two types appear to correspond to my own distinction between under- and over-distanced emotion (Scheff 1979). Overt, undifferentiated shame is under-distanced, since the intense pain of embarrassment or humiliation is experienced. What Mead (1934) called the "I" phase of the self, the "biologic individual," predominates in consciousness. Bypassed shame is over-distanced; one avoids the pain by stepping outside of self, into the "me" phase of the self, as if the pain were not happening.

Adler's (1956) theory of human development anticipated Lewis's discovery of the two basic types of unacknowledged shame. Although he did not use the term, what he called "the feeling of inferiority," i.e., shame, played a central role in his theory. He argued that developing children's greatest desire is for love. If love is not available at the crucial points, the development of their personality can proceed along one of two paths. Either they develop "inferiority complexes," i.e., they become prone to overt, undifferentiated shame, or they compensate by seeking power, i.e., they avoid feeling shame by bypassing it, through what I have termed hyperactive thought, speech, or actions.

Both the slowed-down pattern of overt shame and the speeded-up pattern of bypassed shame are disruptive, however, because both involve the victim in rigid and distorted reactions to reality. Both kinds of shame are equally invisible; one is misnamed, the other ignored. These two basic patterns explain how shame might be ubiquitous, yet usually unnoticed.

The work of Tomkins and Lewis converge with and extend Freud's early work on repression. In his first book (1897, with Breuer), he argued that hysteria was caused by repressed emotion, "strangulated affect," as he called it. He observed that patients improved when they expressed forgotten emotions, e.g., by crying or using heated words, a rudimentary theory of catharsis (Scheff 1979).

Tomkins (1963) approached repression from a very different direction, through deduction about the fate of grief that did not result in catharsis (crying). This approach led him to describe the outer signs of low-visibility grief, an affect that overlaps with, but is not identical with, that of repressed grief (some low-visibility grief is a result of conscious or partly conscious masking or avoidance).

Lewis extended the concept of repression both theoretically and empirically. Using the kind of shuttling back and forth between deductive and inductive methods that Peirce called *abduction* (Scheff, forthcoming), she laid the groundwork for the shame construct, the description of the context and markers for unacknowledged shame, and its role in the genesis and maintenance of neurotic symptoms. Most of the shame episodes she reported seem to be not only unperceived but not available to consciousness. Her work therefore confirms not only the Cooley-Scheff conjecture (the part about shame), but also confirms and expands on Freud's ([1897] 1966) original hypothesis that neurosis is caused by strangulated affect.[2] I will now turn to the reanalysis of a study that points to the role of shame in rigid or excessive conformity, a much more widely prevalent form of pathological behavior than traditional psychopathology.

THE ASCH CONFORMITY STUDIES

Asch's (1956) study of conformity illustrates the way in which emotions may lead to social control. In this classic laboratory study, single subjects found themselves alone, facing what seemed to be a unified majority. Since the task was a simple comparison of the lengths of lines, the naive subjects must have been baffled by the completely erroneous responses of the other subjects. Unknown to the naive subject, the others were confederates of the investigator, instructed to give erroneous responses. A high proportion of conforming behavior resulted: three-quarters of the subjects were swayed at least once by the majority responses, only one-quarter remained completely independent.

In this study, Asch followed the inductive

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[2] In a parallel finding, Volkan (see Volkan and Josephthal 1979 for a list of citations) discovered the syndrome of pathological grief, and its cure, a cathartic treatment, called "regrief therapy."

design that characterizes modern experimental social psychology; it is not a test of an hypothesis derived from theory. In retrospect, however, the study comes close to testing a basic aspect of Durkheimian theory by holding constant one element in social influence (exteriority) while allowing the other element (constraint) to vary. All of the naive subjects perceived the judgment of the majority to be different from, and therefore exterior to, their own judgment. Asch's study demonstrates the exteriority of group standards by showing that naive subjects who were allowed to make judgments alone, without an erring majority, made no errors at all.

The study tests the hypothesis that *given the kind of task demanded, a majority of the subjects will find group standards compelling, even though they are exterior and contradictory to their own individual standards*. This formulation suggests a key question: what is the difference between those subjects who maintained their independence from the group and those who yielded? I will suggest that the answer involves the part played by emotions: subjects who yielded to the majority were attempting to avoid the embarrassment (shame) of appearing different from the group.

Although Asch did not design the study to show the effects of emotion or ask questions about emotions, many of the post-study interview responses suggest that emotions played an important part in the results. It is clear from both Asch's observations and from direct analysis of the subject's responses that many of them found the experience of being in the minority extremely painful. Ash reports that as the division between the majority and the individual continued, the individual became more tense, flustered, nervous, and anxious. A reaction that occurred both in independent and yielding subjects was the fear that they were suffering from a defect that the study would disclose this defect: "I felt like a silly fool. . . . A question of being a misfit. . . . they'd think I was queer. It made me seem weak-eyed or weak-headed, like a black sheep" (p. 31).

Many of the comments show negative viewing of self from the point of view of the others: "You have the idea that the attention of the group is focused on you. I didn't want to seem different. I didn't want to seem an imbecile. They might feel I was just trying to

be out of the ordinary. . . . They probably think I'm crazy or something" (p. 31). These comments are all markers of overt shame (see the earlier discussion of markers).

Asch makes an important point, however, in differentiating the post-study interview responses of those who remained independent from those who yielded to the majority. He notes, first, that both independent and yielding subjects were troubled by disagreeing with the majority:

> As the disagreement persisted many began to wonder whether it signified a defect in themselves. They found it painful to be (as they imagined) the focus of attention, in addition to which they feared exposure of their weakness which they suspected the group would disapprove. (p. 32)

Asch points out that though these feelings were all but universal, not everyone who experienced them yielded. Those who maintained their independence responded to their own perceptions of the lines despite their strong feelings. Asch characterizes the responses of those who yielded in a different way:

> They were dominated by their exclusion from the group which they took to be a reflection on themselves. Essentially they were unable to face a conflict which threatened, in some undefined way, to expose a deficiency in themselves. They were consequently trying to merge in the group in order not to feel peculiar. (p. 45)

There are several key ideas in this passage. First, there are two markers of overt, undifferentiated shame: "feel peculiar," and "expose a deficiency in themselves." A second point is implied by the first sentence, the subjects' perception of "exclusion from the group," which they took to be a "reflection on themselves" rather than on the group. Because the group took no action to actually exclude the naive subjects, the perception of exclusion must have been solely in the subjects' imaginations, implying the basic shame context: perceiving one's self negatively evaluated.

Finally, the entire passage can be summarized by translating it into the language of emotions. The subjects who yielded to the group were those who not only felt overt shame, but whose perceptions, cognitions, and/or actions were controlled by the attempt to avoid it. Conversely, many of the subjects who maintained independence from the group

appeared to feel conflict, i.e., overt shame, but elected to hold their ground in spite of this feeling.

So far the discussion of the role of emotion in compelling conformity has been entirely in terms of overt, undifferentiated shame. There is also scattered evidence in the subjects' post-study remarks, and in Asch's summaries of these remarks, of bypassed shame as a causal element in compelling conformity. In the summary by Asch cited above, he refers to those subjects who acknowledged conflict between themselves and the group. There is another group of subjects, however, all of whom yielded to the influence of the group, in which there is little or no acknowledgement of conflict and no markers of overt shame. The emotion markers in this group suggest the presence of bypassed shame.

After stating that the interview responses of the independent subjects were apt to be frank and forthright, he notes that those of the yielding subjects were different:

> [Their] reactions were more often evasive and shallow, and some revealed a lack of appreciation of the situation and of the possible significance of their action. . . . When asked to describe his experiences at the outset of the interview, one subject (who yielded completely) inquired: "Exactly what do you mean by experiences?" Another remarked: "I didn't have any experiences, I felt normal." (p. 33)

These two responses, especially the latter, suggest a complete denial of conflict and the feelings resulting from that conflict. The comments of two other yielding subjects also suggest denial, but in a different form; they reduced their experience of the study to ponderous or obfuscating generalizations: "People perceive things differently . . ." and "How do we know who is right?" Another group of yielding subjects, according to Asch,

> "granted to the majority the power to see correctly . . . allowed themselves to become confused, and at the critical point adopted the majority judgments *without permitting themselves to know of their activity.*" (emphasis added, p. 42)

This is a very strong statement about avoidance of conflict and denial of feelings through self-deception. Asch found among the yielding subjects another frequent form of self-deception: considerable underestimation of the number of times each had yielded. He showed that the amount of underestimation was proportional to the amount of yielding (the greater the yielding, the greater the underestimation) (pp. 34–35). Many of these subjects acted as if there were only a few such incidents, even those who had yielded at every opportunity. By denying reality, perhaps they sought to avoid painful feelings.

One of Asch's summaries of the interview responses emphasizes both types of shame responses—the pain of overt shame and what I have called here the obsessive quality of bypassed shame:

> Our observations suggest that independence requires the capacity to accept the fact of opposition without a lowered sense of personal worth. The independent person has to organize his overt actions on the basis of experience for which he finds no support; this he can do only if he respects his experiences and is capable of claiming respect for them. The compliant person cannot face this ordeal because he translates social opposition into a reflection of his personal worth. Because he does so the social conflict plunges him into pervasive and incapacitating doubt. (p. 51)

Most of this passage is commensurate with both forms of shame, but the last sentence seems to focus on the obsessive form, the insoluble dilemma characteristic of bypassed shame. On the whole, Asch's report inadvertently suggests that unacknowledged shame plays a central role in causing subjects to yield to group influence, even when it contradicts their own direct perceptions of reality.

To conclude this section, I will return to a still unresolved issue in my interpretation. Recall that many of the subjects who remained independent, as well as some of those who yielded, manifested markers of overt, undifferentiated shame. (All of those cited above who showed bypassed shame had yielded.) In this case, the presence of bypassed shame may adequately explain yielding; however, overt, differentiated shame does not because it seemed to be present in both those who yielded and those who did not. For this latter group, at least, some further explanation is needed.

One possible formulation is in terms of self-esteem. The subjects who remained independent, although they experienced shame, had sufficiently high self-esteem to act on their judgments despite their feelings of shame. Those who yielded had low self-

esteem and sought to avoid further feelings of shame by acting contrary to their own judgment. Asch comes close to stating it in these very terms. Such a formulation, a causal explanation based on the personalities of the subjects, could be tested in future studies.

Although this formulation could mark an advance in understanding, the advance would probably be very slight. The concept of low self-esteem can be seen as a gloss, implying a person who habitually feels shame rather than pride. Perhaps the concept of pathological shame, as already indicated, would specify the causal process more precisely. Low self-esteem might be conceptualized as a tendency toward endlessly recursive shame, spirals of potentially limitless intensity and duration. As suggested in my earlier article (Scheff 1987), in such persons, shame alone, or in combination with other emotions such as anger, might be recursive to the point of chain reaction. Such a dynamic sequence could explain explosive episodes of acute panic, (a shame-fear alternation), resentment (shame-anger alternation, with the anger directed out), and guilt (shame-anger sequences with the anger directed in).

Using this model, persons with high self-esteem would be those with the experience of managing most shame so that it is acknowledged and discharged. Although shame is a painful emotion for them, as for everyone else, it is not overwhelming. Persons with low-self esteem would be those who have been unable to manage shame. For such persons, a situation that threatened to be shaming would be perceived as overwhelmingly painful, since it might involve them in an unending spiral of shame. Such a person might do anything to avoid the pain, to "turn the world upside down, rather than turn themselves inside out," to use one of Helen Lewis's favorite phrases. One example is the episode in which Rousseau's conscience lost the battle with what he called "invincible shame." Another is a troublesome and otherwise baffling remark that one of the yielding subjects made to Asch in the post-study interview. He said that he voted for Dewey in the election of 1948, even though he preferred Truman, because he thought Dewey would win and that he was preferred by most (p. 48). Apparently, unacknowledged shame is not only invincible, but insidious.

This formulation does not imply that social control is dependent entirely on individual personality, only that individuals have differing susceptibilities to shame. The situational component in conformity is equally important in the deference-emotion model (the deference awarded to individuals in a situation). The Asch experiment was almost diabolical with respect to shame because it was arranged to rob, in a covert way, the individual of her own view of reality. As the deference-emotion model suggests, conformity results from the interaction of individual and situational components. This interaction is also a cultural phenomenon because status arrangements consist, at the microscopic level of analysis, of the blend of awarding and withholding deference (for an earlier formulation, which suggests a link between status and emotion, see Kemper 1977).

SUMMARY

I have proposed that Durkheim's analysis of social influence implies a deference-emotion system in which conformity to exterior norms is rewarded by deference and feelings of pride, and nonconformity is punished by lack of deference and feelings of shame. In this analysis, social control involves a biosocial system that functions silently, continuously, and virtually invisibly, occurring *within* and *between* members of a society. Cultural taboos on the acknowledgement of pride and shame seem to lead to pathological states of shame, which give rise to rigid or excessive conformity. I have shown how Asch's study of independence and conformity may be reinterpreted in these terms. If the deference-emotion system is universal, the theory would provide a unitary explanation of conforming behavior, the central problem of social science.

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