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Varieties of the shame experience: Social, interpersonal, and intrapsychic

Karen, Robert Benjamin, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1992

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VARIETIES OF THE SHAME EXPERIENCE:
SOCIAL, INTERPERSONAL, AND INTRAPSYCHIC

by

ROBERT BENJAMIN KAREN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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Abstract

VARIETIES OF THE SHAME EXPERIENCE:
SOCIAL, INTERPERSONAL, AND INTRAPSYCHIC

by

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The Shame experience is divided into five categories: Universal Shame, which is typified by the Christian belief that all people are sinners; Situational Shame, which arises when one violates a social norm; Class Shame, typified by feelings of inferiority or self-hatred based on membership in a demeaned group; Existential Shame, a valid recognition of shortcoming that often leads to personal growth; and Narcissistic Shame (NS), an irrational and deeply held negative evaluation of the self which often derives from childhood experience.

An historical account is given of how the shame experience in Western society has changed as society has changed. In the feudal period Class Shame and Universal Shame were most important. Afterwards there was a rise in Situational Shame as manners and propriety became imperative to a developing society. Since the industrial revolution NS has grown more dominant.

The rise in NS is attributed to the alienation of human bonds;

the rise of competitive capitalism; an increased emphasis on what a proper person must be as opposed to the former emphasis on what he must do; a heightened self-consciousness due to the spread of psychological ideas and the advent of television; a decline in rituals and role models; the break-up of the extended family; and the growing power of bureaucracies.

The link between power and shame is traced, and the author notes that the shift to NS has been accompanied by a rise in interpersonal politics, in which domination and a sense of emotional well-being are achieved by exploiting the shame of others.

The clinical importance of NS is explored, and case illustrations are given. The author notes the dangers of ignoring shame in treatment or confusing it with guilt and suggests the pitfalls to which various psychotherapies are prone. A therapeutic stance is suggested. When psychotherapy deals successfully with shame, it works because the patient's sense of self expands beyond the boundaries of the felt inadequacy; a trusted other accepts the perceived flaw as human; self-compassion is activated; and the patient is free to stop his compulsive flight from the consciousness of shame and to rationally examine hated aspects of the self.

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Introduction

In the last few years shame has become an increasingly important concept in psychology and psychiatry, with a growing number of books dedicated to this experience and its relationship to clinical concerns. For many years shame was overlooked, ignored, or subsumed under other headings (guilt, inferiority, feelings, social anxiety, embarrassment, resistance). In Bergler's book on the superego (1952), for example, there is no index listing for shame. The same is true for Ellenberger's Discovery of the Unconscious (1970), in which he reviews the major theories of Freud, Jung, and Adler and the century and a half of research, theorizing, and discoveries that led to them. A number of reasons have been cited for this: the Freudian favoritism toward guilt (Lewis, 1971); the assumption of anthropologists that Western culture was more guilt oriented (Piers and Singer, 1953)); our society's aversion to the very subject of shame (T. Scheff, personal communication, September 25, 1990); the belief of many in psychoanalysis that shame was little more than a barrier to healthy expression (Broucek, 1991); a cultural trend that has been dismissive of shame (Schneider, 1977); and the resistance of some therapists to focusing on a patient's shame because of it's threatening nature (Morrison, 1989).

To this we might add two additional reasons: the possibility that shame was largely seen more as a normal rather than pathological phenomenon, and the many different ways that shame can be experienced.

In recent past parents commonly warned their children against a broad range of behaviors, conditions, and impulses that might incur shame--from adultery and illegitimate pregnancy; to cowardice and failure; to bad manners, laziness, and dirty underwear. When bourgeois morality prevailed, shame awaited people at every turn--any act of immodesty, poor form, or incompetence could be the trigger. It has been noted that our culture has lost contact with the word shame (T. Scheff, personal communication, September 25, 1990) and with many of the values once associated with it. Yet even today, we recognize many classical shame experiences. Who does not know the shame that swells up after telling a joke that causes offense? After realizing too late that you've out-stayed your welcome? After catching your heel in your hem, stumbling and feeling ridiculous in the presence of people who might judge you for it? After failing sexually with a new lover? After an unintended faux pas, like showing too much enthusiasm at an old-money business meeting? Or after blabbing too much because of your unconscious eagerness to please? Other causes for shame might include burping loudly at a polite gathering, being caught reading over a stranger's shoulder as she writes in her diary, being too familiar when addressing someone of greater status or age, entering a synagogue without a hat, discovering a wet spot on you pants after urinating, your child throwing a fit in the movies.

When shame strikes, it is typically a feeling of being caught out in the open and desperately wanting to hide. One moment you are a decent, functioning, acceptable human being who knows who are you are, and the next you are cast into sudden confusion and your identity is in disarray. The most trivial of daily activities can turn shameful if the context shifts in an unexpected way--such as when you stop to eat a sandwich in a public place in a strange city only to discover from the glances and stares of others that eating is not done here. Now every crumb attached to your lips or dribbling off your clothes to the floor seems to scream, "Ill-bred!" "Bum!" or "Misfit!"

Many factors can increase the intensity of the shame experience. Clearly, membership in a demeaned ethnic or racial group is one. A predisposition to find shameful things in the self or to perceive oneself as unworthy is another. A biologic tendency to experience shame more intensely may be a third.

Unconscious feelings of unworthiness also contribute to the affective experience. Often they crystallize around some negative view of the self: that one is ugly, stupid, impotent, unmanly, unfeminine. That one is phony, grasping, ignorant, boring, cheap. That one is insignificant, immature, unable to love.

But where does normal, healthy shame end and pathological shame begin? How can we make sense of the huge variety of shame experiences? That is one of the purposes of this paper.

Shame is an integral aspect of being human, an inevitable outgrowth of consciousness, of man's freedom from instinct, of social regulation. It is a critical part of our internal compass, innate and yet learned. As with language, the capacity for shame seems to be innate in human beings, while the ways in which we experience it and the boundaries of shamefulness itself are determined by cultural, familial, and individual circumstance. Helen Block Lewis (1987) saw shame as an inherently social affect and as an aspect of the attachment system that binds the closest relationships. In this paper I will focus not on the hard-wired aspect of shame, but on the different ways it can be experienced, based on cultural and personal circumstance.

To a certain extent, power relations in society determine when shame will be experienced (i.e., what constitutes a violation of proper behavior) and who will bear the heaviest burden (i.e., who will be *disregarded, disrespected, or seen as inferior*). In traditional Western societies, shame was like a cesspool of embarrassment, disgrace, or lowliness into which anyone could fall or the grime with which whole groups were tainted. Today, these aspects of shame still exist, but not quite as pervasively as before: neither class distinctions nor propriety count for as much as they once did; differences are more widely tolerated; and once demeaned groups are asserting their worthiness and finding more acceptance. A more prominent form of shame in the modern world is a negative sense of self--unrelated to group membership or specific violations--that is planted within and that we carry around with us at all times.

At this time, despite the new interest in shame in clinical work, there is still a tendency to confuse guilt with shame, which can result in mistaken clinical assumptions. In this paper I hope to illustrate that shame has become an increasingly important clinical issue in recent decades and to give historical reasons why this is so. I suggest a classification for shame, which may be useful in understanding the sort of shame clinicians are dealing with and how it operates in the daily lives of their patients.

I've given a name--Narcissistic Shame--to the type of shame that theorists now typically focus on as "pathological." I will try to establish that this type of shame has become more dominant in our culture in recent years and that it continues to be intricately woven with issues of power. I believe it fits theoretically with the changes observed in the type of patients seen in recent decades, as compared with those seen by early analysts, as well as the increasing relevance of theories about narcissism, split off parts of the self, and false selves. But other types of shame, easily confused with Narcissistic Shame, are still seen in treatment. I believe that a clinician's understanding of the type of the shame being dealt with is useful in developing treatment plans.

Nathanson (1987) writes, "For some years I have taken the study of emotion, of affect psychology, as my prime interest. The pleasant sense of security offered by years of immersion in such work was shattered when I realized that I did not know anything about the affect shame.... Suddenly I became aware that this ignorance had caused me to misunderstand a great many of my patients, whose conflicts had remained obscure, and who had profited little from my work as their therapist."

Clearly, recognizing where shame is at work will give us a better understanding of exactly what is happening with patients, how much of their suffering is the result of early experience and how much of current experience, what succeeds in clinical practice, and where one needs to focus.

Literature Review

Enormous difficulties and disagreements have been encountered in trying to define shame, not least of all because different investigators have concentrated on what appear to be different aspects of the shame experience and because their definitional goals have been different. A number of authors--Schneider (1976), Kinston (1983)--note that in other languages (Greek, French, German) two words are used for shame. The first refers to modesty and bashfulness and, in Biblical usage, to the genitals. The second refers to scandal, disgrace, and criminality. Neither grouping refers to the shame affect per se. The first includes a concern for quality of character that comes of good training and is generally understood in English as the state of "having shame." The second concerns itself mainly with qualities of character, events, conditions, or situations that are causes for shame. This division does not do justice to the variety of shame experiences or the debates that have surrounded them. Some major concerns:

1. Shame vs. guilt. One of the key areas of disagreement has been over the distinction between shame and guilt. Some authors have stressed internal vs. external authority as the distinguishing feature between these two emotional experiences (e.g., Mead, 1937, cited in Piers and Singer, 1953). That is, the ashamed person is cringing before the eyes of others; whereas the guilty person is undone by his own conscience. This view contributed to the argument that guilt was

a more advanced superego phenomenon (Benedict, 1946). As these two experiences have been more closely evaluated in recent years, however (see, for example, Piers and Singer, 1953), most theorists have rejected this distinction.

It is sometimes assumed that deeds cause guilt whereas feelings cause shame. This, too, seems mistaken. Deeds can arouse shameful feelings of impropriety, inadequacy, or illegitimacy, because of what they imply about the self, just as they can arouse guilty feelings of remorse and regret and the desire for some form of penance. On the other hand, in a guilt-driven society (or family) even feelings and impulses can be experienced as an illegal act, demanding confession or penance and requiring punishment (none of which arise in the context of shame).

M. Lewis (unpublished manuscript) argues that the key difference between shame and guilt is that in guilt one reprimands oneself for a specific flaw or failing, whereas in shame the flaw or feeling becomes globalized to include the whole self. He thus sees shame as the universally more severe experience. This is still not quite satisfying, partly because it misses the essentially different quality of the two experiences--shame causing one to want to hide, guilt to make amends. But also because one can feel ashamed of a specific flaw, like being overweight or a poor tennis player without feeling that one's whole self is sullied, or at least not to the same extent as in other shame experiences. Someone might feel guilty about being overweight or a poor tennis player if one had promised one's spouse that one would stay slim or improve one's game; but otherwise guilt in such areas seems unlikely. Although shame always ultimately reflects on the self, it can be more or less global. Also, it would be hard to argue that the monstrous, overarching guilt that consumes someone who has committed murder is less intense than the shame one feels after discovering that one has come to work with one's fly open. Indeed, there are times when it is much easier to feel shame than guilt, and when doing so is a moral lapse.

Piers and Singer (1953) describe guilt as a superego function, shame as a function of the ego ideal. They associate guilt with transgression and shame with failure. According to Piers, any gap between ego ideal and actual behavior is a cause for shame, and he notes that the disparity need not be moral. Any area of perceived inadequacy, be it sexual performance, moral integrity, capacity to run fast, or ability to outcon an accomplished crook, can all arouse feelings of shame. The Piers view has since been modified by others--some rejecting the ego ideal as the essential feature in shame arousal, some broadening the types of experiences that can lead to shame. But several variations on Piers' essential distinction have together become the dominant view (Lynd, 1958; H. Lewis, 1971; S. Miller, 1985, among others).

In keeping with these authors, I would frame the distinction between shame and guilt this way: Shame, whether aroused by some form of behavior or not, is always focused on the self, while guilt is focused on the interpersonal or social debt arising from an act one has committed that has harmed another or that one takes to be immoral.

The guilty person feels: I have done a bad thing for which I stand condemned by myself, for which I feel remorse and the need to make amends, and for which I deserve to be punished. I have robbed, cheated, betrayed, violated, or killed another person, and I cannot live with what I have done. Guilt has long associations with the idea of "debt." It can be repaid. Expiation can be complete, even if it takes the gallows.

On the other hand, the ashamed person does not feel there is a way out. He does not hold himself in a state of anxious suspension until he can achieve oneness again with the human community. His was, in a sense, a victimless crime and there are no debts to be repaid. Rather, the ashamed person wants to flee and hide. No one should see his shameful otherness. He feels: I am unworthy. I am tainted with the unclean and must be shunned. I am unfit to live among other human beings because of the flaw in my nature. I am lowly. There are means by which he can be made whole again, depending on the type of shame he suffers from, but under no circumstances will it be through punishment--that will only increase his shame, perhaps topping it off with humiliation.

The same thought, impulse, or action can be a cause for guilt or shame, depending on the individual and the social context. One man takes a newspaper from a vender without paying and is later haunted by guilt--how can I have cheated that poor man who is trying to make an honest living--and wants to make amends. Another man does the same and is haunted by shame--look what a lowlife I am, sneaking around, pinching pennies, behaving like a petty thief. In our society, where the moral climate has grown very thin and people are not encouraged as much as they once were to agonize over their obligations to others, shame is moving into areas once dominated by guilt.

2. Other areas of difference. Some authors are primarily concerned with where shame comes from, or how it emerges developmentally; others what purpose it serves the individual; still others--Elias (1939), Benedict (1946), Singer (1953), Lynd (1958)--what purpose it serves socially.

Much of early psychoanalytic writing is dominated by Freud's idea that shame is a reaction formation against exhibitionistic impulses (Miller, 1985). He didn't seem to believe that the shame experience was meaningful in itself, but rather a decoy for what lay underneath. There was no genuine feeling of unworthiness, but rather a forbidden excitement covered over with a hastily improvised veil of mortification. At least this was his position when he discussed shame theoretically, grouping shame with disgust and morality, as one of the internal watchmen, helping to maintain sexual repressions. Miller (1985) notes that elsewhere in his writings he talks of shame in its more everyday sense as unworthiness.

Anna Freud (1965) followed Freud on this: "The qualities of shame, disgust, pity, are known not to be acquired by any child except as results of internal struggles with exhibitionism, messing, cruelty." The Freudian position was further echoed by Jacobson (1964) and Nunberg (1955) (both cited in Miller, 1985). According to Nunberg, though, shame is a reaction formation of the ego, with castration anxiety as the motive power. In other words, shame is not so much a superego phenomenon, acting in the service of morality, but an ego phenomenon acting in the service of survival. It helps to curb exhibitionistic impulses that might otherwise invite castration.

Miller (1985), who disputes this view, argues: "The reaction formation theorists have studied a particular function of shame... and have neglected to study the shame experience itself."

Those who have tried to understand shame by isolating its function invariably end by disagreeing, for shame seems to have many functions, none of them overarching enough to include all the others. Also, because they think of it in functional terms, they tend to ignore the aspect of shame that might be seen as a wound.

Another function of shame that is frequently noted is the curbing of arousal. Knapp (1967, cited in Miller, 1985) posits that shame curbs the sexual instinct, much as disgust curbs hunger. H. Lewis (1971) saw the same function at work in the case of "watching" in a child. Shame protected the child "against the loss of self boundaries which is implicit in sexual fantasy" (cited in Miller, 1985, p. 12). Kohut saw the shame that is typically experienced by shame-prone personalities as a reaction of the "flooding of the ego with unneutralized exhibitionism" and thus as a check on grandiosity (cited in Ornstein, 1978, p. 70). Neither Lewis nor Kohut, however, limit shame to its drive reduction function.

Kinston (1983), who acknowledges the involvement of feelings of unworthiness in the shame experience, believes, like Freud, that it is not those feelings which are central but the purpose they serve. However, he sees a very different purpose from Freud: Instead of reaction formation against exhibitionistic drives, shame, he insists, "*is an unpleasurable experience associated with the maintenance of* narcissistic equilibrium" (p. 224). He sees shame as an essentially positive mechanism, a warning signal that a move toward an abandonment of relatedness is about to take place.

The greatest divergence from the Freudian view is presented by those who examine shame not as a function, but, as Miller would say, a straightforward expressive state. Even here, however, there has been a tendency to try to pin it down to a narrow causal area and to assume that all of its manifestations stem from there. Mayman (1974), for example, maintains an emphasis on bodily issues. "He believes," Miller writes, "that the shame-prone adult learned as a child that what he or she wished to display with pride and excitement was regarded by others as laughably small, cute, or underdeveloped" (1985, p. 15). This echoes Adler's concept of inferiority. Some shame theorists, notably Morrison (1989) believe that Adler, although he did not use the word, did the most important early theoretical work on the shame concept. Horney (1950), with her theoretical work on self-hatred, should also be seen as an important early contributor.

In exploring the relationship between shame and inferiority feelings, other authors go beyond bodily issues to posit shame as an inferiority feeling regarding any aspect of the self. Among those included in this group are Alexander (1938), Piers and Singer (1953), Grinker (1955), Lynd (1958), Lewis (1971), and Kohut (1971). Unlike the others, however, Alexander believes that shame is fundamentally positive, promoting development.

On the question of where shame comes from, there are, again, many points of view. Piers (1953) and others posit the fear of abandonment and rejection. This view is adopted later by Lewis (1971, 1987), who sees shame as a peculiarly social affect and relates it to attachment theory. Nunberg (1955) sees it as an oedipal issue, an aspect of castration anxiety (and in women due to feelings of castration).

Mayman (1974) also invokes the oedipal stage, suggesting genital inferiority as the issue, not necessarily castration. Others, like Engel (1963) would allow other developmental stages a role in shame formation, but Engel retains the classical concerns with loss of sphincter control, loss of positive feelings about body products, and concerns with genital size.

Alexander (1938) believes that any failure to move forward developmentally is a cause for shame. Like Alexander, Grinker (1955) suggests that shame arises in response to a failure to master any developmental task (but unlike Alexander, he acknowledges the resulting damage shame may have).

Erikson (1950) linked shame to the struggle for self-control and autonomy in the anal phase of development and believed that the interpersonal dynamics at that time could cause shame to become a permanent feature of the personality. Kaufman (1989) has subsequently noted that the negative pole of each of Erikson's eight life stages "is actually an elaboration of shame, given new or wider meaning" (p. 10).

Kohut saw shame as caused by the parents' failure to see the child as a whole being. Morrison (1989), following up on this line of Kohut's thinking, suggests that shame arises developmentally in response to any perceived empathic failing on the parents part (or, to be more exact, on the part of the "selfobject," which may or may not accurately reflect the behavior of the real-life parents).

H. Lewis (1987) saw shame, like guilt, as an innately social affect whose purpose was to maintain and restore closest attachments. She argued further that shameful feelings about the self were natural and could arise at any time in one's life, that they should not be considered significant only if traceable to early infancy.

Lynd (1958) agrees with Piers and Singer (1953) about the near infinite causes of feelings of unworthiness, emphasizing, in addition, the loss of solidarity with cultural values. For Lewis, who also belongs to this camp, the picture is somewhat narrowed by her belief that shame always arises from failing to live up to goals that one has adopted through a loving identification with parents (Miller, 1985). Once again, we see how difficult it can be to try to pin shame down this way, for this formulation ignores the possibility of other powerful identifications, of the shame-instilling power of neglect or abuse, and of counter-identifications--the shame of being like one's parents. All told, many of the efforts to define shame--either by function, developmental source, or as an affective state--usually represent the author's examination of one or more aspects of the shame experience, but not shame in all its manifestations.

One of the problems, for instance, in looking at shame strictly according to its presumed functions is the possibility of generalizing falsely from a single culture. Tomkins (1987), for instance, argues that shame's only true function is the dampening of interest or arousal, and that all else is a cultural elaboration. Another problem as I've noted, with a purely functional focus is that it tends to omit shame pathology.

Looking at shame from a strictly developmental viewpoint risks assuming that all adult shame experiences are echoes of childhood experiences and have no standing on their own. Whether one sees adult shame as tied fundamentally to an early "defense against infantile pregenital and genital drives" (Lowenfeld, 1976, p. 71), early experiences of inferiority, or early empathic failures, there still seems to be an aspect of adult experience of shame that has an autonomous reality.

It might be useful at this point to note that major semantic problems come into the picture when shame is being debated. For instance, Kinston explicitly places "awareness of inferiority and associated psychic pain" (p. 224) in a different category from shame, while for many current shame theorists, this is the central core of shame. Tomkins (1963) insists that shame is an auxiliary affect whose sole innate purpose is to inhibit feelings of interest or enjoyment. Why those feelings should be inhibited and what meanings we attach to such inhibition is completely variable and culturally determined. As far as Tomkins is concerned, biologically speaking, shame, guilt, discouragement, and shyness are merely subspecies of the same affect, which simply have different cognitions attached to them.. Thus: "Shyness is about strangeness of the other; guilt is about moral transgression; shame [as the term is commonly used] is about inferiority; discouragement is about temporary defeat; but the core affect in all four is identical" (1987, p. 143). He insists that shame need not having anything to do with feelings of worthlessness, that indeed one can feel shame without the self being involved at all, especially in communally oriented cultures where self is not a primary issue (personal communication, April 22, 1990). To insist on the primacy of the self, he says, is to misinterpret the experience of others as culturally identical to our own. This squarely opposes him to those like H. Lewis (1871), M. Lewis (unpublished manuscript), and his own followers, Nathanson (1987) and Kaufman (1989), who give the self central importance in the experience of shame. Tomkins raises important and provocative issues that cannot be ignored, but even if he is right biologically, his formulation still begs the question of how we, in our culture, are to understand the rich meanings of that particular subspecies of cognitive-affective experience we call shame.

3. Classifying schemes. Shame seems to present a different profile in different periods and in different cultural settings. It has been noted (Wheelis, 1958) that in Freud's day, society was different enough from ours that the types of mental illness he saw were different from what therapists tend to see today. Whereas Freud saw true hysterias and non-character-related obsessions, modern analysts are likely to see character disorders and, to use Winnicott's term, false selves. A corollary may be that a similar difference existed in the way shame tended to be experienced at that time.

Take the issue of the false self. In a class society, such as existed in Freud's day, roles were more rigid and people lived according to certain prescribed modes of behavior. Service people, to use an obvious example, were expected to be helpful, agreeable, and respectful, and even if they hated those they served, they put on the proper display of kindliness and good will. There was a false self here, but, it could be argued, for the majority of people in this position the falseness was largely in the behavior. Psychologically speaking, it was not necessarily pathological. They knew what they felt and who they were, and, presumably, in the privacy of protected relationships they could express it. In other words, the false self for them had not moved inward as thoroughly as it seems to have done for many in our day, establishing a fictional identity for the individual as well as for the world.

It could be argued that a similar inward-moving development--from the largely social and nonpsychopathological to the more internalized and troubling--has occurred with shame. What was once sound social functioning has become pervasive, unconscious, and distorting of the self. In order to look at shame in that way, I will suggest a classification that will place shame in an historical context and emphasize its social and interpersonal aspect.

Some authors have already classified shame according to various criteria. H. Lewis (1971) showed how the experience of shame varied in intensity and context in a wide variety of processes and states: dishonor, ridicule, humiliation, mortification, chagrin, embarrassment. Lewis has also divided shame into categories that are particularly suited to clinical work: 1) overt shame, consciously experienced and acknowledged, 2) shame that is overtly felt but unidentified or unacknowledged by the person feeling it, and 3) bypassed shame, in which the individual is struggling with shame issues but not actually experiencing the affect, except perhaps as a momentary jolt.

Shame can further be classified according to its modes of operation. There's the affective experience, the fiery feeling of having been exposed and wanting to cover up. There's the shame that is not happening right now but is implicit in one's psychology--"He carries a heavy burden of shame over his father's disgrace" or "I am so ashamed of never having completed school" (even though I am not experiencing shame as I speak). There is the shame that may never be experienced but seems implicit in one's defensive maneuvers, especially around image. And, finally, there is the vague "sense of shame," the anxiety that something one has said or done or felt will be seen as lacking by others and that it will cause them to behave in such a way that one's shame will be activated.

Wurmser (1981) offers this breakdown: 1) shame as an affective state of either long or short duration, 2) as a form of anxiety, 3) as a symptom, 4) as a character trait, 5) as a tension between the ego ideal and the ego. He groups these manifestations in three major phenomonological categories: shame anxiety, the affective reaction, and the character attitude that defends against the first two, e.g., reaction formation.

One of the primary purposes of this thesis to offer another classification system, one that neither encompasses all the categories put forth by others nor replaces them. It is in part an effort to understand the difference between "normal" and "pathological" shame and to trace different types of shame back to their social and developmental roots. This nosology is therefore more related to the causes and meanings behind the shame experience--whether that experience is the shame affect per se, shame avoidance, or shame anxiety--and the psychological role those causes and meanings play in a person's life. I suggest this classification not because it exists in any real sense, but simply as a means of discussing the variety of ways in which shame operates in our lives.

The five types of shame I see as creating the most useful categories for this purpose are:

1) Universal Shame. Shame that is seen as inherent in the human condition, largely unaffected by power, and equally affecting all people. The idea that 'we are all weak' or 'we are all sinners' can be understood as a manifestation of Universal Shame.

2) Situational Shame. Shame that arises from rejection, humiliation, allowing one's boundaries to be infringed upon, or violating a social norm. Saying something 'stupid' or wearing the wrong clothes to a social gathering may cause a flair-up of Situational Shame.

3) Class Shame. Shame associated with social status or group inferiority. The poor, the peasantry, ethnic and racial minorities have all suffered from Class Shame.

4) Existential Shame. Shame that is personal, that reflects poorly on one's character, but is not itself a part of one's character and is not a pathological development. This is a more mature, and often more conscious form of shame, based on an accurate judgment of one's failing in relation to one's values.

5) Narcissistic Shame. Shame over personal defectiveness, often of an ongoing, pathological type. The sense, usually unconscious, that one is unlovable or unworthy of respect, generally because of some real or imagined flaw.

I will now define these five aspects of shame in more detail.

Chapter 1.

The Varieties of the Shame Experience: A Classification

I start with several assumptions. One, that shame is a negative feeling about the self that is experienced in an extraordinary variety of ways. Two, that the affect is often but not always associated with the early dread of abandonment or rejection that occurs in infancy. The affect often includes a drowning feeling of being cut off from one's social moring and, simultaneously, a wish to hide. Three, that shame is often linked to social power, which determines how shame will be apportioned, when it will be experienced, and certain of the characteristics that define the proper or ideal person. Four, that regardless of shame's association with social forces, it is commonly internalized and felt as one's own experience, as a judgment one makes of oneself. Thus, shame can be experienced even when the cause of shame is apparent only to oneself. Five, that shame has both an active side (the affect) and a latent, usually unconscious side, which shows up in self-concepts, defenses, habits of relating, as well as ideas of virtue, propriety, and good character, and which controls the individual through prescriptions, inhibitions, and prohibitions regarding behavior. Six, that between the shame affect and latent shame, there is shame anxiety which warns the person that the conditions necessary for the affect are encroaching and that renewed adherence to the behavioral prescriptions are required. Seven, that shame plays a necessary and vital role both in the life of the individual and in the life of the community; that it is part of the system by which values, ideals, mutual understandings, boundaries, and social trust are all maintained. But, eight, that shame can also become a wound that is reflected in social oppression or clinical syndromes.

In order to organize these aspects of shame into a coherent and historically-relevant system, I've divided shame into what I believe are useful categories. However, it should be noted that, as with any set of categories, there is inevitable overlap, so that at the edges of each category, things become a bit fuzzy, and it may be difficult to decide if an individual's shame experience reflects one type of shame or another or several at once.

A. Universal Shame

According to the Hebrew Book of Genesis, shame was one of the first elements produced right after the big bang at the birth of consciousness, when people became, in their own minds, differentiated from the rest of nature. Several factors make people susceptible to shame: consciousness of right and wrong, of good and bad, of inferior and superior; the ability to make comparisons; the ability to make choices; an awareness of the self; the need for social regulation to make up, in a sense, for the lower level of instinctual controls; and the sense of being separate from nature, unlike the lower animals, who are more instinct bound and thus free of onerous choices. To people, it has often seemed that lower animals can only be themselves, can only, in a sense, be true the Creator's plan. In medieval society the widely held belief that all people were sinners gave expression to this sense of universal flaw.

Among the many meanings and senses the word shame can have is that of shameful thing--that is, the conditions which acts as, or should act as, a cause for the affect. Thus, "the shame of our cities" is the dirt in its streets, the bigotry of its citizens, the failure of its courts. Those are things that should or do make city dwellers hang their heads. Universal Shame exists primarily in this sense, as a cause for mankind to feel humbled. The affective component may come into being in church, when parishoners hang their heads in response to a sermon about mankind's sinfulness or smallness of spirit. In this form of shame, everyone wears the scarlet letter, and those who feel it feel it for the mass. There is no need for any one person or group to feel particularly compromised.

To "have" Universal Shame means, in part, to have humility. Humility and modesty have been linked with shame for centuries and are implicit in the Greek concept of aidos (Heller, 1974). It is a recognition of human limitation. One needs community. One has obligations to the community. One is limited by one's human nature. There are rules, restrictions. One cannot be entirely free. To even think otherwise leads to the madness of grandiosity, hubris, a self-destructive challenge to the gods. According to Nietzsche (1937), "Shame occurs where man feels that he is nothing but a tool in the hands of a will infinitely greater than is his own within his separate individuality" (cited in Kinston, 1983, p. 219). This observation of Nietzsche speaks to an aspect of the human condition that gives rise to Universal Shame.

A culture's recognition of Universal Shame is reflective of human cohesion. To the extent that they see themselves as one, as a single species with common traits, as basically alike and sharing a fundamental human nature, people may share a similar feeling of both pride and shame in being human. (Often this inclusive shame or pride extends only to the borders of one's country or tribe, but it is the same phenomenon.) Universal Shame exists most strongly in a society where people feel a very strong sense of belonging, in which there is a cohesive body of beliefs, and where one identifies oneself strongly with the community and with the others who make it up. Where these conditions are weak or lacking, Universal Shame can still exist, but for many people it probably tends to be more of an intellectual abstraction than an operating factor in their psychological lives.

With Universal Shame, the sense of defect is surrounded by the safety of brotherhood. It is humility without inferiority or the need for grandiosity. Its equalizing, communal quality tends to drain off the pain and anxiety associated with both Class and Narcissistic Shame, the other two shame areas where defect smolders. When emphasized in the community's belief system, it serves a balm for the human condition. Socially, it is a force for unity and moderation.

B. Situational Shame

Like guilt and the fear of punishment, shame is essential to social life. It can be understood phylogenetically, as assuring a healthy respect for society's codes and mores. Or it can be understood ontologically (developmentally) as part of the attachment system, or, as H. Lewis (1987) puts it, as a means of maintaining affectional ties. I would extend Lewis's point and say that shame functions as part of a social attachment system as well. The latter may be thought of as secondary and based on the transference of feelings originating in the former, but that's only true from a purely developmental view. Our communal attachments are of fundamental importance to our lives. What is clear from both the developmental and social view is that rules about what a proper human being is and how a proper human being behaves become central to our lives, and the failure to live up to them is a cause for shame.

Society's rules take on some of the function that instincts have in the lower animals, and shame plays a part in enforcement. Situational Shame has two important aspects. It is the terrible feeling of negative self-coloration that arises from violating that which is held sacred or decent or proper by one's society. It is also, often simultaneously, the intense negative self-coloration that arises from inappropriate exposure of one's nakedness or animal self. I say "often simultaneously," because it is one's "animal self," the drives and impulses that have been repressed and sublimated in various ways, that is often responsible for pushing one off the well-trod pathways of the acceptable.

Situational Shame operates in the service of both propriety--which suggests the behavioral side of the equation--and modesty--which suggests a quality of being. Modesty, although seen as an aspect of Universal Shame, becomes a factor in Situational shame when it becomes a social expectation. Like propriety, modesty also implies having reins on one's sexual and aggressive impulses.

Situational shame results from coming into contact with the forbidden zone that always lies just outside the realm of appropriate behavior. The zone can be thought of as a stinking pit; a place of anxious dreams where one's pants disappear and one's genitals are exposed; or a personal zoo where one is transformed into a dumb animal--sleazy, lustful, and aggressive. Because we repress awareness of the forbidden parts of ourselves, they seem a horrible foreign place with which we only come into contact through circumstance.

From one's earliest experience, one is warned against all that is subhuman, disgraceful, indecent, inappropriate, disrespectful, poor form, or lacking in proper social distance. A common boundary of situational shame keeps us bathing with regularity, dressing appropriately, eating with utensils, and able to work in close proximity without violating one another every time an aggressive or sexual impulse arises. The power of social expectation is so great that to cross any of these boundaries is to risk a sudden shrinking of one's identity. Sometimes Situational Shame takes the form of a hideous, subhuman caricature of the self flashing before the mind's eye: buffoon, ape, toad, cur, cockroach, piece of excrement. As Elias (1939) demonstrated, the niceties of Western society have all been instilled and enforced through (Situational) shame. It serves as a fiery perimeter around social convention, accounting not only for our modern delicacy over urinating, farting, spitting, and nose blowing, bodily functions that were performed openly and without shame in medieval times, but for many of the subtler responsibilities and obligations of social life as well.

Shame is also experienced when there is a collapse of an over-extended sense of one's talents, capacities, or lovableness. This is experienced as a humiliation, and it can be activated by failure, by rejection by a friend or lover, or some other downfall. In such cases, either Situational Shame, in the sense of a flooding feeling of vulnerability, or Narcissistic Shame, which relates to an ongoing sense of personal defectiveness, or both may be the result. If grandiosity is a character problem, it will inevitably have a twin sense of worthlessness (Narcissistic Shame) that will rise to take over in the face of failure. Rejection by its very nature will tend to stir up feelings of Narcissistic Shame ("I'm not good enough"), but it can also cause the more non-clinical Situational Shame--in the sense of feelings of being over-exposed and over-extended, almost like suddenly finding oneself naked in a public place.

Situational Shame of this type can also be aroused by betraying oneself--by revealing feelings or other aspects of the self in contexts where dignity demands restraint. This may entail speaking to an office acquaintance about the details of one's sexual dysfunction, discussing one's therapy session with a curious doorman, revealing one's homicidal or suicidal thoughts in a classroom discussion, or expressing one's joy over the return of one's menstrual period after many years' absence to a group of colleagues. Wurmser (1981, p. 62) emphasized shame's self-protective role in such cases, acting as a warning signal against intrusions into one's inner boundary or "boundary of privacy," that such, premature, unnecessary, or inappropriate exposure might entail. But it can also be understood simultaneously from the social-expectation point of view. Modesty requires that certain aspects of the self be shared only in certain protective spheres. Outside those spheres of intimacy such information is, at the very least, seen as an unwanted intimacy, a cause for discomfort, awkwardness, or anxiety for others. In most social situations people do not want to be drawn to the edge of things where security and stability vanish and difficult, sometimes frightening, questions arise. Unwanted intimacy may be experienced as offensive or disgusting, much like picking one's nose in public. In either case, it is degrading for the self. Here again, a boundary has been crossed inappropriately and society disapproves. So we see here perhaps most dramatically how Situational Shame serves both the needs of the individual and the needs of the community simultaneously.

(If the individual wishes to cross this boundary anyway, because he wants to expand the boundaries of the acceptable, he will have to use his creativity in order to assure that his action is interpreted as something more than a willful offense. But here, too, he will need some fortification; he will at least have had to explore the forbidden ground of his being himself and come to some terms with it.)

Certain aspects of Situational Shame, like those related to being over-exposed and over-extended may be inherent in the human condition and not reliant on any particular form of training. The individual's sense of self is vulnerable and shame may be an instinctive signal of the need to withdraw and protect. Tomkins (1987) believes that shyness is a form of shame and adds (*personal communication*, April 22, 1990) that this self-protective mechanism is more active in some due to hereditary factors. However, once we move into the specific cultural codes and standards, the violation of which may arouse Situational Shame, a training process is required. The responsibility for this training is initially entrusted to parents, but quickly one learns that all of society stands ready to let one know the moment one has crossed a forbidden boundary. People will point their finger disapprovingly, look upon one as disgusting or unacceptable. One has internalized these injunctions, but social power is central to their enforcement.

The sense that the shame is situational in such cases and thus temporary is strengthened by the fact that most of the forbidden impulses have realms in which they are acceptable. There are contexts in which one can be a sexual animal, in which one can be naked, in which one can defecate or act aggressively.

"To have shame" generally means to have fully incorporated society's expectations in regards to Situational Shame. To have shame has been considered a good thing in Western culture as far back as the Hebrews and Greeks, the latter having made Aidos a goddess, who was seen as the source of "dignity, decency, and good manners" (Heller, 1974). One is modest as opposed to exhibitionistic or grandiose; one is deferential to others, especially one's elders or superiors; one is respectful of propriety, and so on. This internalization, this "having shame," is related to Broucek's (1991) term "anticipatory shame," which keeps one from moving in certain proscribed directions.

Having shame has different meanings according to the manner in which the individual has incorporated parental and cultural expectations. Like guilt, it can exist in several forms: as the fear of an unintegrated authority figure; as prohibitions and injunctions that one experiences as one's own; and as a highly developed conscience, in which right and wrong has been carefully weighed and considered. A person can come to have shame because ideals and injunctions have been incorporated largely through loving identifications, through punishment and fear, or through a subsequent, conscious working through of the first two. The consequences for the personality will be very different in each case. The first leads to a comfortable, at-home feeling in one's social milieu. The second leads to neurotic conflict, anxious conformity, Machievellian manipulativeness, and other uncomfortable adaptations. The third encompasses an autonomous maturity (which can sometimes lead to conflict with society).

Situational Shame and Class Shame. For the most part, the aspects of the self that are at risk in Situational Shame represent a shared vulnerability, so that no individual or group need feel especially stigmatized. Within any particular class in a fairly stable traditional society, there will not even be much individual deviation in how one views the size and contours of the forbidden, at least not the sort of deviation that we experience today. But because the rules come down from the top, and because the dominant classes are inevitably more familiar with and better trained in many of them, people at the lower end of the social hierarchy can be readily made to feel animalistic or subhuman because of their lack of "proper" manners. In this way Situational Shame can become at times an accessory to Class Shame, or group unworthiness. (In recent years, there has been a reverse trend, in which many at lower socio-economic levels have held to traditional values, while those at the higher end have felt free to flout them. Although the traditionalists often disapprove bitterly of their apparently shameless countrymen, the shame has still weighed more heavily on the lower end because that is the direction against which power flows. Traditionalism has been equated with being old-fashioned, hung-up, or unfree. Many fierce national debates, such as the one over abortion, are probably amplified by Class Shame anxiety.)

Situational and Class Shame can blur in other ways, as well. In a society where menstruating women are considered unclean, shame attaches to an entire group, but only on a temporary basis. Once a month a woman's circumstances push her into contact with the forbidden.

The affective varieties of Situational Shame. Situational Shame varies in intensity from a flash of embarrassment to a feeling of deep mortification to a sense of utter disgrace or ruin. Something that one has done, or in some cases thought or felt, or something done by someone with whom one is significantly linked has brought one in contact with the forbidden zone or exposed something in a context where it should not be exposed. Situational Shame, like other affects, can also be felt for others, by the process of empathy.

Situational Shame and reaction formation. When Freud and other early analysts referred to shame as a reaction formation, I believe it was most often a form of Situational Shame that they saw. For instance, a woman discovers that her blouse is unbuttoned as she speaks to a man she fancies: Her intense blushing is an almost unbearable combination of anxiety and excitement, because in fact she is pleased to be displaying herself to him. But, even so, only a fraction of Situational Shame experiences can rightly be considered reaction formation. Far more numerous are the instances of straightforward emotional pain, of feeling one's identity dissolving and the secure flooring of one's position in the community slipping away.

Situational Shame and Narcissistic Shame. Situational Shame is not generally experienced without a transgression. So the essential stigma, although momentarily attached the person, is more coupled with behavior: These things are shameful; I myself am okay as long as I do not do these things. Because Situational Shame tends to disallow certain impulses, it does put a shameful tinge on much of one's animal nature. Hence shame's fundamental connection with anxiety over exposure. Because the tinge is shared by all people--there is something disgusting about my animality, but everyone has it--the individual is usually spared narcissistic injury. But that assumes a positive training process. As the training becomes more punishing, there is a greater chance that the child will grow up experiencing himself (rather than certain behaviors) as dirty, disgusting, or loathsome. That is Narcissistic Shame. If, to follow this line of thinking, one discovers somehow that one's breath has caused offense, and this becomes a emotional crisis, perhaps triggering a depression, it makes more sense to think in terms of Narcissistic than Situational Shame.

Situational Shame and the taint it places on portions of our nature also becomes oppressive, and thus clinically relevant, when more of the self must be repressed than the person can comfortably live with. The reported levels of hysteria in sexually repressed societies might be relevant here. (See Narcissistic Shame, type 2, below.)

Situational Shame generally dissipates with time, but it can leave a lasting inner stigma and sometimes an outer stigma as well, depending on the violation, who sees it, and the extent of society's (and one's own) preoccupation with propriety. Think of The Scarlet Letter (Hawthorne, 1850), of the shame borne by Hester Prynne in the form of enduring social disgrace, and how it was set in concrete by the "A" she was compelled to wear as punishment for her adultery. Or consider the enduring private wound in the form of unforgiving feelings of shame that haunt a man who's run from battle. Here again, Situational Shame, moves toward the Narcissistic.

But the horrible inner portrait Situational Shame stamps on us often comes and goes with no standing threat to the identity. As H. Lewis (1986 videotaped lecture, April 15, 1986) says of guilt, it is, in a certain way, felt to be "out there." It is as if one had stumbled into a cesspool. It is horrible, but eventually the smell will go away. Even when failure to perform well leaves one feeling stupid, incompetent, or irresponsible, the stain on one's identity can be felt as temporary, soon a bad memory, as long as it does not hook up with some narcissistic wound. (For some people, narcissistic shame is so prominent that it is almost impossible to experience any Situational Shame. Anything that causes shame immediately finds a way of reflecting back on what is felt to be a permanent defect in the self, a proof of one's fundamental unworthiness and unlovableness.)

C. Class Shame

Class Shame is associated more with flaws and inferiority than with behaviors and is based on group position in the social hierarchy. The affect can be experienced as a personal humiliation based on one's membership in a demeaned group, or, like Universal Shame, it can be felt by one on behalf of the group.

In traditional societies the lower the class or the more demeaned the group, the less the worthiness. Power is obviously a central issue here. By attaching unworthiness in general and certain disdained qualities in particular to the demeaned group, those in power are freed from some of the anxiety over worthiness that is part of the human condition. Indeed, they are able to deny altogether the presence within them of certain aspects of human nature which their society has devalued. The demeaned group, meanwhile, often takes on those attributes in an exaggerated and sometimes degrading way. We have seen this aspect of shame played out in the "happy-go-lucky" Negro, the hyperfeminine male homosexual, and the irrational, "intuitive" woman.

The fact that unworthiness is attached to the group does not mean that each *member is constantly feeling* unworthy. Group shame can be a suit of clothes with which one becomes quite comfortable: One can forget for long periods that one is--through one's behavior, expectations, or assumptions about oneself and others--wearing the degrading equivalent of prison stripes or a yellow star of David.

Some people can become so identified with the uniform and the process by which uniforms are handed out that they wear it with simple, unquestioning, and painless acceptance: I am just a woman; my opinion is of little worth. I am just the son of a laborer; I am not suitable for education. I am an Uncle Tom with nothing but happiness and rhythm in my soul. But, even for those who meekly accept their status, the shame inherent in a lower social position can always be activated into painful intensity: One is mistreated by a better and unable to protest. One sees the children of one's betters getting options denied one's own children. There are many ways in which one can have one's nose rubbed in such group-derived inferiority, causing an inward turning of the worm of shame or a sense that one's essential unworthiness has suddenly been exposed and spotlighted so that one's whole identity is colored by it.

When a member of a demeaned ethnic or racial group is among his own people, he may feel little sense of defect. But when he circulates in the larger public, he may feel he needs to keep himself small and somewhat hidden. He may have encounters that make him feel that his accent, the color of his skin, the style of his dress, his manner of relating, the texture of his hair are like a disgusting oil that is oozing from his pores.

Social power determines and maintains the social hierarchy and thus also the hierarchies of worthiness and unworthiness. Behavioral prescriptions in this realm are mostly of the sort that demand obedience, deference to betters, and restraint of expectations. Class Shame is in some ways very similar to Situational Shame in that it tends to become inflamed under certain circumstances. But the shame that is felt is tied to membership in a particular group, rather than to forbidden aspects of our common humanity. That said, it should be remembered that the issue of animality is often linked with Class Shame: A common epithet hurled at demeaned groups is that they are "nothing but animals."

There is great variation in Class Shame. Numerous factors, like the dominant group's security, whether they feel challenged and in what way, the extent of their doubts about their right to a privileged status, the extent of class conflict and consciousness, the factors that contribute to class membership (are there ethnic differences or are all classes essentially one people?) will all contribute to the degree and the virulence of the shame that is experienced.

Class shame is best understood as an aspect of social organization. If there is pathology here, it is more social pathology than individual pathology. To have internalized this stigma is part of normal development in the society in question.

Some of the crippling sting of personal self-doubt that class subjugation instills is alleviated by class unity and closeness, by the mobilization of anger (as in the recent power and liberation movements), or by a social story that carefully gives each group, however lowly, a rightful place in the social scheme (as in medieval Christianity). The latter explains why slavery and serfdom can sometimes be easier to bear psychologically than more informal and hidden forms of tyranny. This seems to be one of the agonies of many blacks in American society, where so much is now in flux. It is no longer so easy to blame one's failure on racism since some blacks have been able to succeed in ways that were prohibited before and since racism is no longer officially sanctioned. Clearly, one is hampered because of one's group membership, but the failure feels more personal. The problem is compounded for blacks (and for other minorities), because much of minority culture now looks down upon any feeling of Class Shame, which itself becomes a source of Narcissistic Shame. On the whole, it may even be fair to say that Class Shame cannot truly exist without class solidarity. As soon as the solidarity breaks down, the shame takes on a more narcissistic coloring.

Today, when mobility is the standard, when one is no longer forceably restrained in the social slot one was born into, and when class allegiance and identification is often weak, much of what would have traditionally been experienced as Class Shame becomes more readily a personal (and clinical) issue. Because ours is an officially classless society, the blue-collar families described by Sennett and Cobb (1972) have nobody to blame for their condition but themselves. They suffer a constant, nagging sense of inferiority, but it is not shared or acknowledged or mitigated by the intimacies and folk humor that flourishes amidst open stratification. Here, too, Class Shame crosses the line from social pathology to individual pathology, from a shared burden to the sense of personal defectiveness, or Narcissistic Shame. This transition also occurs when the oppressed group singles out some of its members for special abuse, as when a black child is made to feel inferior by her parents because she has blacker skin or kinkier hair than her siblings.

D. Existential Shame

Every category of shame discussed so far, may be considered a superego function. The internal judgments and incriminations emerge outside the individual's conscious control. For better or worse, the content of shame in each case has been programmed through upbringing. This is not the case with Existential Shame. Existential Shame arises from one's seeing oneself as one really is--too preoccupied with oneself to see that one's child is sinking, too frightened of the opinions of others to stand up for someone one loves, too hungry for group approval to follow one's conscience. This type of shame is a conflict between reality and ideal. Like Situational Shame, it tends to be a here-and-now experience. But it is not seen to arise because one has tripped or erred but because one has made choices that reveal a smallness of being. Lynd (1958), who has traced through centuries of literature to identify the varieties of shame, often focuses on this type of shame experience.

To take an immediate example: A young man from an ethnic Italian neighborhood joins a bunch of toughs defending their turf from invading blacks. He's always thought of blacks as hateful and subhuman, but after helping to beat one up, he sees the tears in the young man's eyes, sees him clutching the torn blouse he's come to this neighborhood to buy, perhaps for his mother or girlfriend, and he realizes that he's adopted a cheap chauvinism in order to achieve esteem in his group. He feels both guilty and ashamed, and the shame helps force him to rethink his behavior, his code of ethics, his beliefs.

Like Narcissistic Shame, Existential Shame bears the implication of personal defect, but not the quality of hopeless deformity that is associated with the shame wounds implanted in childhood. The defect seems to the ashamed person to be more clearly a case of his own misguided choice. He does not feel hopelessly wed to it. And because he is looking at it squarely, it is not exercising unconscious control over him in the form of anxious imperatives. As Lynd (1958) notes, if one has the capacity to reflect on the causes of shame experiences of this type, they can become a spur to growth and the basis for a stronger identity. Existential shame is analogous to mature guilt, or true conscience. It does not have a driven or compulsive quality. In keeping with Arlow's discussion of mature guilt (1990), I see this mature shame as a function more of the ego than the superego.

Existential Shame is shame in its most mature, autonomous form. Here we can most clearly see the shame affect without the "primitive" or infantile associations to forbidden drives or the fear of the complete loss of human connection. Anxiety about the contempt of others is clearly second to the person's sense of not being what he himself believes he should be. If the failing that one sees in oneself is seen by others as well, there is bound to be an intensification of the shame. This is true for each of the previous three shame categories. But failing in one's own eyes remains the paramount issue here.

E. Narcissistic Shame

Like Class shame, Narcissistic Shame is built on a sense of inferiority or defect. But it is a very personal sense of unworthiness: I am a coward. I am unmanly. I am shallow. I am petty. I am selfish. I am silly. I am stupid. I am sexually impotent. I am ugly. I'm a fraud. To "have shame" in this sense means to have a tendency to judge oneself negatively, especially in certain contexts, to be struggling with a negative self-portrait against which one is continually trying to defend. This is the form of shame that is most clinically relevant today.

Narcissistic Shame exists to some degree for everyone. The Narcissistic Shame affect represents the activation of feelings of unworthiness that anyone is prone to, perhaps because our parents and the world at large are never perfect enough to meet our needs precisely, perhaps because of the inevitable tension between individuality and attachment. In any case, it seems impossible to be human without having this central vulnerability. Sensitivity about the value of the self and the fear of of rejection varies tremendously, but total security on this score seems impossible. Four questions about Narcissistic Shame are therefore of considerable importance for any one individual: 1) How easily activated is it? 2) How pervasive or proscribed is it? That is, what realms of life are likely to activate it? 3) What are its emotional and behavioral ramifications? How much anxiety, inhibition, or compulsiveness does it fuel? And 4) regarding any particular shame concern, is it a fundamental issue, which in most cases means a sense of shame implanted when young as a result of abuse or neglect; or is it a secondary issue, following upon other emotional conflicts and the discomforts they arouse about the self?

The Mount Zion Group has talked about the "pathogenic beliefs" associated with neurotic guilt (see, for example, Bush, 1989). Pathogenic beliefs can also be seen as operating in Narcissistic Shame (with the caveat that it is usually wrong to see the belief as coming first in the complex of ideation, feeling, behavior, and defense that constitute the Narcissistic Shame complex). Women are particularly prone to pathogenic beliefs regarding unattractiveness or the inability to relate well to others; men over incompetence, weakness, or sexual inadequacy. Because of the pressures in our society to be independent and the punitive ways this concern can reach the child, people of either sex (but perhaps especially men) may grow up with a wounding sense of shame over being needy. They experience their emotional needs as a grotesque, infantile deformity for which they will be rejected, abandoned, or contemptuously dismissed by others.

Pathogenic shame beliefs have a peculiar relationship to the truth. They may be totally false: We see this in the woman from a poor, uneducated family who grows up believing she's stupid despite her obvious intelligence. They may be a convenient cover for some other deeper issue of shame or inner conflict: A young man who is anxious about his receding hairline and spends considerable time arranging his hair to conceal it, may be fighting off more fundamental doubts about himself. Or they may have an element of truth to them: Many people are, after all, fat, fraudulent, selfish, mentally slow, overly dependent. But the mere recognition of a flaw, like excessive fearfulness or irritability, or of a harmless but maligned difference, like shortness or homosexuality, does not necessarily occasion a crippling level of shame. People have creative ways of dealing with things like that, and sometimes they come out stronger as a result.

But the pathogenic shame belief seems to block creative avenues. It often is crippling, because it tends to carry not just the derisive accusation that one is a runt, a wimp, a bully, or a fag, but the further implication that one is at core a deformed being, fundamentally unlovable, and unworthy of membership in the human community. At its worst, Narcissistic Shame is the self regarding the self with the withering and unforgiving eye of contempt. And most people are unable to face it. It is too annihilating.

Narcissistic Shame can be understood as something of a wound in the self. It is frequently instilled at a delicate age, as a result of the internalization of a contemptuous voice, usually parental. Rebukes, warnings, teasing, ridicule, ostracism, or some other form of neglect or abuse can all play a part. One is either told what to feel shameful about ("Stupid!") and internazlizes the disparaging voice or one is neglected, mistreated, not responded to as one needs, or hurt in some unintentional way, and one draws one's own conclusions as to why (i.e., "I'm no good").

"A lot of parents," notes Broucek (personal communication, November 8, 1990), "learn that one of the best ways to bring about conformity is through shame. Sometimes by telling the child directly, That's disgusting, you should be ashamed of yourself, or it may just be a turning away from the child, a shunning--it gets the message across." Many parents, because of their own unresolved anger, bitterness, or unmet needs, are unable to accept the child for who he is. They may want a child who's prettier, bouncier, smarter, more aggressive, more compliant, more charming. They may fail to give the developing youngster the appreciation and respect he needs, or they may create a climate of periodic rejection or pervasive disrespect which steadily erodes the child's self-worth, making him susceptible, to one degree or another, to shame's ugly self-portraits.

The shame that forms can be understood as a tendency to judge oneself in a negative way in certain circumstances or relating to certain behaviors. It can also be seen as a stable part of the whole self-concept, but something that is so unacceptable it must be repressed. It is kept repressed by various behavioral styles.

Fossum and Mason (1986) have described certain families, which they call "shame-bound families," often those with a history of addictive problems or physical abuse, or harboring a family secret like a suicide or a bankruptcy. Such families develop a "set of rules and injunctions demanding control, perfectionism, blame, and denial" (p. 8) that leave each member carrying a burden of Narcissistic Shame and a style of relating to others that perpetuates that shame.

Problems can develop outside the home as well. Research on inherited temperament (e.g., Bouchard, 1990) has demonstrated that some people are inherently more anxious, more sociable, more intelligent, more highly sexed, more aggressive, and so forth. People are born with widely divergent qualities and inclinations. The social environment does not always look kindly on various aspects of what one is. Feeling that one doesn't fit--like the kid who everyone makes fun of and no one wants anything to do with--is a torment, regardless of the context. The identity of an effeminate or brainy boy can suffer in gym, at the bus stop, in a home room full of jocks; while a boy who gets his esteem mainly from athletics can feel subhuman in the society of intellects. The child internalizes the world's negative judgments, some part of him cringes in shame, and this sets off a whole series of defenses and compensatory behaviors. Later in life he may find that the shame associated with being the odd one out becomes reactivated whenever engaging in certain behaviors or associating with certain types of people.

It should be noted that shame can become attached to positive qualities, advantages, privileges, anything that may cause one to feel different, that might arouse envy or resentment, and thereby threaten one's sense of belonging. Such social-milieu shame will rarely be of great clinical significance, although it certainly can cause suffering.

It would seem that nothing defends against the internal ravages of the Narcissistic Shame that develops outside the home more than the security gained from parental love, especially the sort of sensitive love that sees and appreciates the child for what it is and is respectful of the child's feelings, differences, and peculiarities. Nothing seems to enable it to cut deeper or more painfully than the lack of that love.

Parental attitudes affect the impact of the outside world in other ways, too. Some parents fail to prepare their child for the fact that others might not find him as adorable as they do. They may neglect to teach him good manners, may give him the impression that certain of his obnoxious traits are cute, or may generally assure him that he is the most fantastic child that ever lived. They are, unwittingly, setting him up for Narcissistic Shame.

Certain types of distorted family relationships are also conducive to shame because, in keeping with Alexander's (1938) observation, they hamper the child's development. Wurmser (1981) cited in particular the overly enmeshed relationship, which causes the child to feel different and inadequate.

Paul Frisch (personal communication, various times, 1976-78), a psychologist I worked with in the mid-seventies, noted that when a shameful self-concept is established in the identity, it is inevitably accompanied by imperatives and inhibitions, shoulds and should nots, which govern certain aspects of our lives and become complexly entwined in our relationships. A boy who is ashamed of being needy may become a caricature of independence, unable to ask for help or closeness or even feel those longings within himself without his positive self-regard disintegrating. A girl who feels unloved by her mother may grow up with a nagging sense of shame about wanting and valuing others more than they want or value her and may establish relationships in which she is never the seeker, always the sought. People who secretly despise themselves for being selfish may feel that they should not take, should not ask, should not calculate in their own behalf, and they may compensate for what they see as their shameful self-seeking with rigid displays of generosity. Horney (1950), without associating them with shame, long ago referred to such pervasive unconscious imperatives as the "tyranny of the should."

The should can be understood as a training effect--i.e., an effort to escape the repetition of a certain kind of pain. But more is involved. There is often considerable individual creativity in the design of the required behavior; it often reflects inherited tendencies; and behind it lies the urgent desire that no one (not even oneself) see one's deformity. Thus, the person on the run from selfishness gives and gives, even when it's not in his best interests to do so, even when it causes him pain, even when it causes other feelings of shame to be activated, about being weak or victimized or unassertive. No one must ever see that claw-like third hand reaching out of his pocket with "Selfish!" written all over it.

As we've seen, each type of shame has behavioral prescriptions associated with it. But the behavioral imperatives associated with Narcissistic Shame are often more compulsive, irrational, or dysphoric. And they are often created unconsciously, through trial and error, as a result of the child's desperate efforts to be acceptable. Sometimes they are so pronounced that they themselves become a source of shame and then new behavioral imperatives. Frisch referred to this as the "shame-should-shame" cycle (personal communications, 1976-78).

The costs of keeping Narcissistic Shame and its behavioral derivatives unconscious can be exorbitant. It often propels one into a busy, running life in which the last person on earth one wishes to know is oneself. As painful as shame is, it does seem to be the guardian of many of the secret, unexplored aspects of one's being. Repressed shame must be experienced if one is to know oneself more fully, to build an identity that is more than a complex of compliance and rebellion toward cultural standards and constraints, and to come to terms with the good, the bad, and the unique of what we are.

Narcissistic Shame is a large and variable category. To make some sense of its complexity, I've subdivided it into five types, the first four of which can be seen as derivative of or related to the first four types of shame. Again, these categories are merely a convenience. In reality, it may often be difficult to neatly fit an individual's shame experience into one of these following slots. Nevertheless, I hope they provide a useful perspective on the varieties of Narcissistic Shame, both in terms of origin and impact.

Type 1--Rational and Contained. Narcissistic Shame can arise entirely internally, as one realizes that one falls short of an ideal. Both Lynd (1958) and Wurmser (1981) cite, for example, the case of Alcibiades, who said he felt ashamed when he heard Socrates speak: "When I hear him my heart leaps in me more than that of Corybantes; my tears flow at his words.... And with this man alone I have an experience which no one would believe was possible for me--the sense of shame" (cited in Lynd, p. 51). How are we to determine whether this type of shame is Narcissistic, which implies a festering sense of inadequacy that is fed by dynamic processes, or Existential, which represents a true assessment of shortcoming and which one is able to deal with rationally? If Alcibiades is comparing Socrates' purity of intentions with his own hunger for power and prestige, then the shame he is experiencing may more rightly be considered Existential. But if he is like a composer listening to Mozart, realizing that, "Compared to him, I am weak broth," and punishing himself for not being the great composer he should be, the shame is more Narcissistic.

Of course, such an awareness of shortcoming need not invoke shame at all; it might simply elicit admiration or a determination to improve. But some qualities cannot be improved upon, and in such cases, many people will be susceptible to a shameful feeling of inferiority.

This type of Narcissistic Shame can be a transitional experience, quickly repressed, much like the awareness of death. It also may stay conscious. But it is essentially rational and contained. It does not strike at and diminish the self as a whole, at least not in a crippling way. It does not light a fuse that, through a series of associations, burns straight through to the core, causing an implosion of unworthiness. Or, if such a fuse is lit, the power of the succeeding identity questions is not critically felt. Although the issue involved may be important, it does not fall necessarily within the range of clinical concern. This mild form of Narcissistic Shame can almost be thought of as a simple outgrowth of Universal Shame. At this level, neither power nor behavioral imperatives play a huge role. Like Universal Shame, it is, potentially, a spiritual issue: I am not everything I would like to be; I am limited; this is the human condition.

And yet there is clearly a feeling of defect, which is the opposite of pride, and some wish to conceal.

Type 2--Pre-existential Shame. This type of Narcissistic Shame represents a failing that is correctable but that has become an ingrained aspect of one's psychology. For example: One senses fleetingly, almost unconsciously, that one becomes enraged and moralistic about certain behaviors in others that one secretly engages in oneself. This fact sets one up to feel legitimately ashamed, and so some shame anxiety attends its knowledge. Were the knowledge of one's hypocrisy to be faced in a fully conscious way, the shame would be considered Existential. But due to habits of self-rejection or a fear of the unknown, one may react to the shame anxiety as if it were ignited by some uncorrectable black mark on the identity. In effect, it becomes linked with the more wounding forms of Narcissistic Shame, a phenomenon we will observe with the next category as well.

Indeed, shame anxiety, no matter what it's source, often creates a threat that goes beyond the reality both of the person's condition and of his shame vulnerabilities. If one could let oneself look at it, one could handle it, perhaps rather easily. Unconscious, however, it seems no different from the shame anxiety associated with the most potent form Narcissistic Shame (Type 4). This heightening of shame anxiety is particularly pronounced when one feels some sense of shame about having anything to be ashamed of (see Type 5 below).

Type 3--The Social or Familial Straitjacket. Like behavior, feelings, impulses, and states of being can also be proscribed. Social convention can make fearfulness, selfishness, dependency, passivity, unlovingness, insensitivity all a cause for shame. Indeed, in our society, these things have become a cause for shame, widely considered more egregious than dressing inappropriately, speaking disrespectfully to a superior, bedding another man's wife, or exposing one's sexuality on TV.

Today's cultural climate has been described as one of shamelessness (e.g., Heller, 1974; Broucek, 1991). The shamelessness being described refers essentially to a collapse in many quarters of the standards and structures that were formerly allied to Situational Shame. But although the shame over various types of behavior has declined, the shame people experience about feelings has risen. Today, many people would sooner urinate in the street, for example, than appear uncaring. The forbidden pit surrounding social convention, has moved away from issues of modesty and propriety and toward a shifting core of approved feelings, impulses, and attitudes. This can still retain a Situational flavor, as long as sublimation, repression, and other defenses keep the unwanted feelings properly transformed. But because these feelings are more unavoidable than inappropriate behavior, the shame seems more closely identified with the individual rather than with something he's done and thus leans toward the Narcissistic. Nevertheless, the lines are drawn according to social convention and have some functional relationship to propriety, making this type of Narcissistic Shame a close correspondent of Situational Shame.

The "seven deadly sins"--pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth--tend to fall into this category. They are stigmatized feelings and impulses, about which devout Christians, at least, have traditionally felt both guilt and Narcissistic Shame. There was a social consensus that these were bad things to experience momentarily, even worse to harbor within oneself on an habitual basis. The existence of a belief in Universal Shame presumably helped to reduce the Narcissistic Shame some people felt over such inner tendencies, or at least to make it less acute.

Current theorists who see shame as a pervasive inhibiting factor in modern life, which limits the experience and expression of many emotions are often referring to this type of Narcissistic Shame. According to T. Scheff (personal communication, September 25, 1990), "If a culture is any good, it provides us with a format for discharging our emotions. Like the format for mourning--you do the grief work, as Freud called it. If, however, people are deeply ashamed of an emotion, as we are of grief or fear or anger, then you inhibit the discharge. That's what happens in modern civilization."

Narcissistic Shame, Type 3, sometimes reveals itself in a defensive structure that relies heavily on inhibition and reaction formation. It also lends itself more readily to dissociation. This may be seen in a child who was raised in a family where he felt loved and accepted, but only as long as he kept within strict boundaries in the expression of feeling. Such an upbringing might encourage a dissociation of the disapproved part of the self, which set up a barrier that kept shame from tarnishing the entire self. If he can live as his family does, having a large disapproved region of the self feels more like a straightjacket than a wound. Whenever such dissociation, repression, or disavowal is threatened, however--as it is in certain threatening social contexts, in moments of inner conflict, or in psychotherapy--shame's threat to the entire self becomes little different from the more pervasive shame wounds, described below.

Type 4--a) Core Shame, and b) The Shame Wound. This is perhaps the most important category of Narcissistic Shame, the one that is most typically referred to today by clinical theorists discussing "pathological shame." The two terms, "core shame" and "shame wound" are used to convey the idea that there is tremendous variability in the pathological power of shame in this category, as well as the fact that there is an oscillation in the individual between feeling that something in particular is wrong with him and that he is wholly unworthy. Core shame ("I'm no good") is the sense of utter worthlessness, unlovableness, unbelongingness that can be considered typical of the narcissistically unresponded to infant, the Kohutian infant, who grows into an adult that Kohut saw as essentially grandiose and suffering from a defective self but who many of his followers see as crippled by shame as well (e.g., Morrison, 1989). The shame wound ("I'm stupid, ugly, awkward, selfish, weak," etc.) is a particular sense of inadequacy that is related to core shame but also to the more limited damage, often inflicted at a later stage of life. But the two go hand in hand and tend to require each other's existence. In all of this we are seeing differences in degree not kind.

The festering shame wound is often, but not always, unconscious. (In the same person it can come in and out of consciousness.) It is characterized by compulsive behavior both in the service of repression (one should not be reminded of this quality in oneself or it will cause an agony of self-loathing) and in the service of appearances (if people saw the truth of what one was, one would be rejected, abandoned, or contemptuously dismissed.) Implanted, usually in childhood, by ridicule, neglect, or some other form of abuse, such shame usually becomes attached to various real or imagined shortcomings. Indeed, the real and the imagined often become impossibly entwined.

Inasmuch as the sense of defectiveness is experienced as permanently attached to one's being, this aspect of Narcissistic Shame is similar to Class Shame. But here the stigma is felt to have nothing to do any longer with things that are held in common--either by all people (Universal and Situational Shame) or by large groupings of people (Class Shame). It is now a private burden, one that people have always suffered with but which especially reflects the atomized time in which we live.

Narcissistic Shame, Type 4, is particularly wounding because it is experienced as permanent and attached to the self, rather than transitory and based on a behavior that temporarily exposes or taints; and because it is individual and unshared.

Narcissistic Shame, Type 4, is variable in the severity of pressure it places on the identity. All the predictable factors--genetic vulnerability, severity and duration of abuse, neglect, and other causal factors, age when such factors became operant, availability of alternative supports, and inner resources--all must be assumed to figure in the equation.

It could be said that the old commonality regarding shame still exists, for everyone today is more susceptible to Narcissistic Shame of this type. But the feeling of commonality is gone. As long as the commonality is neither seen nor acknowledged, the upshot is a most isolating and unforgiving form of shame.

As with the other forms of shame, Narcissistic Shame can exist without the affect being experienced. It, too, has its set of inhibitions and behavioral imperatives to keep the affect at bay. It, too, can become a suit of clothes that one gets used to. Although it restricts one's range of motion to some degree, for one is compelled to behave in ways that keep the stigma from showing, one is able to forget much of the time that a stigma has become attached to one's identity. The pain is not experienced unless something happens to bring the shameful quality to attention. Like Class Shame, therefore, it represents a continuous vulnerability and source of anxiety. Once inflamed, it can be a source of pain for some time, even if the person is able to repress any knowledge of the pain's source. Such is the condition of many depressions (H. Lewis, 1987b, among others, has made a strong point of the connection between shame and depression).

Type 5--Shame of shame. This condition has a number of sources. One can be ashamed of Class Shame, because that is considered a violation of group solidarity and a sign of a retrograde personality. One can be ashamed of Situational Shame because one should be liberated, open, not hypocritical, not Victorian, not hung up about one's body, and so on. And, of course, one can be ashamed of Narcissistic Shame. The latter results from the belief that one should have nothing to be ashamed of and partly reflects the intense competition and distorted ideals that afflict our society. In a society in which people expect themselves to achieve an easy, happy perfection, where being able to prevail in interpersonal struggles is a common concern, and where any negative feeling about the self can be a cause for a sense of inferiority or defeat, Narcissistic Shame will itself be seen as a stigma that one must hide at all costs.

Narcissistic Shame: A Case Example

I have a patient, whom I'll call "Margaret," who is deeply ashamed of having been raised on welfare as a child. People are kept at a distance so that they should never discover this terrible truth about her. She is uncomprehending when she listens to talk shows and hears people admit in public without any apparent shame that they were brought up on public assistance. This is the foremost conscious shame issue for her.

But the welfare issue is, in a way, the shame equivalent of a screen memory. When we move past it in treatment, we find that Margaret is ashamed of being black. This is a more forbidden form of shame which she is ashamed of feeling and extremely defensive about. If the therapist suggests that a dream element or some pattern of behavior points to this shame, she is quick to suspect the therapist of racism. This aspect of her shame is difficult to deal with. According to Margaret, it might be even more difficult with a black therapist, with whom she might be even more loath to admit it.

Margaret associates her shame of blackness with growing up in a neighborhood where all the disreputable and drunken people she saw were black. That she mentions alcoholics is significant. Both of her parents were alcoholic, and as a child she was deeply ashamed of them. She still remembers dreading that her mother would pick her up at the school-bus stop in a drunken state, which would be witnessed by the other children. Indeed, much of her shame of being black is built on earlier shames related to being associated with defective parents.

If we dig deeper there are more profound issues of shame. Margaret was severely neglected by her mother, who, Margaret believes, strongly favored her younger half-sister and who was sometimes physically abusive. Margaret identified strongly with her mother, daydreamed about her at school--was she okay? was she drinking?--and believed that if only she could be better in some way her mother would not only love her more but be made whole as well. Because of both her identification with a damaged mother and the neglect and abuse she experienced at her hands, Margaret was unable to develop a healthy self-esteem and instead felt a profound sense of worthlessness, of being a degraded, unwanted, dirty thing. This is yet more profound, closer to her core, than the other shame issues.

That Margaret's shame coalesced around the idea that she was dirty seems certainly related to the fact that her mother was "fussy" about dirt. It may have been further fueled by her mother's not being there at critical times to care for, and specifically to change her diapers. Concern about being dirty is a common pathway for Narcissistic Shame and may be connected with the disgust and contempt important adults demonstrate toward excrement, dirt, or the soiled baby. As Erikson (1950) has noted, shame is often an important concomitant of toilet training. One can imagine that Margaret's toilet training was laden with impatience, punishment, and signs of disgust, for not only was her mother fussy, but she was a single parent, and apparently a rather disorganized one at that, especially so when drinking. Focusing on the issue of dirt also gave Margaret something she could do; it offered the "should" she needed to counteract the shame, to bind the anxiety associated with it, and to keep it out of consciousness.

My assumption is that Margaret felt her identity to be soiled; she saw herself, unconsciously, as an unwanted, dirty thing, a piece of excrement. In reaction to this terrible sense of worthlessness--which she could not let herself get close to, certainly not as a child, and only with the greatest of difficulty in treatment--she was determined to be clean. This determination became something of a compulsion, even as a child, linking up with whatever obsessive-compulsive tendencies existed in her constitution. After cleanliness, the second and closely related great imperative in her young life was to become middle class, like much of her extended family. Their occasionally voiced disdain for Margaret's addicted, non-productive parents no doubt fed her shame. That they provided her with a series of alternate homes and substitute parents also meant an opportunity to identify herself with something better. It was through her connection with these alternate caregivers that she built her pride. But the pride was never as powerful or as deep as the shame.

Some of the "shoulds" that grew out of Margaret's shame issues were reinforced by the establishment of her mother as an anti-role model. Alcoholism, irresponsibility of any kind, impropriety of any kind all became causes for Narcissistic Shame.

Margaret has significant constitutional strengths and weaknesses. Her strength was evident in her success in getting members of her extended family to care for her and to help her in significant ways. With their minimal support, she was able to succeed in school, attend college, become a teacher, and become the middle-class person she aspired to be. She was still severely limited emotionally and had never let anyone be really close to her. She certainly never confided in them about her profound self-doubts. Indeed, she could not be close to herself. But she functioned in the world, and even a rape at age 19, which must have been experienced as a terrible reconfirmation of her worthlessness and and a further sullying of her identity, was weathered. Her capacity to repress her core feelings of shame was a major mechanism of defense.

In her late twenties, however, Margaret was hit with a series of losses that seemed to compromise her defensive structure. First her mother, then her favorite grandmother, then an aunt with whom she had lived, who was the person closest to her, and whom she identified with as a role model, all died. The loss of her mother undercut much of the purpose behind her efforts to achieve. There was no hope any longer that any of these efforts could win the love she always hoped her mother would one day finally give her. The death of her grandmother and aunt meant the loss of significant emotional supports, and in the case of the aunt a role model as well.

After her aunt's death, Margaret's constitutional weaknesses became more prominent. She became phobic about excrement and contamination; became markedly more obsessive and compulsive about cleanliness; and began showing evidence of paranoia, delusions, and thought disorder. She was hospitalized twice in her mid-thirties, diagnosed first as schizophrenic, then schizoaffective. I first saw her at 37, when the psychiatrist who was overseeing her case suggested she seek help for her symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder.

The specific form her OCD anxiety took seems related to her central issue of shame. Again, my assumption is that as a child Margaret felt like a worthless piece of excrement. She mobilized all of her resources to ward off this feeling. After the significant deaths (and perhaps an age-related rise in vulnerability, which may be related to a mild schizophrenic leaning), she could no longer maintain either her forward momentum or her all-important repression. More primitive defenses became necessary. The encroaching sense of being a piece of excrement was replaced by a preoccupation with environmental excrement, which she became terrified would contaminate her.

Today Margaret's OCD symptoms are significantly reduced, and her psychotic symptoms are in remission. But shame remains a pervasive factor in her life. She cannot allow people to be close to her because, consciously for various contrived reasons depending on the case, unconsciously because she cannot allow anyone to know the truth of what she is. (When this unconscious issue becomes conscious in treatment, her childhood on welfare is the shame issue she is quickest to identify as being too terrible to let anyone know about.) The outward achievement momentum she once had remains collapsed. She is addicted to seeking people who will do things for her, who will in some small way replace the lost family members who gave her some sense of being cared for. She unconsciously fears that if she becomes more self-sufficient, people will no longer feel any need to take care of her. She is ashamed of this pervasive dependency, and this, too, no doubt, has childhood roots, since an unavailable and incompetent mother might give a child the sense that her needs are repulsive. She is ashamed of her psychiatric condition, of not working, of lacking friends and a husband, all of which suggest that she is a defective person. But the shame she experiences about all these things, which would certainly be shameful for almost anyone in our culture, seem to be fueled and intensified by the core feeling of worthlessness.

Margaret's shame vulnerability reveals itself in treatment in a number of ways. Typical is a mistrustful concern that I am trying to make her look bad in some way, like catching her using the wrong word. If she uses the wrong word, she feels as if her whole facade of being an intelligent, capable person crumbles, revealing the worthless, unrespectable person within. Thus revealed, her grandiosity collapses and she fears that she will no longer be treated as the special person she also in some way believes she is. She believes her specialness accounts for the extra concern helping professionals often show her.

I've diagnosed Margaret as suffering from a borderline personality organization, and it is helpful and important to understand her in those terms. She has many symptoms common to that disorder in terms of the way she thinks and the way she relates to others; in her fear of going crazy; in her grandiosity, which is a typical concomitant of profound shame wounds; in her desperate wish for someone to contain her, and in her rage. Rage is seen by some shame theorists (see Chapter 4) as a reaction to shame. But shame can be a reaction to rage as well. Margaret's rage at her mother for not being what she needed--a rage that she sometimes transfers to others who have a caretaking relationship to her--had to remain bottled up, constipated, as it were, because she felt she could not risk alienating the mother she so desired. Ugly, forbidden--it's doubtful that her mother tolerated any negative emotions from this child--the presence of rageful feelings made Margaret feel tainted and defective, especially at times when they seeped out and she became aware of something not right about herself. As we have come close to terminating, she has had a new flair-up of excrement anxiety on a level that she had not experienced in a year and a half. This can be understood as a reaction to losing me and a fear that no one will be able to contain her symptoms. It can also be understood as the sense of shameful contamination with rage at me for leaving. All told, Narcissistic Shame is an important component of her condition, and it seems to weave its way throughout her life, both as a cause and effect of much else that goes on in her psychology.

Margaret's case illustrates some of the variability in how Narcissistic Shame attaches itself to beliefs about the self. These beliefs vary considerably in the intensity with which they can evoke the shame affect or shame anxiety; some have a more direct link to the central bad-self feeling, or core shame, than others. For Margaret welfare is an immensely powerful link to core shame; the false belief that she is not intelligent or doesn't use language well is another potent link, albeit less overwhelming; the fact that she is a psychiatric patient is a still less powerful link; and being overweight is, compared to the others, a weak link. But they are all Narcissistic Shame issues. The unconscious belief that she is a piece of dirt or excrement is so overwhelming in its potency that she must dissociate from it entirely and turn the anxiety into an obsessive preoccupation. Here she is not dealing only with shame and abandonment but with total annihilation as well.

Certain people, like Margaret, are more shame prone than others. Thus, she readily turns any difference from what she perceives as the norm into a shame issue. This makes her extremely cautious and anxious about conforming. She also is quick to feel that she is being shamed, perhaps especially in close relationships, because she associates close relationships with being humiliated. This feeds (or perhaps causes) whatever paranoid trends exist in her personality.

However, not everyone who is severely damaged by shame is necessarily shame-prone. Some people develop such strong defenses and habits of being that shame does not become a pervasive issue in daily life. These habits of being are sometimes addictions or sometimes informally referred to as addictions, as in workoholism.

Further Implications

1. Genetic issues. Nathanson (personal communication, April 8, 1990), believes that most people who suffer from shame-related disturbances have a genetic or biological condition. He argues that the popularity of Prozac--"the best drug we've ever had for handling the shame related illnesses"--is evidence that numerous people have a biologic predisposition to experience shame, and that the shame they feel often has little to do with life experience. Other shame theorists dispute this. Tomkins (personal communication, April 22, 1990) believes that the capacity to experience shame does vary from individual to individual, but that the variation is distributed according to the standard bell-shaped curve and that only a tiny minority are so biologically extreme as to require pharmacological treatment.

To the extent that biology does play a part in the variability of the shame experience from one person to the next, it may be that several different vulnerabilities are involved. A list of possibilities might include: genetic vulnerability to depression; a strong attachment drive (or need for affiliation), if Bowlby (1982) is correct that such an instinctual apparatus exists; a greater tendency toward embarrassment and blushing over such things as exposure or performance, which M. Lewis believes is unrelated to the negative valuations typical of shame (personal communication, December 17, 1990); inherited shyness, which Tomkins (1987) suggests is a sensitivity to the strangeness of the other; and a heightened sensitivity to the power of others. Any of these things might make a person more vulnerable genetically to shame. I doubt that there could be an innate tendency to feel inferior or defective.

2. Feelings of inferiority and self-hatred. It is common now to virtually equate shame with these feelings about the self, as I have certainly done in discussing Class Shame and Narcissistic Shame. Although it is not quite accurate to insist on this equivalency, it does makes a certain amount of sense, in that it is those aspects of oneself that one hates or sees as inferior that one most wishes to hide. And yet it should be remembered that it is perhaps only in these two types of shame--Class and Narcissistic--where feelings of self-hatred or inferiority are prominent in the shame experience.

3. Shame-oriented behaviors. The issue of shame goes beyond the issue of affect. Internalized shame reflects on and affects behavior, self-concepts, defenses, habits of relating, and various other components of character structure. People who rarely experience shame can nonetheless be seen as ruled by it.

Each type of shame has a latent and active aspect. In the latent aspect (what is also called "having shame"), the shame affect is not experienced, but evidence in the person's beliefs, emotional life, and behavior suggest that shame is at work in the personality. The latent aspect is different for each type of shame.

In Situational Shame the sense of defect lasts only as long as the affect itself. More important are the beliefs about correct behavior and the habits of being that follow from them. If one lives by the rules of one's society in order to avoid shameful experiences, one can feel good and virtuous. This does not mean that Situational Shame is necessarily conflict-free. Much depends on how comfortably social values have been internalized--how much they are based on fear of punishment and how much on loving identifications. In Class Shame, the behaviors that one engages in to avoid shameful experiences may or may be not felt to be virtuous, depending on how positively one identifies with the social system itself (which, again, reflects at least to some degree early parental identifications). Sometimes the required behaviors, such as compliance and humility, are experienced as a loathsome burden that cause one to be angry or ashamed of oneself for engaging in them.

The latent aspect of Narcissistic Shame includes the negative views one tends to have of oneself, the beliefs, often unconscious about what one must be, and the behaviors that stem from those beliefs. These behaviors often have a more compulsive quality than those emanating from internalized Situational Shame, for they are usually more disavowed, and they represent a desperate effort to keep others from knowing the truth about oneself. How much anxiety is associated with "having shame" in the Narcissistic sense will also vary considerably, some people finding it easier, for a variety of reasons, to live in the restricted way that shame requires, others, perhaps more self-aware, finding themselves in greater conflict. Throughout this thesis I will implicitly refer to this dichotomy between latent Narcissistic Shame and the Narcissistic Shame affect when I refer to someone's shame becoming "activated" or "inflamed."

4. The ego ideal. We tend to think of the ego ideal as something that has formed in large part through loving identification with parents. Having shame, in the Situational, Class, and Narcissistic sense, can originate in this positive experience. In Narcissistic and Class Shame, however, a kind a negative ego ideal, an adoption of the parents' bad feelings about themselves, can also develop. As we've seen in Margaret's case, the ego ideal can also see the parental model as something to be avoided. Although much of the ego ideal will still inevitably incorporate parental values, certain aspects of the parents become anti-role models, such that Margaret, for instance, immediately feels ashamed if it occurs to her that she is like her mother in some way.

5. Exposure and protected relationships. To be suddenly seen in ways that one shouldn't be seen or would not want to be seen is fundamental to the shame affect. The issue of exposure has several different elements to it. A person may be ashamed when he burps in public. He feels like a defective for allowing his animal nature to emerge inappropriately. His defect is not that he burps, everyone does that, but that he is coarse, doing the wrong thing at the wrong time or in the wrong place. But, depending on his age and upbringing, with certain intimates he may burp and not think much of it.

Other aspects about himself may feel all too tender and personal to share except with one or two people who know him deeply. If those things should be exposed to others, he may feel ashamed even though there is nothing "wrong" with those things and they do not imply anything bad about him. But because they are in some sense undeveloped, because they are at the unfinished, creative, edge of his personality, he cannot be secure about their meaning. Perhaps they are a cause for shame. He does not know. And he feels shame if others stir around in that area.

Still other aspects of the self may be kept from exposure not because society requires it, but because the individual himself hates them and would not want anyone to see them. He may choose to expose what he considers shameful to a trusted companion, as part of a search for relief. I will talk about this issue of protected relationships in the final chapter. In general the more deeply lodged "the shame" (by which I mean the shameful fact about the self which must not be revealed), the more problematic it is for the individual. If there is no context in which it can be revealed, he is painfully cut off from others and from some aspect of himself.

6. Consciousness. One can be conscious or unconscious of the things one hates in oneself, of society's rules and the reasons for them, and of the things we do in order to avoid shame. This, too, plays a big part in how shame is experienced. For many people their Narcissistic Shame is so damaging, that even when in the midst of the affect, they remain unconscious of its ideational component. H. Lewis (1971) refers to this affective condition as unidentified shame.

7. Cultural context. All of these issues will naturally vary from one culture to the next. The particular changes that have taken place in Western societies in recent centuries reveal how profoundly a whole people's superego can change, and the way they experience shame along with it.

Chapter 2.

Modesty and Propriety:

Situational Shame and the Rise of Civility

Western society for the millennia after the fall of Rome had a rude, frontier quality, with few of the niceties we associate with either modern or ancient social life (Randall, 1926). People lived under the constant threat of warfare, bands of brigands plundered the countryside, and physical existence was insecure (Huizinga, 1924). This increased the need people felt for an highly ordered, hierarchical social system.

In the medieval years, people came to be ruled strictly from above. Although manners certainly existed, they had not developed beyond what we would consider a few simple injunctions (Elias, 1939). With fewer inner controls, emotional life appears to have been extraordinarily spontaneous and unrestrained. According to the picture we get from Huizinga (1924) and Elias, the average European town dweller was wildly erratic and inconsistent, murderously violent when enraged, easily plunged into guilt, tears, and pleas for forgiveness, and bursting with physical and psychological eccentricities. He ate with his hands out of a common bowl, blew his nose on his sleeve, defecated openly by the side of the road, ate, made love, and mourned with great passion, and was relatively unconcerned about such notions as maladjustment or what others might think. Elias has demonstrated that in the post-medieval centuries what I've called Situational Shame spread rapidly, taming and civilizing the medieval passions, as a freer, more mobile society demanded that people be able to demonstrate to the world of strangers that they knew how to mix properly, that they would show deference to others, especially those of higher status, and that they had their sexual and aggressive impulses on a leash.

The rapid change in Western morés since the Middle Ages offers a rare opportunity to observe the gradual development of shame-related injunctions. By studying the guidebooks on personal manners that flourished in the three centuries following the medieval period, Elias (1939) was able to demonstrate the role that shame played in the development of modern sensibilities, and, the process by which what I've called Situational Shame became a part of people's psychology. This chapter relies almost entirely on Elias's research.

To translate superego issues of the day into the terms of this thesis, we might note that 500 years ago Situational Shame was certainly present in the average person's life but represented a minor component of the self-governing function. Universal Shame (we are all sinners) made a modest contribution to the superego in the form of restraining grandiosity. Narcissistic Shame surely existed, but mainly, I suspect, in people who were plainly different or incapacitated. Less focus on the individual, less concern with what he ought to be, less competition and concern for achievement, and the relatively simple demands of life, probably made Narcissistic Shame a relatively minor issue for most people. All told, the mix of inner controls that thrived in the Middle Ages seems to have consisted primarily of fear of authority; a Christian version of guilt, which was itself very close to fear; and Class Shame, which helped bolster the hierarchy and subdue the lower classes. It was important that people know their place, but otherwise there was little concern for niceties, distance, and bodily propriety, except in the courts of the aristocracy. Civility, or courtesy, was developing in the medieval courts, but in the everyday life of most people, impulses of all sorts were given free reign (Elias, 1939; Huizinga, 1924).

The portraits we have of emotional life at the time describe people for whom inhibition and self-censorship--two of the primary manifestations of shame--are virtually nonexistent. Each emotion is given full play, emerging directly into speech or action the moment it is felt. One moment the average man of the 1400s is gay and innocent; the next spilling over with hurt and self-pity; and the moment after that hungry for vengeance and attacking like a savage. When the tide of feeling turns again, the snarling savage gives way to a frightened and cowering pup. Now he remembers sin and the fact that all the forces of heaven and earth align themselves against the sinner. His heart pounds with fear. He deeply regrets everything he's just done. He becomes penitent, falling to his knees with terrible guilt and begging the Lord for forgiveness. Then he is gay and innocent again.

At horrible public executions, which are swollen with pomp and grandeur, people of the age lose themselves in joy, vindictiveness, awe, and pity, and they weep en masse if moved by the condemned's final words. They derive a childlike amusement from spectacles like the periodic cat burnings in Paris; are moved to spiritual excesses by wandering preachers of great eloquence; exhibit insane passions in their loyalty to party or lord. Dwarfs, cripples, lepers, and paupers are at one moment the object of overflowing tenderness and charitable devotion, and the next openly taunted and mocked with profligate cruelty.

Medieval towns were the scene of widespread and interminable vendettas, and the rancor and violence that characterized them might make some American slums seem to slumber by comparison. The inhabitants were unconcerned about bodily odor, they appeared naked before one another with comparatively little concern, and they mingled with a lack of self-consciousness. The tiny signs, sensibilities, and ceremonies that create an emotional barrier between us today and constitute our sense of separateness, privacy, and isolation were largely unknown to them.

In the last years of the the Middle Ages, when the structure of society was changing, many people were becoming mobile and no longer so rigidly connected to place or class. As the medieval system broke down, and the middle classes slowly rose in prominence, some of the power that had been vested in formal positions was dispersed. Money was a growing instrument of power; and interpersonal issues also rose in importance. As feudalism gave way to towns, commerce, and a centralized national authority, people came to deal with one another more as individuals and less as representatives of carefully governed castes. As they engaged in the negotiations and transactions that lacked the predictability of feudal relationships, manners offered them a means of social regulation through increased self-discipline. It was during this period that the bourgeois townspeople began adopting the etiquette that had developed in the medieval courts. Elias (1939) argues that the new etiquette was essential to a more fluid society, so that people, no longer held in check by the rigidities of the feudal system, could have a means of signaling one another that they had their aggressive and sexual impulses in check. Good manners helped maintain boundaries, which were critical to people who were strangers or did not know each other well. Manners and bodily propriety were a form of deference. The control of spitting and nose-blowing were symbolic ways of respecting the space and privacy of others. Civility created social distance.

The new manners implied a cooperative spirit and honorable intentions; they helped extend into the new society the concern for security and morality that had characterized the old; and within the limits they established on personal behavior, one could enjoy the new social freedoms that the waning of feudalism provided.

Respecting the private space of others is not just a question of trust and familiarity with such intimate things as smells, bodily functions, and personal cares. It is also a question of shame. Whatever is unknown about a person is potentially shameful. It can be misused by people who care nothing for him. Outside certain trusted spheres where one lives with great familiarity, nothing can be taken for granted and exposure becomes dangerous. Numerous signs of respect are now required to keep boundaries intact and reassure each person that no intrusion will take place.

As new forms of civility spread through society during this post-medieval period it was apparent that refinement was something you learned. If you refrained from blowing your nose into the table cloth as previous generations had done and as many uncultivated people still did, or if you reached daintily into the common bowl for a piece of meat with three fingers rather than grasping it with the whole hand as was just recently the mode, you did these things as a show of respect toward others at the table, especially your betters. Until the end of the last century the "Civilités" continued to advise Europeans on good manners, and these books openly acknowledged what would shortly be forgotten: that certain actions, once commonplace, were no longer allowed. Elias's study (1939) of these codebooks reveals the changes in European aristocratic and middle class morality in the three changes from 1500 to 1800.

Many of the codes of self-control that characterize our culture spread rapidly through society in those centuries. At first it was common to defecate and urinate in public, and nothing was thought of it. Then it became impolite to greet someone who was relieving himself. Gradually it became dishonorable to relieve oneself in the presence of other people at all, or even to allow them to see you buttoning up. Soon toilets were invented, and before long it was verboten to relieve oneself outdoors, even if no one was watching.

Spitting, too, was an unnoticed, everyday habit that people performed at liberty, indoors and out (and which they still perform in many non-Western cultures all over the world). Then rules evolved. One should not spit over the table, onto the furniture, into the basin when washing, or in the direction of someone standing nearby. If you spit on the floor, you must now cover it with your foot. Then a spittoon was required. Finally spitting in the presence of others was abolished altogether, and the urge itself seemed to disappear.

People stopped sharing bowls and goblets. They stopped sleeping naked, several to a bed. All sexual matters were withdrawn from polite conversation.

According to Elias, the standard of good and bad manners underwent very little change during the entire course of the Middle Ages. The subsequent changes required explicit inculcation, not just from parent to child, but from adult to adult. The literature of the day explicitly notes that what was once allowed is now forbidden. Erasmus recommended, "Tell him alone and say it kindly" (cited in Elias, 1939, p. 81), and that is what occurs in the anecdote that begins Giovanni della Cassa's Galateo. It concerns the Bishop of Vernon who receives Duke Richard as a guest. The guest is perceived by all as "gentilissime cavaliere e di bellissime manier."

> The host notes in his guest a single fault. But he says nothing. On the Duke's departure the Bishop sends a man of his court, Galateo, to accompany him. Galateo has particularly good manners, acquired at the courts of the great....
>
> This Galateo therefore accompanies Duke Richard part of the way, and says the following to him before taking his leave: His master, the Bishop, would like to make the Duke a parting gift. The Bishop has never in his life seen a nobleman with better manners than the Duke. He has discovered in him only a single fault--he smacks his lips too loudly while eating, so making a noise that is unpleasant for others to hear. To inform him of this is the Bishop's parting gift, which he begs will not be ill-received." (Elias, 1939, p. 81)

At this level of socialization, where shame is becoming attached to behaviors that were formally of little concern, the issues are all quite explicit and conscious (much like our current concerns about not using language that offends minorities or women). Certain behaviors offend others, or they make one look lowly, or they suggest false airs. Thus della Cassa (1558) warns, "The nobleman ought not to run like a lackey, or walk as slowly as women or brides" (cited in Elias, 1939, p. 76). As time passes, however, and the do's and don't's are passed on through the socialization of the child, the reasons are lost, the need to live according the proper standards become more unconscious, and the offense itself becomes more egregious and shameful. What was once experienced as a lapse in form, gradually becomes infantile or animalistic, and then subhuman.

To understand how these injunctions get planted at a deeper and deeper level of consciousness to the point where it would seem that no other way of living were possible, let's follow Elias's analysis of how attitudes toward nose-blowing changed over the years. In the fifteenth century when handkerchieves were largely unknown and people blew their noses directly into their hands, controls were introduced as an aspect of table manners: "Do not blow your nose with the same hand that you use to hold the meat" (Furnival, 1868, cited in Elias p. 144). In 1530, Erasmus, in one of the first civilités ever written advised young noblemen, "To blow your nose on your hat or clothing is rustic, and to do so with the arm or elbow befits a tradesman; nor is it much more polite to use the hand, if you immediately smear the snot on your garment. It is proper to wipe the nostrils with a handkerchief, and to do this while turning away, if more honorable people are present" (cited in Elias, 1939, p. 144). (According to Elias, Erasmus' book went through more than 130 editions across Europe, in many different languages, with 13 editions as late as the 18th century.)

We can hear at least three elements in Erasmus's voice: a distaste for certain habits, a gentle scolding, and, perhaps most important, neutral, nonjudgmental advice for how to get along in a changing world. In later years, as handkerchieves became a firmer requirement of social life, the distaste of the commentators would turn to disgust and the scolding to denunciation and contempt. It may be fair to say that what might have caused some embarrassment in Erasmus's day would have caused mortification in later years, because the nature of the disapproval, both public, interpersonal, and internalized, had grown more severe.

In the late seventeenth century manners had become very refined among the aristocracy and had spread to a much broader segment of society. The old habits were now considered "filthy," but they were not so distant from human experience that they could not be openly spoken of: "You should avoid yawning, blowing your nose, and spitting. If you are obliged to do so in places that are kept clean, do it in your handkerchief, while turning your face away and shielding yourself with your left hand, and do not look into your handkerchief afterward" (cited in Elias, 1939, p. 146).

According to Elias, by the eighteenth century such matters tended to be spoken of mainly inasmuch as they related to the training of children. It was now assumed that adults had internalized the codes in growing up and needed no further instruction. Also, the injunctions applied to what one did in private as well as in the presence of others; and they took on a more broadly moralistic tone. In other words, the original purpose, simple deference to others, was partly forgotten. Nose etiquette had become a part of the security system of society, and people were threatened by lapses. To violate that system was to risk people's reacting to you with horror, disgust, or loathing.

A 1729 French civilité: "It is very impolite to keep poking your finger into your nostrils, and still more insupportable to put what you have pulled from your nose into your mouth.... There are some who put a finger on one nostril and by blowing through their nose cast onto the ground the filth inside; those who act thus are people who do not know what decency is." The reader is advised to use a handkerchief at all times, to hide the process with his hat, to get it over with quickly, and to avoid making a noise (cited in Elias, 1939, p. 147).

By the time this rule book was reissued 45 years later, just before the French Revolution, such matters of etiquette were apparently so ingrained among potential readers, they could be taken for granted. The chapter on the nose was shortened, and, Elias notes, for the first time the issues of health and hygiene arose: "Every voluntary movement of the nose, whether caused by the hand or otherwise, is impolite and puerile. To put your fingers into your nose is a revolting impropriety, and from touching it too often discomforts may arise which are felt for a long time. Children are sufficiently in the habit of committing this lapse; parents should correct them carefully" (cited in Elias, 1939, p. 147-148). Apparently, the details of nose blowing are by now universally understood and no longer require itemization: "You should observe, in blowing your nose, all the rules of propriety and cleanliness" (cited in Elias, 1939, p. 148). The attitude here is different from Erasmus's gentle and explicit admonitions.

As the niceties became ingrained, people lost an awareness that they were learned behaviors. As each new refinement in manners became so established it no longer merited discussion, and as old behaviors just recently warned against became so completely eradicated it was now indelicate to mention them, people came to see their refinements as innate: They were a natural part of being human. The obsolete behaviors became more shocking and animalistic. They were seen as dirty, immoral, or (eventually) unhygienic. It became inconceivable that human beings could ever have behaved that way. Only a subhuman could pick his nose in public. It's not just that the threshold of shame advanced, to use Elias's phrase; the shame itself had become more potent.

Elias's study ends in the early 1800s. But he makes the sweeping statement, parallel to Freud's regarding the swelling burdens of civilization, that as civilization advances so does the threshold of shame. But despite Elias's belief that the process he documents has continued in the last 200 years, it has become apparent, at least recently, that civility has in fact been declining and the threshold of shame regarding modesty and propriety retreating. People expose their sexuality on TV, howl obscenities at those who once would have been considered their betters, cling to elective office despite the exposure of serious breaches of public trust, and greedily pen books about their misdeeds. Class warfare, individualism, competitive capitalism, egalitarianism, alienation--both from society as a whole and from one's groups--and the decline of religion all seemed to have played a part in the erosion of the codes of courtesy that had been built up since the Renaissance. In the aftermath of each of the major wars of this century--especially World War II and the Vietnam War--the changes have been particularly striking. Today, manners, civility, the little moralities of everyday life, the fear of exposing one's nakedness or animality, clearly count for a good deal less than they did a generation or two ago.

Although many elements of Situational Shame, which is the type of shame Elias exclusively focuses on, seems to be on the wane, shame itself is today being recognized as a prevalent factor in emotional distress. As we shall explore in the next chapter, the inhibitions and disavowal of feeling, which are characteristic of shame, seem to have markedly increased. Its presence as a debilitating symptom seems powerful and undeniable--especially in personality disorders, addictions, and abuse syndromes (Kaufman, 1989). Where has it come from if not the overwhelming pressures of civility?

Chapter 3.

Isolation and Inadequacy:

Narcissistic Shame and the Impact of Modernity

Adler did not use the term shame, but he did focus on "organ inferiority" which he believed led to general feelings of inferiority. He defined certain forms of aggressive masculinity as "masculine protest," that is, an effort to overcome intolerable feelings of inferiority (see Stepansky, 1983). This, in different words, is clearly much the same thing as Narcissistic Shame and the compulsive behavioral adjustments that almost inevitably accompany it. To Adler the problem of inferiority feelings is inherent in the human condition; it is part of being a child, feeling small and incompetent in the presence of adults. It is, therefore, inevitable that people will be driven to overcome this condition, which accounts for strivings toward power.

Adler's theory offers one explanation of why Narcissistic Shame is always with us, as much a constant in human psychology as Situational Shame. Another explanation might be the stupendous power of early attachments and the inevitability of their causing wounds, partly because of how the infant interprets life's disappointments and hurts, partly because parents' and child's needs are sometimes in conflict. It could be argued that, because of the power of these ties, the more autonomy and individuation a culture expects of its members, the more risk there is that Narcissistic Shame will be a factor in their identities. A third, related explanation might be the dependence each person has on others for the maintenance of his sense of who he is; identity is in part consensual and thus always vulnerable to injury. A fourth, each society's favoritism toward certain inherited character traits and physical types. A fifth, the very fact of *self-consciousness.*

Clearly, then, Narcissistic Shame is not a new element in human psychology. It is as eternal as the others. But, as we've seen with Situational Shame, the conditions, social and familial, under which one is raised have a huge impact on the degree to which a particular superego function becomes a factor in the lives of the average person in a given age. In Western society, the decline of the feudal order and the rise of a more mobile, commercial world changed the conditions of life in such a way that Situational Shame grew enormously in importance in individual psychology. This is the implication of Elias's work. I will argue that the industrial revolution and much else that we associate with modernity gave a similar boost to Narcissistic Shame.

Our way of thinking and feeling today is in many respects at an opposite pole from the way people thought and felt during the Middle Ages. Acquiescence to forces greater than man has been supplanted by faith in action. The meek acceptance of social hierarchy, based on birth, race, gender, or economic class, is everywhere renounced in favor of an aggressive pursuit of liberty and equal rights. Worship of tradition has been replaced with a passion for trends. Blind obedience to traditional authorities has given way to a reverence for facts, proofs, and experts. A stable, unquestioned belief system has been succeeded by a babel of theories and voices (which only serves to buffet a widespread skepticism). Viewing the world and oneself through the collective lens of one's family, community, and class has given way to a staunch and competitive individualism. Even such modern preoccupations as efficiency, striving, and progress have lost much of the communal feeling that once went with them. For most people today faith in progress is associated mostly with personal goals.

Such a vast change in social organization is naturally mirrored by a shift in superego organization. The initial phase of this transition was marked, as we've seen, by a movement away from reliance on, submission to, and fear of authority and toward a greater emphasis on the more internalized controls of modesty and propriety, which were enforced by Situational Shame. Guilt, which remained a major force, probably made a similar shift: As people became freer and more independent, guilt no doubt became less childlike, less based on fear of others (fathers, priests, lords, angels) and more internalized, more mature. Since 1800, Western society has gone through even more drastic social changes. We've experienced the industrial revolution and its technological aftermath, the rise of democracy and the idea of equality, the decline in religion, and the near total collapse of the traditional associations by which people grouped themselves and from which they had gained a sense of belonging and identity. These changes, I believe, have contributed to another vast shift in superego functioning, toward a greater reliance on Narcissistic Shame.

Narcissistic Shame has two key attributes that, taken together, distinguish it from the other types of shame: 1) a sense of permanent defficiency in the self and 2) isolation, such that the individual feels the defect is uniquely his. This combination is more reflective of modern social organization than any other superego operation. I believe that gradually, circuitously--as traditional, hierarchical, religious society has given way to the freedoms and insecurities of modernity--guilt, Class Shame, Situational Shame, and the fear of authority have deteriorated in varying degrees. They are no longer the chief forces around which inner controls are organized. Narcissistic shame has taken up the slack. Today people are no longer so haunted by feeling guilty, lowly, or socially inept; they are haunted by feelings of inadequacy.

If we look again at the factors mentioned earlier that might make Narcissistic shame a perennial feature of human psychology--the child's feelings of powerlessness, the wounding potential of early attachments, the consensual nature of identity and its permeability to incursions by others, the fact of self-consciousness, and society's preference for certain traits and disdain of others--it becomes apparent that all of these factors have been intensified in the transition from traditional to modern life.

Several broad areas of change help account for this: 1) alienation from former bonds. 2) The rise of competition as an organizing force in society and the fear of failure that went along with it. 3) The huge increase in emphasis on what people should be as opposed to what they should do in order to be acceptable. 4) The heightened self-consciousness promoted by the social sciences, especially psychology, and the media, especially TV. 5) The rise in self-doubt that has accompanied the decline in ritual, role models, and other guides to living that were readily available in traditional societies. 6) The break-up of extended families and the weakening of the ties of the nuclear family. 7) The development of powerful centralized bureaucracies which have contributed to people's feelings of smallness and inconsequentiality, extending into adulthood the powerless that Adler saw in children.

I don't think at this point any of these observations about modern life are controversial. But they have not generally been associated with shame. Let's examine some of these issues more closely to see how Narcissistic Shame comes into play.

Lost Associations

The average person in feudal times could be relatively at ease with who he was (although he would scarcely have considered the issue in a conscious way). He knew he was incorrigibly sinful and--due to all his sinning--the cause of tears and lamentations throughout the heavens (Huizinga, 1924). But then, except for the occasional saint, so was everyone else, and that took the edge off whatever inclination he might have to experience his failings in the form of Narcissistic Shame. What's more, people of all stations came together regularly to acknowledge their common humanity, to unload their personal failings into the all-encompassing Universal Shame, and ask that their sins be forgiven. Even Class Shame may have been mitigated somewhat by the intimate ways in which people of different classes were bound together and by the Christian idea of equality before the eyes of God. We see evidence of this in the frankness and familiarity with which peasants often addressed their masters (Ellenberger, 1970), by the affection often portrayed between masters and servants (see the novels of Tolstoy or Goncharov's Oblomov, 1859), and the fact that some of the best results with hypnotism in the 19th century were accomplished by aristocratic practitioners treating peasants who worked their lands (Ellenberger, 1970). People were secure in their power and positions, which were almost universally accepted. The spiritual strength displayed by humble folk in 19th century literature (see Chekov's Uncle Vanya, 1954) also suggests that these arrangements were not necessarily as damaging to one's core sense of self as Narcissistic Shame tends to be.

Many commentators (eg., Sennett, 1977) have noted how embedded people of traditional societies were in their groups, and how strongly they identified themselves as members of their groups. The bondedness of medieval groups, aspects of which have lasted into our time in very diluted form, meant not only that people saw many of their positive qualities as emanating from their groups, but their negative ones as well. People on the whole are sinful, peasants are lazy and shrewd, my clan is vengeful. The individual was not so focused on his self, and, as a result, did not tend to differentiate himself or to meditate as much on his personal strengths or weaknesses.

In medieval society and for many centuries afterwards most people were born into a station in life that they expected to keep. They weren't going anywhere, they weren't competing with others. They were less hungry for success or acceptance (the words themselves would have seemed meaningless to most people) and therefore less worried about their individual qualities. Clearly, under such circumstances, there is less opportunity for Narcissistic Shame.

A peasant in traditional society knew he was born into a low estate and that compared to the nobleman riding past in his carriage he was a coarse and unworthy person. But he was surrounded by folk much like himself, who were all of equal station, and in their presence he had nothing to hide or be ashamed of. Modernity gradually undid this cozy world. Class Shame and class solidarity remained potent forces well into this century, but nothing like what they were when all of society was structured along rigid and immutable class lines and united by a belief in a universal Father.

Being less isolated, the self in a more traditional society was not the intense center of scrutiny that it is for many people today. One derived a sense of esteem from one's associations. If people were unhappy, if their marriages were sour, if they developed physical debilities, they could more readily see these misfortunes as arising from outside. And even if they did feel that they were deficient in some way, the climate of belonging was often strong enough to protect them from feeling like outcasts.

In an essay called "The World We Have Lost," Laslett (1962) describes the emotional security of patriarchal society. "In the traditional patriarchal society of Europe..., everyone lived his whole life in a family, often the same family" (p. 88). At the time, family had a much broader meaning than today. For instance, the typical bakery in the year 1619 (when the bakers of London applied for an increase in the price of bread) consisted of thirteen people: "the baker, his wife, four paid employees who were called journeyman, two maid-servants, two apprentices, and the baker's children" (Laslett, p. 87). The entire commercial operation was "carried on in the house of the baker himself, an ordinary house with a few extra sheds" (p. 87). Everyone was obliged to eat together, and, except for the journeymen, sleep under the same roof. They were known as a family, and the baker was known as the head of the family. "The paid servants had their specified and familiar positions in the family, as much a part of it as the children but not quite in the position of children. The apprentices were even more obviously extra sons, clothed and educated as well as fed, obliged to obedience and forbidden to marry, unpaid and absolutely dependent until the age of twenty-one" (p.87).

Laslett (1962) notes that the social organization was oppressive and exploitive, but in significantly different ways from what followed. What's more, "there was no expectation of reform. How could there be when economic relationships were domestic relationships, and domestic relationships were rigidly regulated by the social system, by the content of Christianity itself" (p.88).

In addition to being highly stable, traditional patriarchal society offered everyone a secure place. The roles allotted to each person in the master baker's extended family "are all, emotionally, highly symbolic and highly satisfactory. In a whole society organized like this, everyone belongs, everyone has his circle of affection, every relationship can be seen as a love relationship" (Laslett, 1962, p. 88).

Until the industrial revolution, this is the way virtually everybody lived, city and country: "no group of persons larger than a family, fifteen or twenty at most" (Laslett, 1962, p. 89); "...sexes and ages were mingled together. Children might sometimes go out to school, but few adults went out to work, and there were absolutely nothing to correspond to the hundreds of young men at the assembly line, the hundreds of young women in the offices, the lonely lives of housekeeping wives.... Old people did not live alone or in institutions: they were at home, in the families of their sons and daughters. There were no hotels, no young men or young women living on their own" (Laslett, 1962, p. 90).

On the farm, a similar extended family arrangements existed, even for short-term help. "The day laborer visiting a farm was made a member of the family by breaking bread with the rest of them. It was almost a sacramental matter" (Laslett, 1962, p. 91).

"Time was," Laslett concludes, "and it was all time up to 200 years ago, when the whole of life went forward in the family, in a circle of loved, familiar faces, known and fondled objects, all to human size. That time has gone forever. It makes us very different from our ancestors" (p. 93).

Social observers from Rousseau to Fromm have long noted that one of the fundamental impacts of modernity has been alienation--from nature, from mankind, from one's society, from one's former groups, from other individuals, from one's self. Narcissistic Shame has not been a focus of this literature, but I believe it is implicit in much that has been written about alienation. For as bonds disintegrate and the isolated self becomes more focal, Narcissistic Shame naturally comes to the fore.

Those who write about alienation seem to agree that modernity is responsible for the alienation of human bonds on a level that was unknown in the traditional societies that came before. It seems to be the flip side of almost every advance we associate with modern life: vastly increased amounts of freedom, equality, opportunity, and mobility; labor-saving, life-saving, communication, and transportation technology; tremendous advances in scientific knowledge; material wealth. In one way or another each of these things has loosened the bonds that held people together.

This process has been accelerated by certain technologies that came into being in the modern era. The toilet, running water, central heating, moddern transportation and communications, even such things as deodorant sprays and automated tellers enable an independence and distance from others that was impossible in the past. In The Pursuit of Loneliness, Slater (1970) sees the process as particularly accelerated in recent decades, part of an "attempt to deny the reality of human interdependence. One of the major goals of technology in America," he writes, "is to 'free' us from the necessity of relating to, submitting to, depending upon, or controlling other people" (p. 34).

Fading community feeling became more apparent since Slater's book in certain Social Darvinistic trends: in the unapologetic selfishness of the Reagan-years business climate, and, a decade earlier, in the appearance of quasi-spiritual, quasi-psychotherapeutic movements like est which stressed that people pretty much got what they wanted and one need not be particularly concerned if others are suffering since they are, at bottom, getting what they ask for. Says Marin (1975) of the est phenomenon and others like it:

> It reveals the impulse behind much of what we do these

> days: the desire to defend ourselves against the demands of conscience and the world through an ethic designed to defuse them both.... What disappears in this view of things is the ground of community, the felt sense of collective responsibility for the fate of each separate other.... Our deification of the self becomes equal in effect and human cost to what Nietzsche long ago called the "idolatry of the state." (p. 48)

Family ties have also weakened considerably in recent years. Numerous changes in society--from greater affluence to the rise in personal service industries to the technology that has made prepared foods readily available--have enabled a greater independence. The decline in authority has meant people stop obeying parents at a much younger age, and, on the whole, people seem to feel much less obligation to care for other members of the immediate family than they did even 30 years ago. Home used to be a place where when you went there they had to take you in. That is no longer quite the case, not in terms of the large social ethic.

One cost of such changes--of viewing the self as the central source of identity and of the isolation of the self which has been part of that process--is that people have lost much of the familiarity and intimacy that once characterized protected relationships. By protected relationships, I mean those personal connections where aspects of the self that might be hidden from the rest of the world are freely shared--or which cannot be hidden and are thus inevitably shared. Such relationships, no matter how infuriating, tend to be bulwarks of unshakable belongingness, and thus the strongest antidotes against and mitigators of Narcissistic Shame.

As the power of close family and communal associations has been drained, the power of central governments and bureaucracy has increased. Tax authorities, motor vehicle bureaus, the criminal justice system, insurance companies, utilities have a huge impact on the average person. These large entities can by their nature only know people through symbolic facts--like whether they are married or have a good credit rating. The bureaucratic nightmare presented by Kafka in _The Trial_ (1925) suggests the anxiety this partial sort of knowledge causes the average person. One is made to feel like an object, or a powerless child. One is subject to arbitrary intrusions and controls all one's life. And any fact about oneself that runs against what is determined by an unknown bureaucrat or by statistics to be acceptable is a potential cause for shame.

Despite the social upheavals of pre-1914 Europe, Western society in the first decades of our century was still stable enough, families, churches, and communities still strong enough, and values and standards still commanding enough to give people a more solid sense of who they were and what was expected of them than is now common. In such an environment, you worried more about your duties and obligations to others than whether you were lovable or had a right to exist. These guilt-oriented concerns were reflected, I think, in the sorts of troubles that brought many early analysands in for treatment.

After the Second World War analysts were seeing more and more of a new kind of patient. Rather than complaining of specific symptoms, they voiced vague complaints about themselves and their lives, about feelings of emptiness, lack of motivation, alienation, and meaninglessness. Rather than feeling neurotically guilty or excessively responsible for others, they often felt poorly connected to others. They were diagnosed as having personality (or character) disorders--schizoid, narcissistic, borderline--and they make up a great proportion of the current therapy population. In 1950 Erikson wrote:

> The patient 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. (p. 279)

Wheelis (1958), describes the change another way: emphasizing the impact of a lost world view:

> During the past fifty years there has been a change in the experienced quality of life, with the result that identity is now harder to achieve and harder to maintain. The formerly dedicated Marxist who is now unsure of everything; the Christian who loses his faith; the workman who comes to feel that his work is piecemeal and meaningless; the scientist who decides that science is futile, that the fate of the world will be determined by power politics--such persons are of our time, and they suffer the loss or impairment of identity. (p. 19)

In all of this, one thing remains constant: The individual today is more on his own, with neither a community nor a belief system to support him, at least not of the enveloping sort that existed before. Feelings of doubt or deficiency cannot so easily be absorbed by Class or Universal Shame. They are more readily applied to the self in the form of Narcissistic Shame.

In noting that the alienated person seeks security through conformity, Fromm speaks directly to the rise of Narcissistic Shame. "The sense of guilt, which some generations ago pervaded the life of man with reference to sin, has been replaced by a sense of uneasiness and inadequacy with regard to being different" (Fromm, 1955, p. 174).

The anxiety about being different--and the nature of the expected conformity--was given particular shape by demands of a new era in social organization.

Competition and the Fear of Failure

The eighteenth century ushered in changes in social life that were as profound as the collapse of the feudal system. The conditions of life were changing, requiring people to be things and achieve things that hadn't been required of them before. From the beginning of the industrial revolution until the present time, there have been opportunities to fail that were much more egregious to one's sense of identity and much more difficult to avoid than have perhaps ever existed before.

The most obvious new threat to identity was the pressure to succeed. The world was changing from one in which people were born into their God-given place to one in which they had to strive to make their place. Society adjusted its values accordingly. Parents began to train their sons to value work and seek success and soon became anxious about laziness, dullness, and other attributes that might have been taken more in stride before. The acquisition of wealth became, especially for the Protestant middle class, equated with salvation (Tawney, 1926). Those who failed in this quest or lacked the qualities needed for it can only have felt defective in their being. The stigma of lowness and ill-breeding that once attached itself to peasants, servants, and poor tradesmen began to give way to a new stigma, failure, which could attach to anyone.

In 19th century America work, productivity, and business were the main virtues and they were furiously promoted. Middle class reformers, offended by frivolity and excess, attacked working class pastimes--like cock-fighting, boxing, and drinking--for being cruel, idle, nonsensical, or debauched (Lasch, 1979). Morality no longer meant simply following the Ten Commandments or adhering to proper etiquette. It had become a question of achievement, self-betterment, and sobriety, as well.

Competition, now a driving force in society, placed further pressures on individual identity. "Man was driven by the desire to surpass his competitor," Fromm (1955, p. 84) writes of the onset of the industrial age, "thus reversing completely the attitude characteristic of the feudal age--that each one had in the social order his traditional place with which he should be satisfied.... In this scramble for success, the social and moral rules of human solidarity broke down; the importance of life was being first in a competitive race." Although Fromm's focus here is on lost solidarity and lost security, one might easily infer another implication. Failure in the competition Fromm describes would have injurious consequences for one's sense of self. Failure is not like making a faux pas. It is more like a stigma that blackens one's being. The fear was not necessarily that others saw and turned away in disgust (the anxiety associated with Situational Shame). Failure meant that one was not smiled upon by destiny; it was a very direct confirmation of one's not being good enough. It cut one off from others by establishing that one did not belong. Parents might scold, bosses might rage, others might dismiss or look on with pity. But, most important, failure represented the threat of a terrible deflation of belonging, of the good feeling, initially felt in the home, when the child feels he is a part of wondrous thing that is his parents. This is a fundamental aspect of Narcissistic Shame.

The change was gradual, and crept into the emotional experience of different groups of people at different times. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, a man with a menial job might be threatened by Narcissistic Shame because he had, at least theoretically opportunities to move up, and he may have even known one or two men, once his equals, who had bettered themselves and surpassed him. But he might still feel part of his class, that his lot was shared by others with whom he identified, and that his status did not represent a failing in himself but was something God willed or was the result of upper class exploitation and oppression. A man who operates an elevator or runs errands today has to work much harder to protect his identity from haunting questions about how good he is. He is thus more susceptible to Narcissistic Shame. Gradually over the course of generations, class and social status ceased to be the cards one was dealt at birth or the workings of an powerful foe; it was seen more and more as one's own doing, much as character is destiny.

This indeed was the message of Social Darwinism (Ellenberger, 1970) which, in stating that only the fittest were meant to survive, went straight to the very core of shame concerns: I am not fit to live among other human beings. Today it is no longer considered proper to adhere to this view. Political equality is a firmly rooted principle and any individual or group that feels he or it is not being treated fairly organizes, sues, shakes a fist. But such expressions of power often mask underlying feelings of shame. In many ways, Social Darwinism remains our prevailing doctrine, especially on the emotional plane. For how else can one explain one's disappointing position in the world except by one's personal deficiencies?

The New Emphasis on What We Must Be

Fromm (1955) argues that in capitalistic industrial society men had to become more and more like machines in order to succeed. Feelings of passivity and dependence, and tendencies to daydream had to be stamped out in order for men to be successful in the industrial world. And in this case, we really do mean "men," for women were allowed to retain many of the passive, dependent, dreamy, and emotional qualities of pre-industrial people. If civility tended to alienate men from their animal nature, the industrial revolution alienated them from a broad array of other feelings formerly accepted as part of the human mix.

Aggression, sexuality, and bodily functions were hemmed in by civility, but they still had their accepted channels, and the rules regarding behavior affected almost everyone equally. The new circumstances demanded that one be fast, aggressive, resourceful, efficient, clever, ambitions, determined, and so forth, depending on one's status and type of work. The focus, of course, was much more on qualities of being than had been the case before. This not only meant alienation from various aspects of human nature, as Fromm and others have repeatedly pointed out. It also meant that Narcissistic Shame became associated with the unwanted qualities, especially once those qualities become an established taboo offensive to parents. One can learn to blow one's nose into a handkerchief instead of one's sleeve, and in the process develop a sense of disgust toward the products of one's nose which one's forebears lacked. But when one has to _feel_ or _be_ certain things that one doesn't feel or is not, one's sense of disgust will be directed at one's self.

The swing toward Narcissistic Shame may not have been immediate. When efficiency was just a matter of striving on the assembly line in order to get a higher salary, to become foreman, or just to keep the job; or striving in commerce in order to out-do the competition; or striving in the corporation in order to climb the ladder, it meant turning oneself into a machine, staying alert when one was tired, pushing when one was in pain, acting aggressive when one felt timid, suppressing differences, smoothing out rough edges, donning an agreeable personality, displaying whatever qualities were deemed necessary to success. Then, presumably, one could go home and be oneself. But as the standards become more firmly established and implanted in childhood, this distinction becomes harder to make. One no longer feels one has a choice nor even allows oneself to be aware of the forbidden feelings, impulses, or states of being. The taboo becomes blanket, the shame more unconscious, the false self more pervasive, the behavioral prescriptions more unrelenting.

To establish the truth of this proposition, let's glance back for a moment at the history of Situational Shame. It is apparent from Elias's study (1939) that Situational Shame is directed at behavior.

This is clear from Erasmus's injunctions and from the story of Galateo. One behaves in a certain way so that others will not be offended and because this is the way a proper person (of one's status) does things. To do otherwise is to risk offense and to appear ill-bred. At a time when the threshold of Situational Shame is advancing, people recognize that behaviors that were recently allowed are no longer considered acceptable. But, as Elias notes, as the injunctions get planted at a deeper level, this changes somewhat. It is forgotten that people ever behaved in the forbidden ways, and to do so is no longer frowned upon as rustic or poor form but loathed as unspeakable and subhuman. The result is still not Narcissistic Shame but certainly a more terrible sense of offense and a more terrible shrinking of the self when the affect strikes.

The new injunctions that came in with the age of commerce and then the industrial revolution started in a similar way. If one was going to get ahead, one had to behave in certain ways; and new Erasmuses, like Benjamin Franklin, ushered in the age with advice about what this behavior should be and what qualities of character should be cultivated. But unlike the behaviors that civility required, the new imperatives were more and more matters of being, of temperament, of character. Some people were more aggressive, more efficient, more capable, more compulsive, etc. So clearly, we're getting away from behavior, away from the situational, away from what's easily experienced as "out there," and closer to one's sense of self. Initially there was still a situational quality to these injunctions because at least in some cases one was not always required to live this way. The new imperatives were especially applicable to business and one could turn them off at other times. Also, the easy-going, lazy, and dissolute behavior of much of humanity attested to the fact that to act otherwise was not exactly freakish or subhuman.

But then, it is logical to assume that things changed, much as they did with Situational Shame. The injunctions were planted earlier and deeper, it was assumed that a normal person would have the preferred qualities, and the absence of them became a cause for anxiety or disgust. Questions of choice, effort, and learning became more and more supplanted by a focus on the permanent quality of the self. One grew up with a sense of having it or not having it, and one became more sensitive to questions of deficiency. Indeed, as the threshold of Narcissistic Shame advances, the whole question of deficiency becomes a pervasive fear in society, and people are generally more anxious about being found inadequate along one axis or another. Inevitably, emotional disorders become more organized around this issue, and all shame anxiety, no matter what its source, carries the unconscious threat of Narcissistic Shame.

To illustrate this process, let's consider the popular 19th century belief in industriousness, an anxious imperative that elicited this protest from Thoreau (1854):

> The world is a place of business. What an infinite bustle! ... There is no sabbath. It would be glorious to see mankind at leisure for once. It is nothing but work, work, work.... If a man was tossed out of a window when an infant, and so made a cripple for life, or scared out of his wits by the Indians, it is regretted chiefly because he was thus incapacitated for--business! I think there is nothing, not even crime, more opposed to poetry, to philosophy, ay, to life itself, than this incessant business...." (cited in Fromm, 1955, p. 189)

Thoreau saw in the work ethic of his day the tendency of all social regulations to become a comfortable yoke, enabling people to forget deeper aspects of themselves. Thoreau asserted that he did not need "the police of meaningless labor" to regulate him, and he attacked the blind devotion to work that was robbing men of their freedom to be and their ability to contemplate anything beyond the immediate. What, however, were the inner police Thoreau described protecting his countrymen from? It seems evident that it would be from an anxiety that they were not being what they were supposed to be, and hence a sense of Narcissistic Shame. That implication is clear as Thoreau continues: "If a man walk in the woods for love of them half of each day, he is in danger of being regarded as a loafer." He adds, "But if he spends his whole day as a speculator, shearing off those woods and making earth bald before her time, he is esteemed an industrious citizen. As if a town had no interest in its forests but to cut them down!" (cited in Fromm, p. 189).

But the process does not end there. As the prohibitions and expectations regarding what a proper person should be became more and more internalized, the reasons why they came into existence were largely forgotten. The shame, of being a loafer, for example, became unconscious and therefore more powerful. Industrious is what a human being is; anything else is infantile, animalistic, or unspeakable. And it is therefore much more likely that it will arouse parental anxiety. Today Thoreau's protest sounds old-fashioned in that, with the exception of what is now called the under class, people are rarely chided any more for not being industrious. For the average person raised in a functioning home, such admonitions are as obsolete as

Erasmus's injunction against spitting across the dinner table. Children are no longer raised on Horatio Alger stories because they get their lessons in achievement, productiveness, and goal-orientation between the lines of everything their parents do. The need to be doing and achieving is experienced by many as something of an innate drive. Passivity and dependency are not discussed much, except as symptoms of psychological disturbance, but people commonly dread seeing manifestations of either in themselves. (It might be noted, on this score, that despite--or, unfortunately, because of--the successes of feminism, housekeeping wives still feel inferior to their working counterparts, and the desperate need for success drives people of both sexes to prodigious amounts of work, often in fields they don't like.)

Various elements of modern life have naturally adapted to these facts. If Narcissistic Shame is something people prefer to keep repressed, modern life gives them an array of opportunities for evasion, yielding a running sort of life, composed of entertainments, diversions, ambitious striving, and self-improvement routines unheard of in the past. There is always something to do, always a goal. Even sociability must serve a purpose for those who are strongly infected with this ethic. An anxiously striving urban professional today might feel compelled to justify the time spent with others by the potential for romantic involvement or business advancement or an opportunity to talk about his problems. The running life helps people avoid the depression that often accompanies the Narcissistic Shame affect; but it reinforces the pressure of shame anxiety. It is the very antithesis of self-acceptance.

Ellenberger (1970) notes the 19th century academic system bred "much envy, jealousy, and hatred between rivals. But these feelings had to be repressed in order to conform to the official standards of behavior" (p. 266). More and more the organization of society was requiring such adjustments. And what was warned against and suppressed in the 19th century became fully internalized and unconscious in the 20th. In the 1880s a professor may have felt ashamed if he revealed his jealousy of a hated rival. His display made him look bad, suggested he wasn't the sort of person a professor should be, and would provide ammunition for his enemies. But, although disappointed in himself for displaying his jealousy, there was probably more room for him to feel that jealousy was an acceptable human emotion that simply does not work here. But as the prohibition becomes more internalized, detecting jealousy of a rival within oneself is more automatically a cause for alarm. This is not the way a mature, self-respecting person should feel. This is the sign of a malcontent, a troublemaker, a loser. One feels defective for having the feeling. This is of course not true for everyone but reflective of a trend. As time passed, therefore, the shame associated with proscribed feelings has tended to move from the border between Situational and Narcissistic Shame more fully into the Narcissistic realm.

Much of this pressure regarding what one must be represents a social straightjacket, as described in Narcissistic Shame, Type 3. There is anxiety about many impulses and feelings that were once an accepted part of one's humanity but are now taboo. This is not quite the same as Type 4 (the shame wound), where one feels personally tainted with an unwanted quality. But wherever Type 3 exists, Type 4 and the anxiety about Type 4 cannot be far behind.

A key question regarding the introduction of achievement, goals, efficiency, and the concern over what one must be is how early do these elements get introduced into one's life? Clearly, the earlier they are introduced, the more they disrupt the passive pleasures of early childhood and arouse disturbing anxieties at a more vulnerable time. Anecdotal evidence is abundant that such concerns are being introduced earlier and earlier. In New York, it is now common for children of affluent parents to compete to get into the best private kindergartens. Very young children must take tests and are examined for desirable intellectual and personality traits. Parents of all socio-economic strata attempt to train their children from toddlerhood on to be good athletes, in the hope that they might one day reach the Olympics; and frequently the parents exhaust themselves to provide the young athletes with equipment, coaching, and transportation. The pressures and tensions on the children is described by Greenspan (1983). Today there is a company in Philadelphia called the Better Baby Institute (Traub, 1986) that instructs parents on how to train infants and toddlers to make them faster and better learners. A friend, who is a parent, recently said to me, "No one says any more, 'My kid is happy.' It's always what he can do, what he's achieved." One can only imagine the sorts of anxieties about the self that reach children in an environment where achievement has become an issue at such an early age.

According to Fromm (1955), in the 20th century, the needs of corporate life made aggressive striving less critical; getting along became the thing for much of the work force. Smoothed out personalities and a new kind of success, popularity, was now required. "Human qualities like friendliness, courtesy, kindness, are transformed into commodities, into assets of the 'personality package,' conducive to a higher price on the personality market" (Fromm, 1955, p. 129). The growing list of things one must be and must not be further narrowed the acceptable range of individual differences and widened the opportunities for Narcissistic Shame. The world popularlity is less used today, perhaps because, like industriousness, it has been implanted so deeply in our expectations of what a proper person should be that it is no longer necessary to speak of. Meanwhile, the social climate of the last three decades has added new imperatives for certain social groups: one must be physically fit, attractive, untroubled, free of slavishness to social expectation, self-loving, etc., making the demands of conformity virtually impossible to achieve.

Of course, these early achievement anxieties are combined with the loss of the traditional, protective, childhood environment once provided by a more stable society in which parents stayed together, a mother was usually in the home, extended family members were nearby to help and to offer a wider circle of affection, and children were not exposed to the pressures and difficulties of life (see, for example, Bowlby, A Secure Base, 1988; Winn, Children Without Childhood, 1983). Not all children are equally affected by these trends, but they create a climate where Narcissistic Shame becomes a more pressing issue.

The revolution in psychological knowledge in the last hundred years has contributed to this trend. We now have models of what a healthy parent should be, what a healthy wife should be, what a healthy sex partner should be, what a healthy teacher should be, what a strong or sensitive man should be, what a feminine or liberated women should be. "Normality," writes Wheelis (1958, p.41), "has largely replaced morality as a standard of operational adequacy. The significance of inner conflict to all manner of difficulties in living has been so incontrovertibly established that, for many people, any condition of unhappiness is prima facie evidence of neurosis and hence reason enough to consult a psychoanalyst." Today it is no longer adequate--or in many cases required--to be polite, to dress in certain ways, or to be mindful of social rank in order to be accepted as a proper human being. More important now, one's insides must conform. At every turn feelings must be managed, justified, vented, cultivated, or overcome if one is not to fit into one of the threatening new categories of mental unhealth. When a man wants to impress a woman today, the list of inner and outer qualities he may feel compelled to display are truly formidable. Depending on his upbringing and milieu, he may feel that he must be confident, articulate, sensitive, open, able to take criticism, able to take charge, vulnerable, invulnerable, and, not to be forgotten, original, spontaneous, sincere, and self-accepting, as well. Given our anxiety about flaws, our uncertainty of the legitimacy of our feelings, and our lack of mutual trust, our modern psyches are especially fertile ground for Narcissistic Shame.

Television has also been a force for an anxious self-awareness. It has allowed people to scrutinize others in a way that has never before been possible, safely watching as a political candidate sweats or looks nervous in extraordinary close-up. This is a very particular education. For in any situation where we worry about another's judgment, _we_ are the candidate. I think it could be argued that anything that enhances self-consciousness risks contributing to the narcissistic process, especially if the new awareness disrupts a stable mental organization without building adequately towards a new and satisfying synthesis.

Anthropologists (e.g., Benedict, 1946) used to divide cultures in shame cultures and guilt cultures. In a society like Japan, what would seem to us as minor lapses in propriety can be felt as a cause for a terrible descent into shame and fear that one has disgraced the whole family. One is very sensitive about the eyes of others. A guilt culture, like that which was presumed to exist in the West, was believed to be superior because the individual had more fully internalized society's strictures and policed himself without the need of watchful eyes: "True shame cultures rely on external sanctions for good behavior, not, as true guilt cultures do, on an internalized conviction of sin" (Benedict, 1946, p. 223).

I would argue that our society is now more a shame culture than a guilt culture, but a very different sort of shame culture than what was once meant by the term. In the traditional shame culture, Situational Shame hugely dominates, engulfing areas that we would normally associate with guilt; and one does not worry about anything as long as it is not seen by others (Benedict, 1946). In a society like ours, where Narcissistic Shame is dominant, the eyes of others are not a major concern. What one _is_ is the concern, and others must never see it. The sense of rejection is fully internalized and does not require external confirmation. One lives a life of defense against the feeling of deficiency and fears its being exposed because that will allow the shame affect to emerge.

The Lost Way

I've suggested that Situational Shame, despite its continued strength in our lives, has seen something of a decline in recent years, and I've offered as anecdotal evidence the rise in a certain kind of shamelessness, the decline in respect for figures of authority, and the reduced concern for the niceties of social interaction. The obverse side of this trend has been not only a greater freedom but a loss of security, a security that came with a belief in one's role models, a confidence in what was right, and the ability to use long-standing rituals, passed on from mother to daughter and father to son, as a means of navigating interpersonal and social complexities. In the modern world, things change quickly and people feel unclear about how they should behave. Even raising a child, which was full of certainties in the past, is now the domain of experts. There are books now on how to do it--and the books often disagree. Like the loss of a courtship ritual or standard ways of speaking to elders or superiors, it is an example of how modern society offers less security to the individual. One is always at risk of doing things wrong, being left behind, being a patsy for following the old rules of decorum and mutual respect. This more insecure condition has the potential for feeding the self-doubts and shame anxieties which inevitably ally themselves with Narcissistic Shame.

The absence of communally accepted ways of doing things contributes also to a social confusion and disarray that promotes interpersonal conflict. Such conflict, as I will discuss in the Chapter 5, becomes the playground of Narcissistic Shame and offers unique opportunities for its exploitation.

Chapter 4.

Core Shame and Narcissistic Development

Both Kohut (1980, cited in Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983) and Bowlby (1988) have argued that modern social conditions, such as the disintegration of the extended family and the rise of the two-career couple, have been injurious to child development. Bowlby argued that parents today have less time and less support than people had even a few decades ago for creating a warm, embracing environment for children. His colleague Ainsworth (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1977) has demonstrated that a parenting style that is inconsistent or lacking in warm attunement leads to an anxious attachment pattern, in which the child develops negative beliefs about himself and the world and negative expectations of others. Studies by Ainsworth and her colleagues have repeatedly found that 30 to 35 percent of middle class American babies are anxiously attached (the percentages are higher in poor or single-family homes) (Karen, 1990). H. Lewis (1987) argues that shame is a critical feature of anxious attachment, for the child who does not get the empathic attunement he needs begins to doubt the value of his efforts to engage, of the love he is trying to give, of his very being.

Basch, in discussing this trend, believes, like Kohut, that it helps account for a shift in patient populations toward pre-oedipal pathology:

> Neuroses occur because the parents are unable to respond, to perform the selfobject function, as it were, when it comes to the competitive sexual feelings of the child. On the other hand, narcissistic personality disorders eventuate when there is a selfobject failure, real or imagined, for what we would call attachment issues. (personal communication, September 24, 1990)

When theorists talk today about pathological shame, how shame problems arise developmentally, or the shame issues implicit in the narcissistic personality disorder, the type of shame being discussed is generally Narcissistic Shame, most often Type 4, the shame wound, or core shame. Although this type of shame can develop at any time in life, it is particularly intractable when associated with early developmental damage.

When an infant seeks to engage a parent, when his coos and smiles and efforts to make eye contact fail, he looks down forlornly and experiences what looks very much like shame. Tomkins (1987) argues that shame is one of the nine innate affects in human beings. He further stipulates that shame is the opposite of surprise. Whereas surprise says, Drop everything and attend to this, shame tells you to immediately inhibit your feelings of interest or enjoyment and withdraw.

Tomkins believes that this is shame at its indivisible affective core, before cultural values and evaluations of the self become associated with the feeling. Indeed, he goes further, and concludes that, biologically speaking, guilt, discouragement, and shyness are other subspecies of this same affect, which simply have different ideas attached to them: "Shyness is about strangeness of the other; guilt is about moral transgression; shame is about inferiority; discouragement is about temporary defeat; but the core affect in all four is identical" (Tomkins, 1987, p. 143).

The fundamental purpose of all affects, as Tomkins sees it, is to amplify or call attention to the situation that triggers them. "It's like the relationship between pain and injury. If we had no pain receptors we could have injury and do nothing about it" (Tomkins, personal communication, April 22, 1990). Thus when the baby turns away in disappointment as his mother fails to respond in the expected way, or, worse, as she reacts with anger or distress because she sees that he has just wet the new comforter, the baby's shame is an adaptive reaction. It keeps him from making a bad situation worse by continuing to seek attunement in the face of a hopeless situation. And because he eventually associates what he's done with the feeling of shame it's evoked, it helps him to learn about acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

Psychologists disagree (e.g., Tomkins, 1987; M. Lewis, in press), of course, on whether to call these early painful feelings shame, since at this stage there's no self-evaluation involved. But, certainly, dealing with shame and its boundaries is soon a constant factor in the socialization of the child, for standards and rules are everywhere, and he has a lot to learn in a very short time. He is trained to use the toilet, trained to keep his clothes on in company, trained to eat with utensils and hold them in certain ways, trained to blow his nose into a tissue, preferably in a way that does not invite attention, trained not to touch or pick at certain areas of his body, trained not to hit or to even raise his hand to a parent, and always reminded that behaviors that were acceptable before are now childish and beneath him. Formerly pleasurable activities--examining his *feces, smearing himself with mud, blowing bubbles with his drool,* sniffing objects of interest, playing with certain toys--become surrounded with an aura of shame, while other pleasures, like hugging and kissing are limited to certain people, places, and times.

Although there is a growing body of things the child once did that are now cloaked in shame and either slowly eliminated from his life or performed in private, perhaps with some feeling of anxiety, he does not necessarily feel personally tarnished by these things: The shame remains situational, not a wounded part of his being. The same learning process is experienced by other children, and, ideally, his parents convey to him that although some impulses and behaviors are "bad," it is natural that he pass through them. Above all, he is showered with rewards for his efforts to change and for his achievements. He joins the A-team, where no one throws food on the floor or makes in his pants. So there are compensatory pleasures and feelings of pride in learning self-control and mastering the boundaries of shame. Meanwhile, ideally, his underlying impulses are not entirely suppressed. They are merely channeled into acceptable forms.

It should be noted, of course, that the alternative to the A-team is the terrible state of shame that envelops him when he slips and his belongingness suddenly seems to come to a terrible end. Looked at this way, the connection between shame and attachment seems fundamental. The A-team is initially the family, but the inner sense of belongingness he develops there is usually his ticket to feelings of acceptance in greater and greater spheres. This sense of connection is subject to transference in various ways, so that the pride the child felt in his family the adult may later feel toward the clan, the nation, or humanity as a whole. The aspects of his humanity that are associated with the pit of non-belonging are also subject to transference or projection and can become associated with demeaned groups in the society or to foreign groups. The more urgently those forbidden aspects of his being impinge upon his consciousness, the more likely it is that he will need to find an outside group or individuals to represent them.

Such impingement arises in part because, inevitably, there are certain aspects of the child's being that cannot find an acceptable channel. What is he to do if belonging to the A-team means that he must never express certain feelings? What if his mother turns icy when he gets angry, is unable to respond to his sadness, smirks when he acts disappointed, or lectures him whenever he's fearful or wants to be held. In such cases his very feelings become stigmatized and to a certain extent he is stuck with his shame. It is still possible in some families to distinguish between feelings that are essentially taboo and a self that has become tarnished. A child can sometimes feel loved and accepted even if displays of aggression or dependency are verboten. But clearly in these cases shame is becoming more dangerous, striking closer to the core of the self.

This is an area that can be thought of as on the borderline between Situational Shame and Narcissistic Shame, Type 3, the familial straightjacket. A lot depends on the child's vulnerability to shaming and how punishing the parents are in their disapproval of the disliked emotional displays. Morrison (1989), building on Kohut, believes that any empathic failure on the part of the parents will cause shame to develop in the child. More serious, it would seem, are empathic failures that result from the parents' allowing their own emotional or neurotic needs to come before the child's emotional welfare. In such situations, disapproval or empathic failure becomes most punishing to the child's identity.

There are innumerable ways in which a parent's emotional distortions can become translated into the child's Narcissistic Shame. For example: When a mother feels guilty about saying no, the child may be made to feel ashamed of being selfish, a taker. If a mother feels trapped by her responsibilities, the child may be made to feel ashamed of being too needy. If the parents are uneasy in the presence of strong emotion, the child may be made to feel ashamed of his spontaneity, as if it were somewhat freaky. If the parents cannot tolerate conflict or aggressiveness, the child may be made to feel like a cur whenever he becomes angry or defensive. In each case the key element pushing the shame issue toward the Narcissistic category is the intensity of the felt rejection.

Punishment itself is not necessarily shame-inducing. Its underlying emotional tone is more important. When the parent does not feel himself to be in a training role so much as a vengeful, defensive, dominating, or striking out role, there will be a tendency for the punishment to augment the child negative self-concepts. The parents may be self-doubting. They may be uncertain of the legitimacy of their motives or of their very authority. They may find the role of the authority figure anxiety-provoking. And they may take their distress out on the child, often in subtle ways.

Sometimes there is something in the child that the parent hates at that moment. The child may be impeding the parent in some way, or displaying a feeling or an aspect of its humanity that the parent loathes in himself. Or it could be any combination of these things. Outwardly, the parent may seem to be teaching the child something practical. But the unseen identity lesson is more powerful. Indeed, the parent's effort to cover up his true feelings may cause the Narcissistic Shame to be planted at a deeper, more intractable, more unconscious level, so that the child is able to maintain his belief in an idealized parent while seeing himself as a problem. This is typical of certain anxiously attached individuals (Karen, 1990).

Changes in Parenting Style

The social changes brought about by modernity have naturally been reflected in child care. Basch notes that there has been a major shift in parental attitudes in this century alone. "In the kind of upbringing people had before the First World War," Basch says, "things were much more certain, people knew who they were and where they were going and had no hesitation in imposing their ideas on others, including their children" (personal communication, September 24, 1990). Given emotional trends discussed in the previous chapter, it may be fair to make the following generalizations about modern parents: They are, broadly speaking, more insecure about their feelings and personal traits, less confident of their role as authorities, less certain of what's right and wrong, indeed less likely to be anxious about right and wrong behavior than about good and bad traits. They convey these attitudes and anxieties to their children in a variety of ways, often unspoken, using facial expressions and tones of voice that can be more shaming than rigid commands or a swat on the behind.

M. Lewis, who has videotaped parent-child interactions as part of an ongoing study of the self-conscious emotions, provides some empirical evidence for the ways in which what I've called Narcissistic Shame may be promoted by parental behavior. "We've looked at our videotapes. Mom says, Oh, don't do that, that's awful." On the surface, she seems to be voicing a negative reaction to the child's behavior and not to the child's whole being. "But the face is an incomplete disgust face. What she is saying to the child is, You disgust me. We're finding that thirty to forty percent of mothers' prohibitions are accompanied by this incomplete disgust face. And this is in laboratory situations where they know they're being videotaped. I would say that the middle class, in moving away from physical punishment, utilizes more withdrawal of love. We think we have moved to a higher plane because we don't punish the kids, when in fact we may be humiliating them instead" (personal communication, December 17, 1990).

Lewis sees a cultural trend toward increased shame, partly because of this subterranean style of rejection, but also because "we keep telling our kids how great they are. We're using a lot of global evaluation and we didn't do this earlier" (personal communication, December 17, 1990). Like other developmental psychologists, Lewis sees the use of global negative evaluation as critical to instilling feelings of shame. But too much global positive evaluation may be risky as well, for it trains the child to think globally, to make his self the issue in whatever he does, and thus to be prone to both grandiosity and self-contempt, the Scylla and Charybdis of narcissistic disorders.

Lewis believes that middle class parents today seem particularly susceptible to how their children react to them--that they are easily ashamed of their kids' disapproval and prone to respond in shaming ways. This would seem to be a problem particular to an egalitarian, anti-hierarchical society in which family traditions have grown weak. "I remember," Lewis says, "being very unhappy when I told my kids not to do something they wanted to do and they were sad or angry at me for this." Looking back it seems absurd to him that a parent should be upset about the fact that a child becomes unhappy when told not to do something he wants to do. "And what seems clear, especially among middle class parents, is that when the child withdraws love, the parent gets shamed by that and then gets angry at the child" (personal communication, December 17, 1990).

A review of the child abuse literature suggests that parental shame, and especially feelings of inadequacy in their role as parents, is a pervasive factor. "Abuse usually happens," Lewis says, "after trying to do something for the child, often for a crying child that you're trying to comfort and can't. You feel angry because you failed interpersonally" (personal communication, December 17, 1990).

When parents do not feel they have a right to their anger, when they feel it is unjustified or shameful, they often try to suppress it, only to have it emerge in more poisonous forms. Sometimes the shame a parent feels about his anger causes him to get enraged at the child, another process that can escalate into physical abuse. "You hit a kid," says Lewis. "Now you're ashamed that you hit, so you get angry and hit the kid again. Studies show how this builds up. It really has a flavor of shame, rage, shame again, and rage again" (personal communication, December 17, 1990).

An Imagined Comparison

Freud (1923) remarked that each child must learn in the space of a few years the rules and restrictions of 30 centuries of civilization. How might the changes in civilized life of the last few centuries be reflected in an individual case?

Take the imaginary case of Lester, a busy, intelligent father who frequently gets exasperated with his five-year-old daughter, Pauline. She forgets to wipe her nose, she eats with her hands sometimes, she touches things she's not supposed to, she sniffs the clothes of guests when they come to visit. Such behaviors would have gone unnoticed by a medieval parent, but parents today must deal with them in some way.

Two hundred years ago, a French *civilité* advised: "Children like to touch clothes and other things that please them with their hands. This urge must be corrected, and they must be taught to touch all they see with their eyes" (cited in Elias, 1939, p. 203). A proper bourgeois father reading such advice in those days would probably have felt different from Lester. He may have had an equal desire to keep his child from touching. But he lived in an hierarchical society in which people were accustomed to obeying and being obeyed, and that probably made him more comfortable ordering, instructing, or reprimanding his child. He most likely lived in a Christian community which officially sanctioned right and wrong behavior but (unless it was a Protestant community) was not yet so concerned about good and bad traits. Because most adults were not as emotionally smoothed out as they are today, there was a greater likelihood of the father's identifying with the child's sensual urges even if he disapproved of their emergence at certain moments. He would control her, perhaps even punish her, but the punishment would probably not have been laden with guilt, anxiety, or self-doubt. As a result, chances are, his target would have plainly been what the child _did_ not what she _was_. And, unless he was physically abusive, that is probably how she would have experienced it.

For Lester the situation is very different, and the sight of his daughter losing herself in the touch and smell of a guest's gloves is an alien and repugnant act that arouses alarm. The sensual openness of Pauline's sniffing may be threatening to him, and he may even feel it makes her look like a freak in front of his guest. And given his own insecurities and narcissistic tendencies, he's disturbed at how this might reflect on him. He may control her with a slap, a sharp tone, or a reproachful glance. He may rationalize, either reprimanding her for handling another's property without first asking permission or for exposing herself to germs. He may divert her attention with an offer of candy, a sudden burst of playfulness, or some other reward. But whatever he does, his anxiety and his dread of abnormality will be conveyed to the girl. Pauline will be trained, but she will also harbor some personal sense of defectiveness. Not only is it repugnant to sniff--that's what a little girl 200 years ago would most likely have learned--but she is repugnant, for she has an unnatural urge to do so.

Lester, of course, is living in a cultural straightjacket that worsens the problem. He may feel, as a result of his own training, that anger against a child is unjustified. He may believe, as a modern, liberal democrat, that he doesn't have the authority to rule over her. Because he is educated and has been exposed to psychological ideas, he may guess that his disgust at Pauline's behavior is symptomatic of his own rigidity, or that his anxiety over her touching things represents a needless impulse toward control. But he does not know what to do with this knowledge other than to make his punishment more hidden (even from himself). And so the moment of disapproval may become loaded with a more potent charge. Because he has secretly pulled himself out of the equation, Pauline's sense of defectiveness is planted, one might say, at a "deeper" level. There is no memory of meanness on the part of her father which might be perceived as more external to her and which might later be more accessible to working through. All she knows is that she is no good. And this, like the partial disgust face described by M. Lewis, probably makes her Narcissistic Shame more stable.

As such moments multiply, Pauline is instructed in the use of feelings. The insincere smile on Lester's face as he pats her or gives her a candy, or the flat tone he uses to warn her against germs, tells her that both anger and embarrassment are impermissible and that a shell of evenness, cordiality or reason must be maintained. She learns something indefinably negative about the direct communication of feelings and sees that influencing others--even for her powerful father--is unsafe unless achieved through cautious maneuvering.

There are, or course, times when Lester is unable to contain his anger. As it spills out, he feels confused and disrupted, suffers pangs of defectiveness because of his loss of control, and perhaps even hates himself for sacrificing Pauline to his own image needs. But, like the physically abusing parents described by Lewis, this may cause him to channel his pain into more anger, of a sharply disgusted and bitter kind, that seems to blame Pauline not only for touching or sniffing but also for the deeper crime of making him lose his control and come into contact with his shame.

When the parenting function gets distorted this way on a regular basis, when it is carried out by the primary caregiver, and when it begins in infancy, Narcissistic Shame would seem to be an inevitable concomitant.

Needless to say, a critical factor in all this is how the child interprets the parent's behavior and how it gets internalized.

The Core Feeling of Defect: Theoretical Perspectives Based on the Narcissistic Personality Disorder

A number of efforts have been made over the years to trace the development of shame feelings in the infant. These take essentially two different tacks. Developmental psychology is interested in when the child is first able to experience shame and the nature of the cognitive and affective capacities that come into play. Psychoanalysis is interested in pathological developments, with an emphasis on abstract psychic elements like the self, the superego, the idealized self, the grandiose self, the selfobject, and so forth.

In psychoanalysis Kohut's work has been something of a starting point for several of those, like Morrison (1989) and Broucek (1982), who have attempted to understand shame's pathenogenisis. Kohut did not give shame great importance theoretically in the development of narcissistic disorders (Morrison, 1989). For one thing, he saw the grandiose self as a natural rather than pathological development; and it naturally followed that he did not see shame as relevant to its genesis. Also, shame was not a factor in his discussion of narcissistic rage (Morrison, personal communication, November 17, 1990). He believed rather that shame was more a reaction to one's grandiosity. Others (Broucek, 1982; Morrison, 1989), who have taken inspiration from Kohut's work differ with him here, arguing that shame is indeed a key factor, if not the key factor, both in the development of the grandiose self and in the affective experience of narcissistic rage.

Some of these differences may represent the familiar problem of shame semantics. Throughout Kohut's writings there is a frequent reference to a defective sense of self, to problems of self-esteem regulation and occasionally to such obviously shame-related conditions as "mortification," "disturbed self-acceptance," and "dejection" (Ornstein, 1978). But he didn't necessarily think of these things as shame.

Kohut's sensitivity to shame is apparent in this statement on treating narcissistic personalities:

> The innumerable ways by which the increasing integration of the split off sector is brought about defy description. But as a concrete and frequently occurring example I mention the overcoming of the often severe resistances--mainly motivated by shame--which oppose the patient's "mere" description of his overt narcissistic behavior, of his conscious perverse fantasies or activities, and the like. (Kohut, 1971, p. 154)

According to Broucek (1982), Kohut's "analytic work with narcissistic personalities involves in no small part, helping the patient to master, overcome, or mitigate the intense shame which maintains the dissociation, disavowal, or 'splitting off' of the grandiose self." But, Broucek says, Kohut does not adequately recognize the importance of this aspect of the work" (p. 374).

Kohut's lack of recognition of or emphasis on shame's importance has led to a reworking of some of the familiar theoretical material on narcissism. Morrison's assertion (1989) that any empathic failure on the parent's part is experienced by the infant as shame is typical of the new tendency to give shame, at least as it is currently being defined, a greater pathogenic standing. The child feels, What's wrong with me that I can't get things to work the way I want, that I can't get people to respond to me the way I want. There must be something wrong with me; or, similarly, there must be something wrong with my needs. Broucek's description of shame's relationship to grandiosity represents a similar theoretical development: "Shame may play a double role--as an instigating force in the construction of the grandiose self, and also as the affect responsible for the defensive 'splitting off' of the grandiose self from the rest of the self organization" (1982, p. 373). In other words, one takes refuge in a grandiose construction of the self in reaction to shameful feelings of inadequacy; then one feels a sense of shame about one's grandiosity and dissociates from it.

Broucek (1982) argues further that shame--including the normal shame crises of early childhood--is particularly disturbing for a child with a prominent grandiose self, more so than for a child "with a less fantastic, more 'normal ideal self,' and he must work doubly hard to eliminate it. He includes in the normal shame crises first experiences of self-awareness at 18 to 24 months and objective self-awareness, when "the child becomes more acutely conscious of his comparative smallness, weakness and his relative incompetence in the larger scheme of things" (p. 375). To this essentially Adlerian view of shame genesis, I would add the general pressures of training described above. They represent an opportunity for the empathic failures that Morrison emphasizes.

Bursten (1973) offers yet another avenue for the development of core feelings of Narcissistic Shame. He notes that in certain narcissistic personalities there is a wish for reunion with parental representations. These reunion wishes are shameful to the individual because they imply weakness, homosexuality, or incestuous desires. In other narcissistic personalities, he says, shame arises from identification with a weak father.

The Core Feeling of Defect: The Case of Polly

Broucek (1982) distinguishes between two types of narcissistic personalities. In the egotistic type the central sector of the personality "recognizes and embraces the grandiose self while disowning the 'actual' self" (p. 376). This is the narcissist of popular conception who has an exclusively flattering image of himself and filters out all discrepant data. "This type of narcissist has won a victory over shame, but at the price of impaired interpersonal sensitivity and defective ego formation" (p. 376). Broucek believes that objective self-awareness was damaged in such personalities by "adoring, doting, narcissistically disturbed mothers" (p. 376).

In the dissociative type of narcissistic personality the grandiose self is occasionally operative, but more often projected onto an idealized other. "The central sector of the personality is identified with the depreciated actual self resulting in the low self-self esteem typical of the dissociative type" (1982, p. 376).

Broucek's egotistical type is essentially shameless, although one must assume that when the defenses of the egotistical type are not strong enough to ward off a shaming experience, shame becomes like mortal wound, leading to a sense of utter disintegration. The following example, adapted from Miller (1985) refers to what Broucek would call the dissociative type of narcissistic personality.

A young woman is having some friends and acquaintances over for a rare brunch. Only six of the ten invited were able to come. The poor showing is a humiliation for the hostess who is ashamed in front of the remaining guests: She fears they can see how unpopular and disregarded she is. The hostess does not know three of her guests well--they are acquaintances from her department at work--and they do not seem to be mixing much with the others. They are more successful people, "really going somewhere in life," as the hostess sees it, and now she feels a fool for having invited them, having reached out for people who have no interest in her. In fact, she is quite certain, despite their cordiality, that they came only to be polite. For a moment, the encroaching shame panics her. She finds herself talking excessively. She wants to explain, to be liked despite it all, to make the group coalesce into a successful party. She makes excuses for the food, for her decor--"It's only temporary"--feels bad for having betrayed herself like that, laughs nervously, hears herself laugh, suspects it sounds forced and unnatural. Her guests seem uncomfortable. She wishes the the whole thing would end. Later, when everyone's gone, she's sure they're thinking, "Oh God, that was really stupid."

This fictional experience typifies the kind of shame that haunts the life of "Polly," a young woman interviewed by Miller (1985). In some ways, Polly is an archetypal shame sufferer. She feels like a nobody. "In a room full of people, she feels invisible; when talking with people, she has no sense that anything she says is meaningful or worthy of being remembered, no sense that after she sees people they will ever want to see her again" (Miller, 1985, p. 51). Polly looks in the mirror and feels despair. She sees herself as the sort of person who cares for people who don't care for her, which makes her feel desperate and pathetic. If she doesn't react the way others do, if she hears a complaint or a harsh tone, she is quick to think, Uh-oh, there's something wrong with me, my deformity is showing.

Despite all this, Polly continues to hope that she will be famous and glamourous one day, even though she suspects she's untalented, uninteresting, and boring. Like so much else in her life, the fantasy of a grand redeeming future is also shameful and makes her feel like a fool for not being able to know the truth of her own worth. Hers is a core sense of shame, a condition that some psychologists now trace back to early infant experience.

"The child's sense of being someone who counts," Miller says, "comes in large part from the parent's capacity to empathically tune into that child. Not necessarily to focus on the child as extraordinary or special in some overblown way, but just to really be there with the child, attentive to its feelings and wishes. Polly seemed to have had the kind of parent who in some basic way never saw the child or saw a distorted image of the child based on the parent's own needs. I got the impression that her mother over-attended to Polly at times--not based on Polly's feelings or needs but based on something within the mother--and was very neglectful at other times" (Miller, personal communication, November 9, 1990).

Kohut (1977) had argued that the parent reflects a kind of mirror for the child, which gives her a sense of herself and her feelings before she has the capacity to achieve this on her own. The attentiveness, the verbalizing of the baby's feelings, the gleam in the mother's eye, as he called it, are essential to the early development of a healthy, confident selfhood. "If there is no clear reflection," (Miller, 1985) writes, "the self has a great deal of difficulty achieving any definition." Sometimes this failure occurs because of events beyond the parent's control. But "in Polly's case the parents never saw the child" (Miller, personal communication, November 9, 1990).

Polly's mother tended to focus on details--the fit of the child's clothes, the smudge on the face, the posture--rather than on Polly herself. When she did attend to Polly, there was a false quality, as if in some way that Polly could never articulate or even be certain of, she was not fully there. Insecure about her ability to draw other's interest to her, Polly develops a tenacious shameful self-concept--that she is inherently uninteresting.

Unhappily, in Polly's case, although not irreversible, the concept contains some truth. "Part of what makes a person interesting to others," Miller says, "is their ability to express and convey their genuine feelings and opinions" (Miller, personal communication, November 9, 1990). But Polly had a tenuous faith in the validity of her feelings, which her parents had so disregarded. "She developed a very conventional, compliant personality, trying so hard to fit in with everyone that she would ultimately be chosen by no one" (Miller, personal communication, November 9, 1990).

The Core Feeling of Defect:
Other Narcissistic Wounds

Another early route to shame is the loss of one's loving identification with a parent. As Kohut observed, the comfortable sense of being one with mommy and daddy, of being part of what makes them big and strong and perfect, provides a safeguard for the fragile, undeveloped being. "The child does not feel that he or she must be able to perform every task or defeat every enemy. Early on it's enough that Dad or Mom can beat up the offender or fix the broken toy"

(Miller, 1985). Learning that one is adopted, she notes, is sometimes traumatic partly because of the loss of this comfortable association. Suddenly the child feels shrunken back into his smallness, losing that portion of his pride and identity that was built on the parents' strength. A similar and often more lasting loss occurs for the child who sees his parents in conflict and one or both of them become tarnished as a result; when a parent is himself burdened with shame and acts it out in self-demeaning ways; or when some calamity befalls a parent, like a crippling accident or the loss of a job. Any of these unhappy life events can derail the child's sense of worth by prematurely compromising his much needed idealization. Even later on, when the early need for idealization has passed, a child can feel diminished if the same-sex parent is continually debased by a ridiculing spouse (Miller, 1985)

Although it does appear that the earlier that shame problems arise the more damaging they often are, no one has any proof that early childhood traumas are irrevocably wounding (M. Lewis, personal communication, December 17, 1990). If a child later gets the loving validation he needs, he may be able to overcome even a persistently shame-inducing experience. Unfortunately, most negative home environments remain negative; and the child, in trying to cope, develops traits which his parents find frustrating or objectionable. These may elicit a greater negative reaction and more feelings of shame.

As development progresses new challenges may compound early shame. Any child, for example, when he reaches the terrible twos and starts opposing his parents, faces an inevitable challenge to his self-esteem. "The child must retain the strength of the remembered, loved parent, even while facing the parent who now actively, articulately opposes the child's will" (Miller, 1985). But the child who lacks the foundation of a sense of loving acceptance will have less of this internalized goodness to fall back on and will find his burden of shame intensified during this period.

Sexual abuse is also frequently cited as a source of deep Narcissistic Shame. "Sexual and physical abuse are guaranteed by their nature to produce excessive shame, beyond the capacity of the individual to tolerate" Kaufman says. "Any time the body is violated, that always leaves the person defeated and humiliated" (personal communication, September 24, 1990). According to Wurmser (1981), shame functions partly as a guardian of one's private self, signaling the intrusion of external forces toward one's vulnerable interior. When a child's defenses are penetrated persistently by a more powerful adult, he may at times be reduced to a shame-ridden sense of powerlessness. One is reduced to an object, a thing. In any abuse or seduction context, there will inevitably be other factors at work, mitigating, augmenting, or complicating this aspect of Narcissistic Shame.

The ways in which differences get worked out in the family also tell the child a lot about his rights, his dignity, his worth. Is he allowed to feel he's still okay when saying no, complaining, or expressing other negative feelings? "It's not that every baby has to be gratified every minute, far from it," notes Basch. It's whether the parent lets the child have his emotion and responds to it in a reasonable way, whether the child is able to come through it knowing that whether he gets his way or not, he had a right to his feeling.

"Basically," Basch believes of such early experiences, "shame is often the response to emotion that is not being dealt with effectively" (personal communication, September 24, 1990).

Defective Self or Shame-Prone Superego?

The Freudian view had typically been that shame is more primitive than guilt (Morrison, 1989). Partly because self psychology's new work on narcissism, it was now associated with developmental failures in childhood and with a defective self. H. Lewis, who believed that shame was an issue for everyone, questioned this trend. She insisted, first, that one could be shame-prone without having a defective self. Second, that some patients diagnosed as narcissistic or borderline may actually be suffering "the sad effects of unanalyzed shame in the patient-analyst relationship" (1981, p. 247). And, third, she argued that shame was not merely a side effect of personality disorders but that, if anything, the causality tended to run the other way (1981, 1987).

During my internship at Bellevue Hospital in New York, I worked for some time in the psychiatric emergency room where I had an experience that brought this question to life. One morning I was startled by sounds of expletives booming from the waiting room. I went out to see the aides struggling to put a patient into three-point restraints on a stretcher. He was a small white man with a pugnacious face and he was telling a pregnant aide nearby that she was a black bitch and should go back to Haiti. He spoke as if he knew her intimately and was privy to her flaws. We were used to screams and racial slurs in the emergency room, but his language made people stiffen. The young white cop who'd brought the patient in drew nearer the struggle, only to be warned off by cries of, "Watch out--he's going to spit!" The coiled ball of energy grinned maliciously at the cop and called him a coward. "Come on, come on, come over here." The cop didn't move. "Look at him," the patient sneered. "He wants to be a cop. You're just a wanna be, that's all you are."

The hate that people felt toward this little man was palpable. He stirred passions you didn't want to have stirred. He had an insult for everyone and cruel eyes to match. I tried to make myself invisible, because I feared he'd see something in me, maybe my dumb feeling of ineptitude, and nail me for it. A nurse standing next to me said he was a frequent flyer. "They bring him in every few months," she said. "It's an unusual case, because he doesn't have an Axis One diagnosis"--which, in emergency room lingo meant that he was neither psychotic nor a crack head. "What's wrong with him?" I asked. She shrugged. "He's a borderline."

The idea that shame may be the pivotal issue in borderline conditions, a cause, in Broucek's words (personal communication, November 8, 1990), of "a lot of the rage and the volatility," is still an extreme minority view. But, whatever its role, rarely does one see a potential source of shame so pitilessly displayed as it was on this man. In addition to his psychiatric diagnosis, he had a medical one: thalidomide syndrome. Neither his threatening snarl, nor his powerful chest, nor his defiant, challenging eyes could fully distract one from his shortened arms and withered, birdlike hands.

Because Lewis believed that shame in and of itself could be terribly disorganizing, even perhaps to the point of requiring hospitalization, she gradually found herself questioning the whole trend toward diagnosing patients as suffering from pervasive characterological deficiencies. She believed that people are often in a state of shame without knowing it, and that unidentified shame could lead to florid psychiatric symptoms, the self becoming depersonalized or estranged, its boundaries disordered (1987). Maybe some patients suffering from these conditions are a special breed, she conceded, but the fragmenting of the self, which is considered a hallmark of the more severe personality disorders, is also typical of acute states of shame. You're judging yourself, you're monitoring the judgment that you think someone else is making, the two things are becoming confused, and meanwhile another part of you sees the whole experience as crazy and uncalled for. How can it not be be fragmenting, she asks, at least temporarily? And if your therapist, someone whose word is writ large for you, is indeed making the very judgments you fear, and responding to your humiliated fury by denying such negative thoughts, the shame and rage and sense of internal fragmentation will escalate (H. Lewis, 1987).

Because of Lewis's work, shame is now frequently seen as a cause of rage rather than just a defense against it. Scheff, for instance, was a marriage and family counselor at the time he first read Lewis. "I did what I was taught to do with anger as a therapist, which is to let people express it, and I couldn't help but notice that it never worked. But I picked up Helen Lewis's book one day and I saw a sentence in there--she said shame and anger have a deep affinity. And

I thought, Oh my God, this is what all that therapeutic failure was about" (personal communication, September 25, 1990).

According to Morrison, "Many classical analysts tend to treat shame issues as defensive, as a defense against underlying aggression," he says. "What we [the new crop of shame theorists] are doing now is trying to reverse that. To make the point that aggression and hostility are often a defense against underlying shame" (personal communication, April 13, 1990).

In a study of violent men at the Brentwood Veterans Administration Hospital in Los Angeles, psychiatrist Lansky (1987) found empirical evidence for this view. He discovered that much of the men's violence toward their wives derived from shame over some disability that made them dependent on their wives. Sometimes their violent rage was triggered by a wife's needling comment that inflamed their feelings of incompetence. The violence, according to Lansky, gave them back a measure of control and deflected attention from their shameful dependency.

As it turns out, Lansky's work represent an extreme case of the ways in which Narcissistic Shame works its way into interpersonal dynamics.

Chapter 5.

Power and Shame:

The Rise of Interpersonal Politics

Ideally, we might expect shame to serve certain positive functions: To signal the individual when his behavior is risking the bonds of affection or community upon which he depends (H. Lewis, 1987b; Kinston, 1983); to fill the need for some of the internal structure (superego) that the absence of more thorough instinctual controls creates in developing human beings; to help ensure that the community will have a unifying sense of correct behavior; to warn the individual when he is failing to live up to standards that are important to him (Lynd, 1958); to keep the individual from exposing aspects of himself in contexts or with others where such exposure might be injurious to his sense of self or lead to reactions that are injurious to his sense of self (Schneider, 1977; Wurmser, 1981); to keep people from giving in to the human tendency toward grandiosity, which can have various destructive consequences for both the individual and the community (Heller, 1974).

But shame is a very malleable affect that is not tied to any one function (Tomkins, 1987). In each society it is molded to serve in somewhat different ways. And at times it can serve damaging ends.

Several authors have noted the link that exists between powerlessness, striving for power, and shame. According to Wurmser, power-seeking can be an antidote to shame. "One is ashamed of weakness and losing control, of not being in charge of one's being, of failing. And the fantasy of power is really the remedy against that sense of helplessness" (personal communication, September 24, 1990). It is easy to relate this insight to the results of Lansky's study (1987) of physically abusing husbands.

Except for Existential Shame, and to some extent Universal Shame, I would suggest power is almost always a factor in the creation, maintenance, and activation of shame. Although, parental power is critical in building the contents of the superego and social power in determining what behaviors will be considered shameful, the power dynamic is perhaps most evident in inter-group stresses. In the creation and maintenance of Class Shame, social stability is achieved at a terrible price to those who are stigmatized and must carry a permanent burden of shame. It is, in effect, the powerful using the tool of shame to tilt the game to their advantage; similar to the way tax or stock regulations may be structured to benefit the wealthy.

Where power has not clearly coalesced in one group's hands, competing groups within the society, or even between societies, struggle to avoid becoming the shame-bearing victim. Many have noted the consequences of the humiliation of Germany after World War I, in terms of the need it created among Germans for revenge. "I think Nazism was really a shame movement," Wurmser says. Many Germans felt that they'd been, to use an image that often seems particularly apt for shame experiences, covered in excrement by the terms of the treaty of Versailles, and in revenge, as Wurmser puts it, "they were going to drown the world in shit" (personal communication, September 24, 1990). Kaufman (personal communication, September 24, 1990) has also taken note of the issues of shame at stake in inter-group conflicts.

Like Class Shame, Narcissistic Shame is the other shame condition in which defect and power are linked. Not surprisingly, a dynamic similar to group struggles around the issue of Class Shame takes place between individuals around issues of Narcissistic Shame. I will use an illustration from my own experience:

I recently picked up three books on the sale table of a bookstore near where I live. The sign said "25% off all marked prices." But the cashier gave me 25% off only on the one book that had a red slash through the price. As I was leaving I saw the sign again and realized the cashier had been wrong. She pointed me to the manager who took the books from my hand. As we looked at the prices I was embarrassed to realize that a ridiculously small sum was involved. "What, you want your dollar back?" he said. I heard his tone but didn't know how to respond. I started saying something when he interrupted, telling me it was easier just to give me my dollar than take up more of his time. "Give him his dollar," he called to the cashier across the crowded store. I got my dollar and walked out feeling like two cents.

I think everyone understands this moment. It has become part of our urban experience, an example of the casual emotional abuse with which people manipulate, control, and punish the strangers they deal with. But the variable that is not always understood about the rage that such experiences engender is shame. Whenever one is put down, shame of some kind is usually stirred up. The store manager does not need to know what my soft spots are. His derisive, dismissive attitude will find my feelings of shame like a heat-seeking missile.

Taking advantage of people's weak spots in order to control them or as a reflexive aspect of a defensive psychology seems to be as eternal as class domination. We see the dynamic at work in ancient as well as modern literature. And yet aspects of the incident above feel particularly modern: the lack of civility, the sense of alienation between shopkeeper and customer, the pressure of time. There are also issues of individual psychology at work here, which also seem peculiarly modern, particularly the vulnerability to Narcissistic Shame in such seemingly insignificant encounters. Indeed, all the aspects of the modern era that have caused Narcissistic Shame to become a more prominent feature of individual psychology have contributed as well to a heightening of the interpersonal power-shame dynamic. This dynamic has to some degree encroached on terrain formerly ruled by civility.

The Changing Locus of Social Control

Under the feudal system a degree of law and order was achieved through a firm hierarchy, at the center of which was a powerful lord who could protect his subjects from marauding gangs and foreign invaders. Power was vested in positions--princes, priests, lords, fathers. Authority was legitimized as part of heavenly design (against which one quarreled at great peril), and its legal transfer was accomplished largely through the process of heredity. In such a society, respect was due another strictly on the basis of class, age, or position in the hierarchy, and personal qualities were less relevant than they are today. People had moral responsibilities to those above and below, and whether they adhered to them or not, there was little question of what one's duties were and what one had the right to expect.

As the medieval system broke down, and the middle classes slowly rose in prominence, some of the power that had been vested in formal positions was dispersed. Money was a growing instrument of power; and interpersonal issues also rose in importance. As feudalism gave way to towns, commerce, and a centralized national authority, people came to deal with one another more as individuals and less as representatives of carefully governed castes. As they engaged in the negotiations and transactions that lacked the predictability of feudal relations, manners offered them a means of social regulation through increased self-discipline (Elias, 1939). Manners and bodily propriety were a form of deference. The control of bodily functions, sexuality, and aggressiveness were symbolic ways of respecting the space and privacy of others. Civility created social distance. In particular, it told the world of strangers that one had oneself on a leash, that one could control aggressiveness and sexual impulses that had been allowed freer rein in the past (Elias). The new manners implied a cooperative spirit and honorable intentions; they helped extend into the new society the concern for security and morality that had characterized the old; and within the limits they established on personal behavior, one could enjoy the new social freedoms that the passing of feudalism offered.

If one's manners were poor, people were offended and had means of making their displeasure known, sometimes in the cordial manner of

Galateo, who was careful not to arouse shame in the person he was correcting (see Chapter 2); sometimes through expressions of spontaneous disgust; sometimes with calculated efforts to put the offender in his place. This dynamic certainly did not represent the first appearance of interpersonal politics, but a time of changing morés does offer considerably broadened opportunities for its coming into play.

As people dealt with each other as social equals, and as group consciousness gave way to individual consciousness, the neat social packages by which shame was apportioned in traditional society lost some of their meaning. Interpersonal politics and an awareness of individual traits gradually equalled, then surpassed the importance of class politics and class traits. It was as if the old cesspools of class shame had blown open and shame now circulated through the open market of peer relations.

As Rousseau observed (Berman, 1970), the transition from feudalism to modernity gave rise to greater competition. Freed from the carefully ordered relationships of medieval society, people found themselves more alienated from their fellows with their energy flowing into all sorts of strategic considerations. Liberty had increased--at least at the strata of society Rousseau observed--but he saw men squandering it in image games, one-upsmanship, and other forms of competitive conflict. They were also trying to impress one another on a scale that had not been required before (Berman, 1970).

As individuals compete, it is only natural that they search each other for defects or signs of self-doubt and use this knowledge to gain an upper hand. Although this process is in and of itself undermining of security, the more fundamentally secure one is to start with, the less psychological impact such interpersonal competition can have. But in the two centuries since Rousseau's time, shame anxiety has increased, people have felt more isolated and insecure (see Chapter 3), and interpersonal competition has affected every strata of society. Psychological awareness has made people adept at recognizing the symbols of self-doubt in others and television has given many the opportunity to become scientists of the interpersonal. It enables viewers to coolly examine the ways in which self-doubts arise, as well as the ways in which they can be exploited or covered up. Meanwhile, the weakening of accepted rituals and codes of deferential behavior (the province of Situational Shame), has not only left people with greater self-doubts and thus greater vulnerability to questions about whether they've done the right thing, but has also left the door open to more ruthless forms of interpersonal competition. Goffman's work (1959, 1967, 1969, 1974) on image management in daily life suggests the awesome complexity that comprises the simplest of interactions. I would argue that such interactions are particularly heightened in people who are anxious and ambivalent in their relationships with others and who have found in image and power maneuvers, many of which were learned in the home as children, a peculiar kind of security.

Case Study: Marge and Chuck

In 1987 I published a popular account of the workings interpersonal power dynamics from which I would like to quote here;

first from a case that concerns two people who have just met and later from a case that involves a husband and wife. The first case concerns Marge, a successful lawyer of 35, and Chuck, a 29-year-old history professor, recently unemployed. Both might be described as suffering from insecure attachment histories (Bowlby, 1988) and the sorts of characterological disturbances that have been found to be on the rise in this century (Erikson, 1950; Wheelis, 1958). They have a disastrous dating experience. What follows is an examination of power and shame dynamics in Marge's psychology.

> As soon as Marge becomes involved with a man, she begins to judge. She hates clumsiness. A man may be generous, talented, artistic, knowledgeable, but if he's timid about handling things in her apartment, if he doesn't know how to put a cassette in the tape deck, if he fumbles when reclosing a box of crackers, she finds herself beginning to fume. Ashamed of her impatience ("Bitch!"), she controls herself, she keeps trying to be nice and to focus on his fine qualities, all the while hating herself for not being able to do so. Eventually covert fragments of abuse begin leaking out, which she quickly denies or explains away with defensive statements like: "Oh, I'm still a little edgy from the office," or "Easy, easy, I was only teasing"....
>
> If Marge tends to become a subject with some men and judge them as weak (Uch, incompetent! Uch, too eager to please!), with other men, she tends to become an object and judge them as exploiters (Uch, what a bastard! Uch, what a pig!). In each case, her judgments eventually provide her with a convenient means of escape. Every so often Marge finds herself with a man who is more like herself, someone who successfully uses image to mask his self-doubts and who has a talent for studiously pleasing others without seeming to sacrifice his own identity in the process. With such a man she is slower with her judgments. Unfortunately, no matter how much they enjoy each other, and no matter how much they sense they have in common, their thick layers of image are a daunting barrier. Who's going to open up first? ...
>
> To each the other looks crisp, cool, and confident. One moment Marge wants to show him exactly who she is; the next she feels she's gone too far and suddenly must prove how happy, healthy, and on top of everything she is. As she

> pours on the air of well-being, her date feels required to do the same....
>
> They go to a party. Her date talks and dances with other women, some of whom are very attractive, and Marge feels possessive. But in the context of such a new relationship, her possessiveness seems inappropriate. Besides, they've both leaned so heavily on presenting themselves as self-reliant, confident, and emotionally secure. How can she be jealous after just a few dates? So she covers her feelings with breeziness. Unaware of Marge's inner turmoil, her date begins moving closer to her later in the evening, showing affection and hoping for affection in return. But when he gets breeze in return, fear whispers through him--"Uh-oh, I've gone too far"--and he beings to blow some breeze of his own.
>
> The tendency to see manipulation everywhere is now hard to resist. Each senses the other moving away and makes assumptions about the reasons why. Their self-doubts become inflamed, and they escalate their strategic messages.... Marge jokes that she hopes he got the telephone number of a certain woman at the party--the one who made her the most jealous. Because she seems not to care, he interprets this as a warning that she does not want an exclusive relationship, at least not with him. He stops touching her and his smile becomes forced.
>
> In the beginning the strategic escalation operates entirely between the lines, and they may cooperate in the pretext that everything is fine. But as they proceed to build a relationship on these subterranean messages, they create a house of cards. They each feel hurt, suspect that their hurts are the result of their own insecurities, and retaliate in covert ways; while little signs of weakness--a false laugh, a fallen face, a moment of paralysis--are shingled over with wisecracks, loving gestures, and outright lies. Finally, somebody goes too far, the hidden hurt becomes unbearable, a terrible breach is committed, and the house collapses in a rumble of abuse. Such escalation can happen over the course of months, or, as in the case of Chuck Meyers, in the course of a single evening. (Karen, 1987, pp. 87-89)

The disastrous evening for Marge and Chuck turned out to be their third date. They went to a disco, danced, touched and eyed each other suggestively, and became very excited about the prospect of having sex with each other for the first time. They took a cab back to Marge's apartment, and then each became nervous about what would happen next.

Once in bed, Chuck's anxieties about how he would perform and how Marge would judge him made him lose his erection. Afraid to acknowledge his self-doubt, Chuck pressured Marge for oral sex as a way of getting re-aroused. Afraid to seem unwilling or hung up, Marge complied in a brief and unsatisfying way. By the time it was all over, both felt terrible, but still nothing was said.

Chuck found a pretext for leaving shortly after sex. Marge was wounded, felt used and abandoned, flew into a rage, screaming that he didn't give a damn about her or her feelings or whether she had an orgasm. Chuck said, "So you have to come every time, is that it? If you don't come then you kill." Marge was crushed. Chuck had, in effect, taken her disrupted identity--enraged, self-doubting, ridden with Narcissistic Shame anxiety--and created for her a shameful caricature to which she was, at that moment, susceptible. The sex, the date, and the relationship were over.

Although Marge's and Chuck's problems may not be typical of the modern dating relationship, we may recognize in their experience elements that are particular to our time. Most important is the tendency of individuals to pose extraordinary threats to each other's identities and to fall into conflicts where someone wins and someone loses in terms of their identity issues.

Power, Sex, and Narcissistic Shame

The Rise of a "Winning" Ethic

From what we know of the Middle Ages (see Huizinga, 1924, Elias, 1939), it appears that sex was more open and matter-of-fact than in subsequent centuries, with far less self-consciousness about such things as proper sexual behavior or adequate performance. It was a coarse, lusty, and violent time when sexual spontaneity, openness, aggression, and rape all played a bigger role in daily life.

The growth of civility may not have affected the sexual act _per se_, but it placed inhibitions and rituals around it in the form of various chivalrous postures and concerns and eventually made the subject of sex a conversational taboo. The middle classes aspired to be gentlemen and ladies, and this required certain restraints.

With the onset of the industrial revolution, emotional life underwent a far greater constriction, and this, too, affected sexuality. Pragmatic concerns moved eventually into the regulatory center. Marge and Chuck's determination to make everything "work" on their third date represents a modern obedience to such pragmatic pressures. Their minds are busy with technique; with satisfying their partner; with the things they need to do in order to be liked; with avoiding conflict; with contraception; with erections, orgasms, and what hour it will be when they're done. By the time they take off their clothes, Chuck's anxiety about performance and results make him feel more like a piece worker in a nineteenth center garment factory than the sexual savage he felt like on the dance floor.

In the encounter between Marge and Chuck, all of the social concerns mentioned above--from the threat (and promise) of sheer physical force; to concerns over morality, chivalry, and propriety; to the more recent anxiety over technique, efficiency, and forbidden feelings--are present like layers in an archeological dig.

But at the uppermost layer there is a new source of anxiety. It represents a regulatory element, like civility, religious ethics, or the law, but lacking the communal element that links those three. It is a pragmatism without morality that has become morek prominent in recent years. The two lover-strangers are both fearful about when this regulatory element might come into play, and because of their particular psychologies, they are very absorbed by it. The new element--new in the sense of being a subject for widespread concern--makes use of all the old elements and therefore seems to have no truly stable rules. It represents a world in a state of change and insecurity, a world of discord, distrust, and disharmony in which traditional forms of relating have been weakened to the extent that people no longer have a clear idea of what to expect from one another in many ordinary realms of experience, a bustling, striving, atomized urban world where morality and ethics sometimes seem obsolete. It represents, too, a world in which the absence of strong family ties and other forms of emotional security puts each person's identity at stake even in small encounters. This new regulatory element is like a life raft in a sea of uncertainty and anxiety. But it is a life raft that only has room for one. The new element is, of course, the power-shame dynamic in interpersonal politics, or what we might call "winning."

In interpersonal encounters winning essentially means coming out on top, so that one feels okay about oneself and shame anxiety is quieted. It is achieved by activating the Narcissistic Shame of the other person. With Marge and Chuck winning is not the issue at the outset. They are concerned about each other's feelings and even fancy that "this could be the one." But in a world where almost anything goes, where strangers come very close and then disappear forever, neither can afford to assume too much about the other's expectations or the meaning of his behavior, and so they have to be careful about what they reveal. Besides, they've both been around. They've been hurt, picked apart, one-upped, made to feel guilty, made to feel inadequate. They feel damaged by their failures, and they don't want to be damaged more. Having no basis for trusting each other, their shame anxiety is high. They know that humiliation or self-hatred could lie around any corner, and they are prepared. They tend to make manipulative and adversary assumptions about others, and with certain people, in certain situations, those assumptions are on high alert.

Marge's and Chuck's strategic view of the dynamics between them, although almost entirely hidden, is apparent to each of them nevertheless. It causes an occasional flash of intense suspicion and makes it difficult for them to give each other the benefit of the doubt when something disagreeable happens. What's more, they approach each other bearing pent-up feelings of longing, aggression, and a burden of Narcissistic Shame that makes them very vulnerable. Unsure of the legitimacy of their feelings, they have a low level of self-acceptance, a high center of gravity, and a great need for each other's approval. So they measure everything they do, and, like politicians always checking the polls, they measure each other's responses. They are teetering in a tiny boat of mutually acceptable behavior on a great sea of questionable emotions, and tossed about by the prevailing winds of mistrust. One wrong move--who knows which one?--may invite a reaction that will drench them in self-hatred.

Chuck and Marge live in a time when sexual freedom is taken for granted. But they are so burdened with fear, self-consciousness, hesitations, and second-guessing that their freedom feels narrow and they find themselves taking little advantage of it. They are free of a strict courting ritual and its arbitrary niceties and restraints. A courting ritual is like a giant ocean liner and each prospective couple like passengers with no control over the rules or access to the helm. But considering the perilous seas in which Marge often finds herself, is it any wonder she looks back with some longing on the formalities that both ruled and sustained her grandparents?

Chuck is constantly looking for the formula that will make all his sexual opportunities work for him. He's been with women for whom sex automatically meant love and commitment. Is that right? He's been with women who wouldn't touch him without a condom and an AIDS test. Is that right? He's been with women who've wanted to lie naked and see what happens. Is that right? He's been with women who've insisted on talking out everything in advance and women who didn't want to ruin anything with introspection. What, he wonders, is right and what is wrong? What is modern and what is obsolete?

In a sexual context, Chuck experiences Narcissistic Shame anxiety on several fronts: he is susceptible to seeing himself as sleazy and illegitimate, stodgy and old-fashioned, bald and unappealing. Whether Marge expects him to be a gentleman, a cave man, or a "therapeutic" man, her disapproval is likely to inflame one of his tender areas of Narcissistic Shame. Since Marge could, nowadays, make a case for any of these preferences ("Be considerate!" "Let it all hang out!" "Know thyself!"), Chuck has the anxious sense of having to look over both shoulders at once. His search for formulas of right and wrong, modern and obsolete, is really a search for protection in a world where anything goes--just as Marge's judgments and rigid moral opinions (about her right to an orgasm, about Chuck's eagerness for oral sex, about the impropriety of his early departure) are a form of protection for her. The moment a relationship moves into a context where each person senses he is bound to either win or lose, assertions of right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate, have little meaning beyond their use as shields and weapons.

As they race back to Marge's apartment after the excitement of the disco, the arousal she and Chuck experience, as full as it is of fantasies of love and pleasure, is thus very fragile. Fearing conflict, or anything that will disrupt their plans, they try to shelter the fragile moment from the wrong sorts of feelings. But once those feelings reach a certain level, maneuvers begin to proliferate, punishments seep out, the precariously balanced boat of their relationship starts rocking, and their main concern becomes survival. Someone is going to spot a weakness, make a judgment, pull a winning move. Someone is going to salvage a feeling of being okay at the other's expense. And although violence for them is still taboo, and although the social structure still stands around them, with its police force, its building personnel, its taxi cabs, there is something in their struggle that is reminiscent of the anarchy of pre-feudal times when might made right in most relations.

Machiavelli for the Masses

In Renaissance Italy, Niccolo Machiavelli (1532) argued that a prince must be prepared to murder if it served his purposes and that in order to be strong and popular he need not be virtuous but only appear so. He explained political ruthlessness in terms of pragmatism--if one isn't prepared to undermine or betray potential rivals, one will, in the end, be undermined or betrayed by them. Machiavelli's cool observations of princely relations cut through the chivalric flourishes of the day to the power realities underneath. He was widely cursed and deplored for this--in England Old Nic became a sobriquet for the devil (Bronowski and Mazlish, 1960)--but he essentially spoke the truth of how things functioned at that level of society, where no one stood above to enforce codes or honor or ethics, where there was no law to which these sovereign rulers were beholden, and where matters were routinely decided according to raw power.

Although, as both Machiavelli (1532) and Adler (see Stepansky, 1983) have suggested in different contexts, the will to power may be a universal constant in human affairs, the average person in a traditional society is carefully guided and hemmed in by a web internal and external constraints that serve to keep individuals in their place and to reinforce community stability and communal affiliations. In such situations the ruthless power considerations that concerned Princes were not relevant to the average person. Even commerce, which we now think of as rife with ruthlessness, was carefully regulated so that no one could gain advantage by competitive methods that are considered mild in our day (like price cutting).

And competition was not much of an issue for anyone else. As competition became more and more important, and as the medieval prohibitions on competitive tactics waned, the ruthlessness that Machiavelli described in princely politics became more relevant to the economic realm.

The industrial revolution ushered in an age of pragmatism, especially in the United States. The new spirit--"whatever works"--contributed to the erosion of the Christian principles that had guided Western society for centuries and that were still taken for granted as eternal but were actually on the wane. The effect was an ever more ruthless competition, apparent in the brutal tactics of the robber barons of the 19th century. As we've already noted, a new belief, Social Darwinism, developed partly in order to justify the new pragmatism. Democratic politics was infested with the ruthless spirit, as the early career of even Abraham Lincoln demonstrates (Thomas, 1952).

Individual relationships were undoubtedly the slowest to show the effects of this change. In most aspects of social life, people were still kept on a short leash by fear of punishment, and they were watched over by parents, priests, bosses, and "betters" who tugged the leash whenever they got out of line. Propriety and traditional ethics were a force. One respected one's elders and often obeyed one's parents into middle age. Middle class people were still commonly concerned with honor and their good names until well into this century. But in recent decades the remnants of what was once called bourgeois morality--a mixture of Christian values, propriety, good citizenship, striving, and pragmatism--has experienced a steep decline as all the forces that held traditional bonds in place weakened and as a growing ethic of freedom and equality loosened the constraints on everyday behavior.

A widespread awareness of economic injustice contributed to an already growing sense of alienation from society. Some socialist political movements advocated that working people feel identified and aligned only with their class, while the Communist Parties preached that any behavior taken against the bourgeois ruling class was justified. The idea of equality had all along been eroding the tendency of the lower classes to play a meek role. People now began--with some legitimacy--to ask whether the pride they once took in their jobs and the loyalty they gave the business wasn't naive, considering who was getting the glory and who was getting the profits. The alienation gradually infected citizenship, charity, any area where you could be taken advantage of and made to feel a patsy. People became more suspicious of each other's motives and hypersensitive about their rights. Today groups or individuals who feel they've been wronged often are relatively uninhibited about how they will behave in order to right that wrong.

The can-do spirit of the industrial age and the belief in doing whatever works for a long time made little sense in personal relationships. The pragmatism of everyday life was tempered by the propriety and diluted religion inherited from the past and an ongoing sense of oneness with others in the community. But as mistrust, alienation, and the erosion of old manners, rituals, and beliefs moved apace, ruthlessness began to slip into daily life and arouse new anxieties.

The change in concerns is evident in the change in self-help literature. Until 1800 it will be recalled the main emphasis was on manners. Afterwards a new practical how-to literature of success was born, emphasizing efficiency and upward mobility. In 1936, Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People began a new trend toward concern with interpersonal politics, image, and manipulation. Carnegie's emphasis on the importance of "sincerity" was revolutionary in a way, because he demonstrated, without saying as much, how to appear sincere while actually being quite inauthentic. To openly favor manipulation, in Carnegie's day, would have been unthinkable, but judging by Carnegie's success (millions of copies later the book is still in print), people were eager for help in the art of manipulating others. A decade later Stephen Potter, the British humorist, explored the forbidden topic of the purposeful manipulation of others with a series of books on "gamesmanship" and "one-upsmanship" (1947, 1950, 1952). Potter offered devilish advice on such things as how to win at games "without actually cheating" which were a tongue-in-cheek critique of middle-class values as they had evolved in his day. In 1964 Berne, also using humor but quite serious in his description of neurotic behavior, hit the best-seller list with Games People Play, documenting how interpersonal manipulations become damagingly ingrained in relationships. Each of these books, spaced many years apart, seemed very fresh when they came out, offering people a peek into something that was somehow unthought of before.

Carnegie's orientation was practical: Here's how to use interpersonal maneuvers to get ahead. Potter's view was essentially moral. Berne was clearly concerned with the psychopathology of everyday life, how interpersonal maneuvers get imbedded unconsciously in relationships and in styles of relating. A fourth author, Goffman (1959, 1967, 1969, 1974), viewed these human interactions from a strictly sociological point of view, steadfastly refusing to comment on morality or character. One could argue that the interpersonal dynamics observed by Berne and Goffman came to light at this time because the social sciences are a relatively new discipline, and few had attempted these sorts of observations of ordinary people earlier. But society had also been changing, and its changes have showed up not just in trends in psychopathology but in social options and pressures as well. The change is evident in Carnegie's literary descendents.

There are now enough works on the how-to's of interpersonal politics to fill a library, most of them straightforward advice in the Carnegie style without the squeamishness he demonstrated about calling a spade a spade. In the mid-seventies, overtly Machievellian works, directed at the average person, caused a momentary sensation. Korda's Power! How to Get It, How to Use It (1975) voiced an explicit concern with coming out on top in office politics and in the give and take of social life. His main recommendation was the clever use of image maneuvers. Shortly afterwards, Ringer's Winning Through Intimidation, self-published in 1974, reached the attention of the general public who gradually made it into a best-seller despite its rejection by major publishing houses. In this and in a later volume, Looking Out for Number One (1977), Ringer, a disciple of Ayn Rand, recommended that people who were tired of being nice-guy losers, relax the constraints of traditional morality and look at life the way it is really lived. Soon titles were spilling onto the bookstore shelves, advising the average person on how to win, come out on top, have his own way, stop broadcasting loser's vibrations, how to speak like a winner, dress like a winner, and so forth.

Special volumes were written just for women. The early works were mainly on assertiveness and saying no without feeling guilty (e.g. Smith, 1975). But as women spent more time in the managerial and professional work environment, they apparently discovered that assertiveness--essentially strong, direct, nonmanipulative speech--could not succeed against more sophisticated power maneuvers. New titles corrected that problem (e.g., Harragan's Games Mother Never Taught You: Corporate Gamesmanship for Women, 1977), so that the contemporary woman is better versed in the politics, maneuvers, image games, and Machiavellian realities of corporate work. Other volumes (e.g., Dyer's Pulling Your Own Strings, 1978) addressed themselves more explicitly to personal relationships. The myriad of books on the power politics of daily life vary considerably in message, tone, and quality and rarely recommended a ruthless disregard for the feelings or rights of others or purposely trying to activate their shame. But, overall, they represent a single trend in which terms like image, game plan, and political shrewdness--not to mention playing hardball, playing to win, looking our for number one, and going for the jugular--are no longer applied only to the powerful few. These terms are applied to ordinary people engaged in the business of daily life, where a social hierarhcy, broadly understood and accepted rituals, and the rules of civility no longer hold sway. Under such conditions the power-shame dynamic readily comes into play even if it is never named or understood.

It could be argued that we have witnessed a new ethic, a winning ethic, which operates alongside traditional ethics, propriety, and pragmatism in our confusing social life. How big a part it plays is impossible to say, but, because traditional standards lack the firm basis in communally held belief systems and in community sanctions they once had, the winning ethic is self-accelerating.

The drift toward ruthlessness is apparent in subtle changes in who is applauded and admired. It is now common, especially in popular entertainment, to see behavior that used to be condemned as caddishness, exploitation, or thievery admired as daring or genius or a healthy selfishness. Even brutality is justified (see the films of Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwartzenegger, Charles Bronson, or Steven Segal) as necessary acts of vigilantism or revenge in a world where authorities can no longer be depended upon to be competent, ethical, or fair. In such an environment, the weakness of traditional standards suddenly becomes plain, and people seek security elsewhere. Where society's sanctions begin to favor ruthlessness in daily life, if in no other way than by standing aside, people inevitably become nervous and prepared for the worst, even if they don't actively begin to think in strategic terms. As in the case of Marge and Chuck, the anxious preparations themselves can help incite the very thing that is feared, especially when they mix with the kinds of emotional insecurity and disturbances that are common today.

The dynamic can appear in any relationship where there's a struggle--over sex, money, who loves whom more, where to go on vacation, how to discipline the children. The dynamic shows up in business, between parents and children, between friends, wherever people compete, get angry, feel threatened. If I, for instance, am explaining my dissertation topic to a colleague and she says she doesn't quite get what I'm talking about, this may be threatening to me. I may feel that this confirms some shame I have about being too abstract or inarticulate. And depending on what my childhood training was like and what kind of transference issues exist with this friend, I may try to counteract the shame anxiety that her noncomprehension arouses in me by trying to establish that she is slow. I may make a dig at her with a pointed joke about her dimwittedness. That may not be a Narcissistic Shame issue for her, but the disapproval apparent in my tone may reach whatever narcissistic issue she has, especially if she sees me as a figure to be respected. Such power-shame interactions can occur in almost any situation:

- A friendly disagreement over a book, a film, or a presidential candidate can take on a painful hidden agenda as, between the lines, the debaters struggle to establish their intelligence, their worthiness, their right to respect.

- An office discussion about how much to spend on a birthday gift for the boss's secretary can slip into a threatening exchange as each person tries to prove that he is not cheap, that he likes the secretary as much as anyone else, or that those who want to spend more or less want to do so because of hang-ups or hidden motives.

- A statistician is asked by his supervisor to temporarily vacate his office because a co-worker needs it for an important project. Although the request is understandable in strictly practical terms and although the statistician is perfectly capable of working elsewhere, he feels an inexplicable feeling of threat. He fears that if he acquiesces, he will be stripped of his small allotment of security and authority. He senses that this innocent-sounding request symbolizes how low his stock has fallen. Why wasn't someone else asked to move? As the pros and cons are discussed in terms of cost-effectiveness, space requirements, and levels of seniority, his Narcissistic Shame anxiety grows more and more intense and it elicits a similar anxiety in his supervisor, who may begin to feel that his motives are unclean. As voices become strained, each person tries to find something in the other that will give him the emotional upper hand.

Winning in such cases is not exactly the same as other forms of pragmatism because it does not necessarily mean getting one's way. It is, more importantly, an emotional victory in which Narcissistic Shame is activated in the loser. In strategic encounters like this there is often a threat, based on prior experience with similar situations--a prior experience that many people first have with their parents. For people who have been sensitized in this way, any conflict is likely to raise the specter of shame. They intuitively know that if they can make the other person the problem, they can be more at ease with themselves. Is A a horny, grasping, sexually graceless man? Or is B a frightened, frigid woman? Is A a rigid, inconsiderate boss? Or is B a lazy, rebellious secretary? And so on. This dynamic may now be the key power-shame equation of modern life, replacing, in a sense, the power-shame equation of class society.

All the pressures people experience today regarding what one must be in a relationship--assertive, understanding, able to listen, able to help, able to protect oneself--add a further dimension of defensive concern. Wheelis (1958) writes, "The unconscious has declined in significance but has by no means disappeared. Insofar as it exists at all it renders one vulnerable; for everyone knows that it usually shows to others before it shows to one's self" (p. 49)--and, given the games people now play, one is worried now only about what others will see but how they will use it.

In such a climate, children are inevitably affected, because parents unconsciously absorb the new reality and pass it on to their children in intensified form. Children learn strategic tactics that are modeled in the home and apply them throughout their lives. They also learn the importance of coming out on top and the shamefulness of being bested. The choice of friends, mates, or careers can be affected by such concerns.

In the previous chapter we discussed the way parent-child relations are affected by modern social conditions and, in particular, the shift from a secure sense of parental authority to one based more on controls that tend to inflict or inflame Narcissistic Shame. Early relationships with parents have been long been assumed to form the basis for later relationships. Whether it is understood from the point of view of transference, internal working models (Bowlby, 1982), or cyclical psychodynamics (Wachtel, 1977), it appears that people continue to play the parts they learned to play with their parents or that their parents played with them, especially in their closest relationships. Where authority and control is associated with inflaming Narcissistic Shame in another person, one will anticipate and act out such a dynamic in one's adult relationships. Dominance and submission in relationships comes to be specifically keyed to this dynamic. This will show up most acutely in marriages and similar relationships.

Case Study of Martin and Georgette: The Subject-Object Component of Personality

The second case I will use from my 1987 work concerns Martin and Georgette, a married couple. Two incidents from their relationship demonstrate how the dominant-submissive, or subject-object, style of the relationship is constantly reenacted. One centers around the night of Georgette's 35th birthday when the two are trying to have sex despite a feeling that their relationship is shaky. The sex doesn't work well, and afterwards they feel more distant than before. Georgette, who is superficially more shame-prone in the sense that she knows when she is feeling bad about herself, is eager to get some reassurance. Martin, who is a dynamic and successful man, impatient with his wife's depressions and intolerant of his own self-doubts, defends against encroaching shame with anger:

> Martin: "How was it?" (I can't bear the thought that I'm not a good lover.)
>
> Georgette: "Fine." (I'm ashamed to admit I need more.)
>
> Martin: "You don't sound find." (You're ruining it again, Georgette.)
>
> Georgette: "I'm sorry." (I hate myself.)
>
> As Georgette nestled into Martin's arm and as Martin set his jaw, angered over what he had to put up with, their subject-object tendencies were now fully in place. (Karen, 1987, p. 27)

The couple's bedroom exchange is not only an event in which one person manages to feel okay at another's expense; in this case it also defines a relationship. It is similar in some ways to class relationships in which one group is the acknowledged inferior, the cause of whatever problems exist. The common factor in both instances is the use of power as an antidote to shame and as a means of defining both one's own and the other's identity.

To examine this dynamic more closely, let's consider another conflict that arises in this marriage. In this instance Martin asks Georgette what she wants for her her birthday. Georgette, embarrassed by her wish, masks her discomfort with humor, saying "Mink, Dahling" with an aristocratic air. Her underlying shame anxiety, largely unconscious, centers around a long-standing, mainly unconscious picture of herself as being too selfish and the knowledge that first her mother and now her husband will be quick to exploit her shame if she makes them uncomfortable in any way. Martin was indeed made uncomfortable by her request for a mink coat. He responded, "Yeah, and then a Mercedes for Mother's Day and diamonds for Christmas and you'll be able to hold your head high on Fifty-seventh Street" (1987, p. 7).

That both the subject and the object are operating in ways designed to protect against Narcissistic Shame is apparent from a closer analysis of this exchange:

> Clearly, if Georgette is ashamed of her desire for a fur coat, she is going to present a weaker case and buckle under more quickly. But...it is not just a question of whether she feels some self-doubt about wanting a mink; it is also a question of whether she reveals that doubt to Martin. Because if she doesn't reveal it, if she makes wanting the coat seem the most natural thing in the

world..., Martin's conviction weakens. He begins to wonder about his motives. A voice breaks into his consciousness, suggesting that the real problem is not that he objects to killing little animals or that he believes mink is garish and wasteful, but that he is tight-fisted; or that he doesn't really love Georgette the way a good husband should; or that he's just plain unwilling to give. In short, that he is "Cheap!" "Fickle!" "Unloving!" and not a worthy husband. And so it turns out they both have elements of self-doubt just beneath the surface.

But...suppose that instead of being simple, direct, and pleasantly confident in her request, Georgette becomes manipulative, hints at the general inferior quality of Martin's gifts over the years, reminds him of something precious he said to her on their honeymoon, mentions in passing that...good friends were all surprised when they found out that Martin had never bought her a fur coat. Then his inner doubts may begin to whir like sirens; he may feel his position slipping from under him and either abandon it in panic and defeat or escalate the conflict with shouts and overt accusations.

If the balance of power is such that the struggle lasts for more than a few seconds, they will each have time to marshal arguments in an effort to establish some universal right or wrong. Georgette may argue that it is scandalous for a successful man to refuse to buy his wife one measly mink when most of his colleagues have by now bought their wives much more. But the fact remains: Why should anyone give a present he doesn't want to give? Martin may insist that mink-farming is cruel, that fur is frivolous, that such self-indulgence is obscene in a world where people are starving. But considering the apartment they live in, the car they drive, the prevalence in their lives of meat and leather, his argument is clearly self-serving. The real issue in this struggle is not whether a husband who makes 50, 70, or 90 thousand a year should buy his wife a fur coat in a world where other people have no food, but deeply personal feelings about money, giving and getting, respect, past hurts, and associated issues of shame....

Neither Martin nor Georgette can be one hundred percent certain of the legitimacy of their own positions. This is true of all interpersonal conflict. They may argue forcefully, but inside there lurk treacherous question marks. Why am I really saying this? What am I afraid of? Am I the problem? Barring an open discussion of such questions, each attacks the other's weaknesses, trying to undermine the opponent by making his hidden self-doubts unbearably hot. In the end, their struggle will be settled strictly on the basis of who caves in from an intolerable assault of shame and who is able, through between-the-lines exertions of power, to hide or suppress his own self-doubts while inflaming those of his opponent....

> ...If, in the struggle over the fur coat, Martin is able to win decisively, both he and Georgette will believe not that he exploited her self-doubt, but that he was essentially right, that it's obscene to own a mink, and that she is obscene--"Selfish!" "Self-indulgent!" "Superficial!" "Materialistic!"--for wanting one. Even if he gets nasty and she accuses him of meanness and she spends the rest of the day desperately chanting that she's okay and he's not, she will still suffer these churning, self-loathing indictments. As it turned out, Martin was able to ignite her self-doubt with a single sentence and wrap his attack in a smile, so that although Georgette spent the rest of the day depressed, she never thought to blame him for it. (Karen, 1987, pp. 22-23)

In a sense, the outcome of the outcome of the coat incident is pre-ordained because Martin and Georgette are each unconsciously living out their childhood relationships with a parent. Martin feels he must be dominant at all costs and is prepared to repeatedly raise the stakes in order to achieve that. This is particularly true as long as he is picking up signals from Georgette that she expects to be treated shabbily--that is, as long as she continues to play the other half of the transference equation. For her part, Georgette is also engaged in strategic maneuvers that exploit shame, and sometimes she plays the subject role with people who evoke that from her. With Martin, however, her attacks are mainly passive aggressive. She gets even by making Martin feel guilty about working late and about neglecting their daughter; she stops doing things he likes, which had always been a part of their life together, under the ruse that she no longer has the time; she becomes depressed and overeats. It's all a retaliation for the shame he repeatedly makes her feel. But her passive aggression, although it successfully needles him with guilt and shame, does nothing to alter her standing as the problem person.

Her Narcissistic Shame anxiety continues to eat away at her.

Martin had a mother who constantly made global evaluations of his great worth, who had a hawklike eye for weakness, and who made him feel like less than nothing if he ever revealed self-doubts or other qualities that were not to her liking. She taught him by example how to translate shame into achievement, obsession, rage, and blame. As an adult, his advantage, such as it is, is that he does not suffer the same degree of pain as his wife; he is better able to repress his shame. But both partners, by being caught up in this dynamic, are kept from working through shame issues and, of course, are denied an intimate, satisfying marriage. Other couples avoid such roles through endless power struggles, in which angry denunciations or subtle blaming matches cover each person's fear of becoming the shame-bearing victim. In still other couples the dynamic operates more in the background. There are things they don't like in each other--her anxious fealty to her parents, his eagerness to engage strangers--and whenever these issues arise, a subtle struggle is engaged in which each is threatened by a fear that there is something wrong with him for being the way he is or for opposing the way the other is.

Scheff (1987) and Retzinger (1987), who have studied shame-rage spirals in interpersonal communications, have observed the impact of the power-shame dynamic when one person uses anger to dominate another. "What we see in quarrels is that someone says something in anger. It's disrespectful, a put-down. And you see the other person recoil and go into a momentary shame state. They look away. Sometimes their speech gets very soft, or they withdraw. You see men doing this. They get small and their words become few and far between during the shame state. The person who is angry and disrespectful will look large and will be quite fluent. There will be lots of words and they'll be loud, or at least quite audible. What we see, if there's a lot of disrespectful communication, is shame-rage spirals dominating the discourse" (personal communication, September 25, 1990). A similar study could be made of the more subtle ways in which shame is activated.

Shame of Narcissistic Shame

We saw earlier that the rise of manners during and after the Renaissance and the rise of goals regarding what one must be during and after the industrial revolution were each accompanied by a rise in a particular form of shame which was first learned consciously and later absorbed in more unconscious, threatening forms as it was passed down through the generations. The rise of the winning ethic may also be associated with a particular form of shame. If so, logic suggests it is the shame of being a loser. And since losing in this context means having one's Narcissistic Shame exploited, shame of Narcissistic Shame would seem to inevitably follow.

The heightened concern with achieving an untroubled perfection (see, for example, Dyer's How to Be a No-Limit Person, 1980) suggests that shame of shame is increasing. This has been accompanied by the loss of a sense of tragedy and a decline in an acceptance of the fact that the human condition is imperfect and often painful. There is a widespread myth that we live in an era of good cheer, of "Good Times and Good Friends," to quote a recent commercial. Advertising, TV, popular psychology, and the human potential movement have all played a hand in propagating this myth, subtly instructing people in the necessity of being winners and how much they should love themselves. There is an implication in this that one is deformed if one does not share in the false good cheer and implacable self-acceptance. To suffer from Narcissistic Shame is shameful.

By the logic of the winning ethic, there is no solace for those who suffer, only more pain. Shame of Narcissistic Shame can be understood as hating and rejecting oneself for detecting the stain of shame on one's being, or, to put it more ironically but no less accurately, as hating oneself for not loving oneself enough.

Protected Relationships

When shame and guilt are compared, it is often said that guilt has a solution--make amends--whereas there is no solution for shame (see, for example, H. Lewis, 1971). While there is a certain kind of truth to this, one should be careful about it, since shame has had its solutions, too, particularly in the form of protected relationships.

Where shame involves a sense of defect, a need forms for a protective relationship in which it can be voiced and either ameliorated or worked through. Universal Shame is made whole in spiritual communion. The sting is extracted from Class Shame through the brotherhood of the downtrodden. In each case people share a sense of being in the same boat and being fully accepted by the others despite their flaws. In these contexts it is safe to experience and discuss the pain. The protected relationship in Narcissistic Shame is usually one other person with whom one can confide one's feelings of deficiency, self-hatred, or both and feel accepted nonetheless. In such instances, the shame loses some of its global quality. The intense need to run from it through repression, disavowal, dissociation, or compulsive behavior subsides. One is able to examine the issues without panic. Today, for many people, the family offers less opportunity for such intimacy, but they have found in the therapeutic relationship the protected place they need for sharing and exploring the feelings of defect.

Chapter 6.

Clinical Implications

H. Lewis has been the leading theorist regarding shame in the clinical setting. "It is generally agreed," she writes, "that... narcissistic or schizoid personalities often surprise the analyst who has mistaken them for the more familiar...neurotics. It seems possible to me that what is so surprising about these patients is the force of their unanalyzed shame reactions for which analysts are insufficiently prepared" (1987, p. 99).

One of Kohut's most famous cases was that of Mr. Z (1979). During Kohut's first analysis of him, Z was constantly in a rage with the analyst, often complaining of being misunderstood. "The first year and a half of his analysis was dominated by rage," Kohut writes. "These attacks arose in response to my interpretations concerning his narcissistic demands and his arrogant feelings of 'entitlement.'" (cited in Lewis, 1987, p. 100). Mr. Z's rage finally abated when Kohut said, "Of course it hurts when one is not given what one assumes to be one's due" (cited in Lewis, p. 100). For the first time Kohut saw Z's rage as a product of his own interpretations--he had been denying a central experience of deprivation in Z's childhood which still hurt and which Z had a right to be in pain about.

Lewis essentially agreed with Kohut's view of this case, but made the shame experience more central to the success of the second treatment. "As I interpret what happened, Kohut was now treating Z's humiliated fury as an inevitable or at least an appropriate response" (Lewis, 1987, p. 101). That is, it was something he didn't need to feel ashamed of. Lewis believed that the essential difference between the two analyses of Z, was that during the first analysis Kohut had persistently shamed Z for being "infantile," "deluded," "arrogant," or "grandiose" (p. 101). She saw this as typical of a style among a number of analysts, including Otto Kernberg, another major explicator of the personality disorders, who implicitly shame their patients for failing in their adulthood.

It is a commonplace among contemporary shame theorists that the shame factor in human psychology has been largely overlooked until recent years. H. Lewis (1987b) argues, for instance, that what is called resistance in treatment is really a misnomer for shame or guilt. In what ways does shame-based resistance manifest itself? Some patient resistance is based on Situational Shame. It may become activated in people from traditional backgrounds, including especially members of certain ethnic minorities, who feel it is improper to discuss sexual or familial matters with a stranger. This type of shame needs to be respected, just like any other personal value or cultural difference. Situational Shame of this type has been under assault from some segments of the culture as being nothing but an unnecessary hang-up. Schneider (1977) sees the sixties therapist gurus as having been particularly unkind to shame. He emphasizes the loss of respect for modesty, propriety, and privacy, which are all Situational Shame issues. Broucek makes a similar point about psychoanalysis--"shame was considered this neurotic hang-up that got in the way of free association" (personal communication, November 8, 1990).

Resistance, of course, mobilizes around Narcissistic Shame, too. Patients can be very defended against knowing or acknowledging what they consider to be defective in themselves. Resistance may be most severe where shame of shame is involved. A disavowal of shame acts as an additional barrier, and probably has to be addressed before the shame itself can be dealt with.

The patient may also exhibit shame resistance that is at least partly related to class membership (racial, ethnic, economic) which he feels the therapist is unable to appreciate. He may feel he would be betraying his group by revealing those elements of shame to an outsider (or member of an oppressing class). Whether or not the patient's fears or judgments are justified, they may still be a barrier to treatment.

Therapists may collude in a patient's shame resistance by missing it--sometimes for unconscious reasons of their own--or actively avoiding it. This has been a contention of many current shame theorists (e.g., Morrison, 1989). Such avoidance may serve the therapist's own shame issues, especially if they resonate with or complement the patient's. For example:

> A patient is errant on a bill. He doesn't want to talk about it, he wants to get away with it. But underneath he's ashamed that he's working in a menial situation and that he isn't making as much money as he'd like to to be able to pay the bill. The therapist feels greedy. The therapist has some trouble asking for the bill, because he wants a lot of money and he feels ashamed about it. So the bill goes unaddressed. (A. Morrison, personal communication, April 13, 1990)

The therapist may avoid Narcissistic Shame issues in the patient if he admires the patient's defensive posture. An inhibited therapist who relies on reaction formation as a defense against aggression may, for example, admire a patient's capacity for passionate anger. The patient's anger, however, may be a means of masking shameful feelings of inadequacy that do not get touched in the treatment. A similar shame evasion may arise whenever the therapist idealizes the patient.

The Question of Evasion: A Case Illustration

Laura is a 41-year-old single woman whose closest male friends are almost all homosexual. While waiting for a suitable marriage partner, she's created a social life that includes female friends, couples, and gay parties. Straight men occasionally enter her life in the form of debilitating obsessions. They are invariably men--her psychotherapist, her married supervisor--who are completely uninterested in pursuing a relationship with her. "Maybe I'm just a fag hag," she shrugs. "I like being with gay men."

To be in the presence of a man with whom a lasting relationship is possible triggers in Laura a latent and unconscious shame. The wound was implanted largely through experiences with her seductive father, who became overwhelmed and disgusted by his desire for her and turned his disgust on his daughter. The precocious sexuality, which her father had helped to promote, a sexuality that remains one of her vibrant but sadly quarantined qualities, became tainted for her.

A parent's sexual feeling for a child is usually a healthy, energizing aspect of the relationship, which builds rather than undermines self-esteem. But in Laura's case, as pleasurable as her father's attention had been, it went a little too far, subtly violating her boundaries and flooding her with feelings she was not ready for and wasn't sure were right. For that reason alone, her sexuality can sometimes have a shameful sense of discomfitting exposure associated with it. Even as a child, Laura could sense some of the guilt her father felt for letting his feelings for her flow so strongly at the expense of his wife, and this too helped contribute to her sense of sexual wrongness. But his subsequent rejection while she kept reaching out was the major source of damage. To even think now about seriously dating a man causes the old shame to begin crowding her consciousness with sneers of "Dirt!" "Slut!" and "Needy thing!"

Laura's mother, angry and jealous, removed herself early on and stood aside during this ordeal. As a result, Laura unconsciously came to believe that she was unworthy of the care and protection her mother might have given her. Implicit in this, of course, is a sense of Narcissistic Shame. Today, she incorporates both her father's contempt and her mother's neglect, so that a life in which many of her fundamental needs go unmet seems normal to her.

Past analyses of Laura's conflicts might have focused on her rage toward men, on the guilt she feels about incestuous wishes toward her father, or on the guilt she feels toward her mother for having monopolized her father's desire. The importance of these themes should not be underestimated. Neurotic guilt could cause Laura to become preoccupied with making reparations--not only with her father or mother, but with anyone who doesn't treat her well. It could distort her work life, making her feel that her only legitimate role is slaving to help others. But the issue of shame, equally important, might easily be disregarded.

A treatment that was more sensitive to shame would give Laura the opportunity to articulate attitudes and feelings about herself that she has always kept hidden and to examine them anew. To speak a shunned feeling of shame can be like emerging from a harsh, self-imposed regime where the unexamined voice of contempt rules without check and where the self lives, to some extent, as a second class citizen, shrunken and wearing a shroud. The therapist's sympathetic stance might gradually enable Laura to be a kinder parent to herself, not only by undoing some of the deprivations that she unthinkingly fosters upon herself, but by looking at her pain the way she might look at a hurting child rather than a loathsome adult. Without this aspect of treatment, no matter how much insight she gained, she might still leave with a nagging, unconscious sense of defect.

Many of the theorists now writing about shame (e.g., Nathanson, personal communication, April 8, 1990) believe that cases like Laura's are numerous, in which therapists, often analysts, have either avoided or missed the patient's shame.

One of the unanswerable questions in any debate about trends in treatment is knowing with any certainty how exactly the majority of analysts (or any other group of therapists) actually work. Has shame been disavowed to the extent that many who have recently written about shame insist? Or are they simply slicing familiar material in a new way, and, in doing so, enabling new insights and possibilities to emerge? My own belief is that good therapists have always worked with shame to some extent. It may not have been named, but the sensitivity was there and so was the healing power. Treating painful, hidden feelings of defect is an intuitive aspect of the therapist's job. Arlow (1990), who has written sensitively on subjects that many would now classify under the heading of shame (although he himself does not), believes that a lot of the fuss about shame today is largely semantic ("Most conflicts in analysis are definitional"). He argues that much of what is now being called shame has not been overlooked by more orthodox Freudians but simply called by other names, mainly guilt (J. Arlow, personal communication, November 17, 1990). (Other terms have included inferiority feelings, embarrassment, narcissistic injury, social anxiety.)

Arlow defines shame as "an unpleasant affect connected with feelings of self-reproach, with an ideational content of the reproach being experienced as potential condemnation emanating from other persons. Experiences of that sort had been part of the individual's past and the experience of shame harkens back to such earlier painful instances of reproach, accompanied, of course, by the danger of loss of love" (personal communication, March 4, 1991). But Arlow believes that labeling a feeling guilt or shame or anything else is an inherently messy procedure. "It all depends," he says, "on the accompanying fantasy and ideational content. It's very hard sometimes to say the patient feels *just this*. Because at any moment contributions from different levels of experience at different times in one's life may enter into the ideational content" (personal communication, November 17, 1990). Arlow therefore favors sticking as closely as possible to the patient's actual words, and not fussing so much about definitions. As for the new emphasis on shame and the new ways it is now being defined, Arlow sees a political motive. "Persons dedicated to self psychology are recasting formulations concerning shame in order to accommodate it into the structure of the theory of self psychology" (personal communication, March 4, 1991).

Psychoanalysis had for many years a strongly masculine, scientific, individualistic bent that seemed much more comfortable with a careful emotional neutrality that would enable the patient to heal himself than a warm, accepting stance toward those who needed it (H. Lewis, 1981). When Alexander (1946) began writing about the importance of giving the patient a "corrective emotional experience," many in the field were horrified and the phrase became an object of scorn. With the growth of object relation theories, and self psychology, that has begun to change. But for a long time, some current shame theorists contend, most analysts were squeamish about being supportive or getting too close to certain feelings (e.g., A. Morrison, personal communication, April 13, 1990). They limited themselves to making interpretations about the patient's unconscious conflicts, and, according to Basch, "analytic work suffered tremendously" as a result (personal communication, September 24, 1990).

Current shame theorists typically believe that therapists who lacked a natural feel for dealing with shame states, who were rigidly tied to whatever they'd been taught, or who were defensive about their own unexamined shame, could easily, sometimes damagingly, evade the whole thing (A. Morrison, personal communication, April 13, 1990). Indeed, if anything has fueled the current interest in shame among analysts, it's the painful disappointing memories some of today's leading shame theorists have of their own experiences as patients. For instance, Morrison says:

> As I look back on my childhood, it was loaded with shame. But I had a first analysis during medical school that was all based on oedipal conflict--competition with my father, guilt around sexual feelings for my mother. It was helpful but never really touched feelings of shame and inferiority--even though I kept trying to come back to them." (personal communication, April 13, 1990)

F. Broucek concurs:

> Shame has been the silent emotion in therapy, often unidentified by both patient and therapist. Psychoanalysts, at least when I went through analysis about twenty years ago, didn't understand very much about shame. Shame was considered just a kind of neurotic hang-up that prevented us from being able to get in touch with our true instinctual desires and needs. I had a lot of shame issues in my life growing up, and I don't feel they were recognized or dealt with. My own analyst failed to pick up on those times when I was really suffering from acute experiences of shame. My reluctance to deal with certain things was always interpreted on some other ground--anger, anxiety, resistance, hostility toward the analyst. (personal communication, November 8, 1990)

The very way analysis tended to be conducted in those days (and often still is) only made matters worse.

> There was something shame aggravating about the whole process, the whole nature of the psychoanalytic set-up--the distant, aloof, anonymous analyst, the poor bleeding patient on the couch; if you wanted to design a human relationship to elicit as much shame as possible, you couldn't design one better than that! (F. Broucek, personal communication, November 8, 1990)

Broucek argues that when the therapist is reluctant to deal with shame issues, it is almost impossible for the patient, even in the unlikely event that he himself is not colluding in the evasion, to bring the topic around.

> The thing about shame is, one tends to deny it to oneself. It would be simpler if I knew then what I know now about shame, but back then nobody talked about it and there was nothing to read about it. Besides, as a patient you don't feel like an authority on anything. You're feeling very inadequate, inferior, and you're not likely to challenge anyone's point of view. You're apt to submissively accept whatever's being offered, even if it doesn't feel right at some level" (personal communication, November 8, 1990).

When the patient does insist on discussing shame, as might be the case if Laura began to speak openly of her self-hatred or inferiority feelings, many therapists, analyst or not, might still suspect that her shame was just a way-station on the way to the real stuff, like an unconscious wish to kill her mother or father. If that happened, her need to come out of the closet, to be seen and understood for exactly who she is, would be frustrated. S. Miller, who, like Broucek, works in the analytic tradition, recalls the case of a man who had raped his daughter and who subsequently volunteered for her research project in which she interviewed people about their shame experiences. "Shame just pervaded his life," she says. "But his therapist wanted to talk about anger all the time. He experienced tremendous frustration because he hadn't been heard" (personal communication, November 9, 1990).

Shame is melodramatic. It strikes at our sense of humanness, fostering images of ourselves as animals, bugs, or things. And it has a contagious quality, not only because it is traditionally shameful to look upon another's shame (H. Lewis, 1971), but because its appearance nearby can upset the tenuous peace we've made with reality and bring our own latent issues of shame to the surface.

To the extent that there has been a professional evasion of shame, this may help account for it, as would certain shame-aversive trends in the culture. Our society values independence, action, domination. We expect to be free of fear, sadness, wounds. As both Erikson (1950) and Alexander (1938) have noted in different contexts (cited by Miller, 1989), guilt is often felt to be a preferable state to shame. When guilty, at least, we're an active evil doer. There's something weaker, more passive and victimized about being ashamed. "People are ashamed of being ashamed," Scheff says. "So we don't talk about it, we don't express it, and we don't acknowledge it. We say we're uncomfortable, or 'It was an awkward moment'--these are code words for shame" (personal communication, September 25, 1990).

The Problem of Confusing Shame With Guilt

If one is burdened by extremely harsh injunctions, such that any act on behalf of the self is seen as a crime against others; such that feelings or desires are made to feel like serious transgressions; or such that one is forced into the habit of feeling responsible for too much and blaming oneself for whatever goes wrong, then, inevitably, one will be haunted by neurotic guilt.

The same thought, impulse, or action can be a cause for guilt or shame, depending on the individual and the social context. One man takes a newspaper from a vender without paying and is later haunted by guilt--how can I rob this poor, hardworking man--and wants to make amends. Another man does the same and is haunted by shame--look what a lowlife I am, how ill-bred, how much like people I abhor. In our society, where the moral climate has grown very thin and people are not encouraged to agonize over their obligations to others, where many more sorts of behavior are tolerated, but where simultaneously there are many more expectations about what one should be, Narcissistic Shame is not only moving into areas once dominated by Situational Shame, but also into areas once dominated by guilt, including many areas that probably should be dominated by guilt, or, to put it another way, in which guilt would represent a higher order of functioning.

In speaking for the Mount Zion group Bush (1989) writes: "Irrational guilt arises because children make false causal connections between their own behavior and harmful things that happen to them and other family members (p. 100)."

Bush's concept of guilt, however, sometimes sounds more like Narcissistic Shame. He writes: "Traumas that befall oneself, especially those stemming from parental mistreatment and rejection, often produce a deep-seated unconscious belief that one is unworthy and deserves punishment (p. 102)." Accept for the mention of a need for punishment, this seems a perfect description of the development of Narcissistic Shame. But, as he always does when he speaks of self-esteem problems, Bush works them back into the complex of unconscious guilt. He therefore includes as part of the emotional syndrome the belief that one has harmed others, and the need for restitution, punishment. And yet, for the esteem problems he describes, a more realistic concommitant would, I think, be the wish to hide. Weatherford (1989) (another Mount Zion theorist), writes: "We believe that traumas become internally structured in the form of pathogenic beliefs. Such beliefs are faulty causal explanations about how one's wishes, thoughts, feelings, or behavior caused a trauma to occur, and they are central to the etiology of most, if not all, psychopathology" (p. 144). Note that in the Mount Zion perspective, the trauma victim sees himself as having caused rather than having deserved what has happened to him. I would argue that for many the trauma is felt as deserved and the condition is mor aptly described as Narcissistic Shame.

In discussing the danger of misinterpretations in the realm of unconscious guilt, Bush (1989) writes, "if a woman is told that she is struggling with unconscious guilt over her envious and castrating wishes toward men when she is actually struggling with unconscious guilt over her desire to love and be loved by a man, she is not likely to benefit from such an interpretation." But I would like to suggest yet a third interpretation. While it may be possible to feel guilty over wanting to be loved, where negative self feelings are attached to such a desire the person more commonly feels unworthy of love. This represents Narcissistic Shame, not guilt. She is now ashamed to expose her desire to another person--for she stands ready to have her defect spotlighted--"What right does one such as you have to expect to be loved?"

The idea of shame would fit well within the Mount Zion Group's twin concepts of pathogenic beliefs and the therapist's having to pass the patient's tests. The key pathogenic belief in shame is that "I am defective." The key test is, "Can I trust you with my wound?"

Bypassed Shame Between Therapist and Patient: The Work of Helen Block Lewis

During the course of the work, the patient's Narcissistic Shame may be activated. This may happen in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons: Something about the therapist may trigger envy and feelings of inadequacy. It may be a self-confident tone, a hint of arrogance, the patient's catching sight of the therapists spouse or children, noting that he's adding a wing to his house, seeing a new car in his driveway. Any of these things may cause the patient to feel, I'm not as successful, as competent, as able to relate to others, as free, as smart, as good, as smiled upon by fortune as my therapist. The envy component of such situations has been emphasized far more than the shame.

Also, the way the therapist addresses an issue may be wounding to the patient. This is a criticism that has been leveled at Kernberg's methods of treating patients with a borderline personality organization (L. Wurmser, personal communication, September, 24, 1990; H. Lewis, 1987). Or the therapist and patient may get into a conflict. Conflicts, as we've seen, have a tendency to activate Narcissistic Shame, especially if one is dealing with a person who is felt to be superior, or if being wrong is in itself felt to be shameful. The shame-arousing potential is particularly pronounced if the therapist is defensive (I'm not the problem, so it must be you).

The therapist may also be innocently insensitive to the patient's area of Narcissistic Shame. An example of that is the patient whose silence in treatment is felt to be narcissistically shameful because she believes it reflects her global inability to produce. The therapist, not picking up on the element of Narcissistic Shame, keeps suggesting new avenues of production--i.e., "Did you have a dream last night"--that only exacerbate the patient's state of shame. This case will be addressed more fully below.

Finally, shame issues may not be addressed because they are supplanted by power issues. As Basch notes, "Offense is the best defense, and many patients, especially narcissistic patients, try to make you ashamed of yourself, of your needs, of your problems, things that you may be advertising in one way or another by the way your work, by the way you dress, by the way you talk" (personal communication, September 24, 1990). If the therapist has not come to terms with his shame, the treatment may go awry. He may be defeated and proceed on the patient's terms, or he may regain control by using the power of his position to inflame the patient's feelings of Narcissistic Shame.

That the patient's shame was often bypassed in treatment was discussed by H. Lewis in 1971. "The first thing that alerted me that something was missing in our psychoanalytic theory," Lewis said in a discussion before she died, "were a very few but relatively disturbing cases in which there had been a good analysis, the patients were happy, I was happy, we shook hands, that was it. But a couple of months--sometimes it was a couple of years--later, the patient showed up. The good results had vanished" (videotaped presentation, Massachusetts General Hospital, Department of Psychiatry, April 15, 1986).

In each case a painful life event had intruded, "but one would have thought," Lewis says, "that the person might have been strengthened against the return of neurosis. And what seemed awful to me, as I listened now to what they were saying, they had an improved vocabulary of self-denigration! Masochistic, narcissistic--I used to shudder with what they were saying about themselves" (videotaped presentation, April 15, 1986).

Lewis believed that something had not been analyzed, something in the patient's feelings about the analyst, and that it was probably hostility. "Some of them would vent their hostility like crazy in an effort to get better. And I was very drawn to figuring out what the devil was the matter here. And I can no longer tell you what it was that made it seem to me, Maybe shame, maybe unanalyzed shame in the patient-therapist relationship had something to do with this" (videotaped presentation, April 15, 1986)

During her research in Field Dependence and Independence with H. A. Witkin, Lewis examined the transcripts of initial therapy sessions that had been recorded for the study. She found that all sorts of shame-related incidents were going unnoticed in the treatment, and that iatrogenic symptoms were developing new troubles as a result. This confirmed her suspicions about what had happened with the angry patients who returned to her after supposedly being cured (Lewis, 1987).

"Shame," she decided, "is the existential core of the patient-therapist relationship. However good your reasons for going into treatment, so long as you are an adult speaking to another adult to whom you are telling the most intimate things, there is an undercurrent of shame in every session" (videotaped presentation, April 15, 1986). She argued that such shame, if unanalyzed or bypassed, would remain unconscious and come back to haunt the treatment (Lewis, 1971).

Lewis began reexamining the published case histories of other analysts, including Freud, and argued that shame played a more central part than had been understood before. She saw that many analysts not only overlooked their patients' feelings of shame but worsened them with judgmental interpretations, often by implicitly shaming them for failing in their adulthood (H. Lewis, 1971).

Lewis did not focus much on the origin of Narcissistic shame. Her main interest lay in the here and now of the therapy situation. She described a predictable sequence of emotions that followed such moments, in which shame is activated and then ignored in treatment. Hidden rage at the therapist came first. "If I'm humiliated," Lewis explains, "I'm absolutely going to have to get back." But how can you get back at your therapist, she asks, this person "who has worked so hard with you, has been up with you, who just recently said something that relieved you when you were in pain? How can you now want to push his face in the mud?" Guilt thwarts your rage. Your humiliated fury now pointing back at yourself, you sink into depression (H. Lewis, videotaped presentation, April 15, 1986). R. Dattner, who was supervised by Lewis, offers the following example:

> I'll give you an example of a patient, who had been in therapy with somebody else, who came in and the first thing she said was, "I have a problem. I have a lot of shame." And fortunately for her, the previous therapist recognized

> there was something she couldn't work out with the patient. The patient would come in and not talk. And the patient's perception was that she wasn't able to produce. It was a long-standing view she had of herself that she didn't have anything. And so the therapist, in an attempt to help her elicit more material, would say, "Did you dream last night?" [which caused more shame]. And it became a vicious cycle, which spiraled down into depression, which had really been helped along by the therapy. Fortunately both the patient and the therapist realized they were at an impasse of some sort and they couldn't get out of it. And so by mutual agreement the patient left.... This therapist, who I know and who's a very good therapist somehow didn't' get it. That actually what she was doing in her attempt to help was to put her patient more into a profound depression because of the unacknowledged, unrecognized shame.... We couldn't do anything about preventing the emotion occurring, but it was the recognition of the sequence from the bypassed shame through the humiliated fury, into the state of guilt, and ultimately into depression, that we had to review over and over again [in the treatment]. (R. Dattner, personal communication, September 27, 1990)

Lewis cautions that rigid, unfeeling styles of treatment are anathema to shame-prone patients and warns therapists against side stepping a patient's signals of shame; for, if they do, they will often create symptoms that weren't there before, and patients will not only fail to progress but slide backwards (H. Lewis, 1971, 1981, 1987).

The Protected Relationship: Psychotherapy

We've noted that shame can be ameliorated or worked through in the context of certain protected--and protective--relationships. The church can serve this function, as can the closely knit group. In both of those cases one not only feels free to have the traits that are considered shameful, but it is understood that all other members of the group share them. How does this function operate at the personal level, where the hated traits are not necessarily shared?

The experience of therapy suggests that being able to come out of hiding and speak one's shame to another person is a healing process. I have a patient who is prone to spend time ragefully condemning her husband. But when she is able to stop and face the shameful fact that she is a shrew to her husband, she is free to stop the endless litany of blame and to feel again. The litany of complaints, the incessant demands that the therapist see things from her point of view, the guilt-tripping accusations that he always takes her husband's side, are part of her flight from feeling, fueled by the desperate fear that she will be found in the wrong. To stop running and experience the shame is to give herself a chance to recognize that being in the wrong in the sense of acting like a shrew, does not mean that her husband isn't also wrong in his way, nor does it make her into a poisonously deformed and unlovable thing. That's a legacy of how she experienced being wrong when she was a child. But it's a legacy she cannot overcome as long as the shame remains unconscious, unspoken, and fled from. Once spoken, to someone who is able to listen and absorb without becoming anxious, something changes. She is able to view herself from a freer, less tyrannical perspective, able to feel some sympathy for herself and her predicament. Able to see that it is, in part, her cruel lack of sympathy for herself that fuels her rages and her desperate need to blame. Gradually, she has been able to look at a deeper issue of shame, closer to her core--of feeling unwanted, a piece of excess baggage, a little girl who felt she constantly had to prove her worth. The clarifying, sympathetic, clean relationship with the therapist helps guide and contain this process, and at times helps liberate her self-love.

What aspects of a therapeutic relationship (of the professional or nonprofessional type) allows for such liberation? A relationship where a person feels free to explore secret aspects of the self which are normally closely guarded seems to be the key. Putting shame into words with a trusted other enables one to step outside of it--it no longer seems to permeate one's entire being, as it does when one is on the run from it and using various defenses to keep it at a distance from consciousness. There are several components of this relief: 1) The I that is addressing the problem is no longer equivalent to the tainted I; the self is raised to another dimension. 2) The other's caring, understanding, and acceptance says, in effect, "Yes, this too is human." 3) Self-compassion is activated, so that one feels toward oneself as one would toward a defenseless child--as opposed to one's normal feelings toward oneself as a well-defended adult. 4) Finally, the person is free to examine the hated aspect of the self with an adult perspective. As long as the shame was repressed, the unconscious global, unforgiving logic of much Narcissistic Shame, implanted in the heat of earlier experience, remains in force.

All this allows a healing perspective to emerge. It can be experienced as a kind of redemption, for the shame anxiety which is often continuously present when Narcissistic Shame is repressed, is, for the time anyway, released. Some Narcissistic Shame may still exist, but it is removed from shame's worst domain, in which the whole self is felt to be unacceptable.

Even where one is able to see that the accusations one has been unconsciously making against oneself--eg., that one is selfish, greedy, inconsiderate, incompetent--are accurate in some respects, the problem becomes more contained, moving from Narcissistic Shame, Type 4 toward Narcissistic Shame, Type 1, or toward Existential Shame. The shame loses some of its tyrannical, irrational, unforgiving quality and one is better able to see how one has been controlled by it.

> Even if you discover that there's truth to the accusation, that you are selfish and do place yourself first in an obsessive way, there are grounds for self-forgiveness. For you see that, although the selfish pattern may be shameful in some respects, the pattern was born of certain childhood reactions that were inevitable at the time, and that far from being a core deformity, it is a common human affliction and within your power to change. (Karen, 1987, p. 155)

Obviously, one such experience is not enough to work through a deep and long-lasting issue of Narcissistic Shame. But over time the therapeutic effect can be profound. This is, of course, somewhat different from the therapeutic goals outlined by H. Lewis, who tries to help the patient see the downward emotional spiral he goes through when shame is activated. I believe, however, that it is in keeping with Lewis's therapeutic stance, as well as that of many of other therapists--whether they would actually define it this way or not.

Overt validation by the other is not usually necessary for this process and often impedes it (see below). But when the patient has been in a power struggle with a third person who has caused the patient's latent Narcissistic Shame to become activated, acknowledging that this is what has happened can be helpful. It can release the individual from the most intense from of Narcissistic Shame anxiety, a painful and obsessive inner debate--I was wrong, he was wrong; I hate myself, I hate him--that such abuse often induces.

Most therapists will probably have noticed that an intervention of this type--e.g., "He treated you very badly"--will often cause a patient to cry. I believe the crying marks a release from a punishing internal process--a transition from brutal self-castigation to sympathy, rationality, and release. The crying itself is probably restorative, both physiologically and emotionally. Anxiety and tension is flushed out of the system, and the defenses, which take up so much energy, break down, giving new freedom, new energy, new clarity.

In everyday life, relationships that allow for such transformations are rare. One popular mode by which people do help each other to discharge shame anxiety is through laughter. (The way laughter and shame interact has been noted in some detail by Retzinger, 1985.) But in coping with shame in a more meaningful way, relationships often fail. Many people find it difficult to listen to pain without becoming anxious. If a friend confides in shameful tones that his child is a homosexual, or that he feels incompetent in his job, or that he can't get an erection any more, he is asking us not to look away, and what's worse, provoking us to tune into painful aspects of our own life where shame lies waiting. We may try to escape from the moment by mouthing meaningless encouragements ("Your kid will grow out of it!" "You just need a vacation!" "Who could get it up with her, the way she treats you?") in the hopes that our energetic sympathy will force him to put his distasteful feelings back where they came from. We may even become secretly angry that he's placed this burden on us and shove him off with a stern warning ("Feeling like this, you know, can only make matters worse"). Not everyone runs from shame this way, but few respond easily or honestly to the painful doubts of others.

Given the unsatisfying experience a patient is likely to have had in communication about shame issues, the therapist's posture takes on great importance. Is he honest? Is he hiding some feeling of disapproval? Is he "just trying to make me feel better" (to quote one of my patients)? Is he trying to diminish the intensity of the experience to lower his own anxiety? Does the particular thing being exposed make him uneasy in some way? Does he remain dry and distant, overly clinical? Does he become too close and take on a maternal position--thus fostering dependency instead of a sense of self-affirmed worth? Any of these false or overly counter-transferential positions can spoil the therapeutic impact.

I suspect that various schools of psychotherapy have tendencies to fall into particular pitfalls. If a cognitive therapist acts as if the patient's Narcissistic Shame represents faulty thinking and can be easily rectified by correct thinking, the depth of the problem may not be accorded its proper due, and the patient may feel left alone with his shame. If a psychoanalyst is determined to remain distant in his effort to keep things pure, with the result that there's no sense of natural human sympathy, the analyst may subtly give the patient grounds for persisting in his self-hatred. If behavioral interventions, like assertiveness training, become the exclusive grounds for treatment, the patient may learn how to operate in certain situations in such a way as to avoid having his Narcissistic Shame constantly reinforced. But his long-standing sense of defect may remain untouched--and he may even sense that his therapist is loath to touch it. A little area of his life has been reclaimed for better functioning; but the ramifications cannot spread into all the areas of behavior and feeling in which Narcissistic Shame radiates its effects. The negative self-concept continues to haunt.

We tend to think of psychotherapy as a realm in which harsh superego functions like guilt and shame are ameliorated. In fact, psychotherapy is also a realm in which guilt and shame sometimes needs to be strengthened. There are behaviors about which a person should feel guilty and in which feeling guilty represents a developmental advance. As Rangell (1975) wrote in his discussion of compromises of integrity, "Analysis may quite appropriately result in a patient experiencing more guilt rather than less." The same might be said of shame, and not just in the sense of helping the patient to feel that which has been repressed. In order to feel shame it is sometimes necessary to have another's point view, to be shown, for example, how one is living, how one is relating to oneself and others. The therapist must be careful, however, that the shame that the patient feels as a result of the intervention is Existential, which requires a basically respectful, trusted, careful, clear stance, and not Narcissistic, which will arise if there is a sense of enacted disrespect or rejection. This is not to say that the patient may not use the therapist's intervention to feed his Narcissistic Shame. But the therapist must be alert to that and pursue the issue further.

Protected Relationships:

Group Management of Shame in Alcoholics Anonymous

A number of years ago I observed a series of AA meetings and came away believing that one of AA's main functions seemed to be the management of shame. People are deeply ashamed of themselves for drinking. It implies desperation and weakness of character and is freighted with memories of degradation. But speak of your shameful habit before people who are sworn not to judge, who will welcome you, praise you, offer you friendship for coming out, who are just as tainted by the stigma themselves, and somehow it doesn't seem so shameful any more. As you laugh with the others about the splendors and depravities of the diabolical juice, you benefit not only from humor's ability to drain off shame anxiety, but from the transforming camaraderie. Suddenly the defect that you'd experienced as a private scourge becomes a shared problem.

The members of AA are concerned about "normal people." The normals are, manifestly, non-addicted, but at another level might be better thought of as non-defective, lacking in a cause for Narcissistic Shame. This naturally engenders envy and efforts to contain it, as it would in a hierarchical class society or a racist society. Some wish they themselves were "normal." Some declare themselves better than normals--who are "fucking up the whole world." Some deny that the normals are normal at all--they just haven't come out of the closet yet and acknowledged their addictions.

"People out there are still doing all the stuff that doesn't work." Some torment themselves, especially when they're first starting out in AA, about whether they couldn't be a "normal" after all instead of adopting this new, officially tarnished identity. But accepting that tarnish, putting that double A on their chest, means achieving a level of at-homeness many of them never knew before. "Once I joined I was no longer an outsider among normal people" (quotes from New York City meetings, April, 1989).

Kaufman notes that the 12-step movement "seems to be fueled by the attempt to unburden oneself of shame." But the shame they tend to deal with best is what Kaufman calls "secondary" shame, that is the shame of being an addict, rather than the more potent feelings of shame that may have caused one to become an addict in the first place. "What these groups invariably do is dissolve the secondary shame immediately. Any time you bring twelve bulimics together and they start telling their stories, that's pretty much guaranteed. And I think that accounts for the power of these groups and the way they have been spreading and attracting adherents" (personal communication, September 24, 1990).

In many cases the shame is probably not so much dissolved as toned down. The shame anxiety is reduced, and the shameful thing becomes more conscious and manageable. The quality of the shame moves away from Narcissistic Shame, Type 4, being transformed into something like Class Shame, Universal Shame, Narcissistic Shame, Type 1, or in some cases Existential Shame, depending on the individual and the group psychology.

Other issues of shame are revealed as well, and this too seems to have value for the members, even if Kaufman is correct in asserting that core issues of shame cannot be successfully dealt with in this environment. All the defectiveness that members thought they would be rejected for in the normal world is welcomed here. The more profoundly disturbing material one can dredge up, the more sympathy one gets, and acclamation for having shared it. Shame thus becomes a source of value. People speak readily about being depressed, lonely, unhappy; about "feeling shitty"; about doing things that society "would have me locked up for" (quotes from New York City meetings, April, 1989).

And it's not just over bad things you've done: it's how you feel about yourself--your self-doubts and your self-hatreds--which can now be exposed. These things were the dirtiest secrets of your life in the normal world. And the fact that they were kept a secret made you feel horribly, oppressively other, a central feature of Narcissistic Shame.

Much of this is the typical reaction of an oppressed or stigmatized group. Before they joined AA, few members probably divided the world so clearly into themselves and normals--at least not along the alcoholic axis--and few of them had any constructive way to manage their shame. Their shame was a private narcissistic wound, as is typical of shame in our society. But joining AA, they've at the very least traded in a portion of their Narcissistic Shame for a peculiar kind of Class Shame, which is inherently easier to bear.

Like members of the medieval church who accepted without question that they were all sinners, AA members take comfort in knowing that they are all in some sense cripples. As long as everyone must begin by saying, "My name is X, and I am an alcoholic," no one need fear being inferior. There is a communal equality based on some aspect of unworthiness or shame. (I am not familiar enough with AA to know if issues of superiority and inferiority sneak in in other, subtler ways.) The efforts many of them make to include the "normals" in their problems, to assert that "the people out there" are just as damaged but aren't doing anything about it, suggests the discomfort they feel at accepting class inferiority. In AA there is a tendency for some to want to push the shame to an even higher level of comfort, Universal Shame. Nevertheless the comforts this organization provides are clearly immense. In one of the meetings I attended, a speaker said, "I don't want a million dollars. I want to identify in an AA meeting. That's what makes me happy" (quotes from New York City meetings, April, 1989).

When families are bound tightly together, others in the family knew all there was to know about you, all your dirty laundry, but you were accepted because you belonged, and there was not much that could undo the sense of belonging. It's not that way any more for many people in this society. Their dirty laundry is not so well known because even immediate families are not as involved in each other's business to the degree that the largest of extended families used to be. Nor do people today feel as accepted: parents and children lose contact; marriages break up. Meanwhile, everyone puts on his best image and hides his vulnerability. At AA your dirty laundry will be seen, at least the part of it that has wine stains (your presence confesses to that); and you will be accepted, responded to, and probably applauded. ("Hi, I'm Brian and I'm an alcoholic." "Hi, Brian!!!!!") (from a New York City meeting, April, 1989). So in a sense AA is not just an alcoholism treatment program, but also a specialized treatment for the alienation of our time.

The Tendency to Overvalue Narcissistic Shame

New trends in psychoanalysis often represent efforts to work with aspects of the residue of childhood experience in therapy that have been left out by earlier perspectives. If we look at the case of Laura, we can see how important the oedipal perspective is, with its recognition of the terrible power of neurotic guilt, and how important is the additional perspective on Narcissistic Shame, with its capacity to cripple one's sense of self, to inhibit, and to fuel compulsive activity. In Laura's case the object-relations perspective is at least as important as the first two. It helps explain--or at the very least emphasizes more strongly--both her incorporation of her parents attitudes toward her and also a powerful, continuing commitment and allegiance to her father. Laura's father tore himself away from her in an emotionally brutal way at a time when she was ill-prepared for it. She reacted like a small person in a storm, hugging a tree for dear life, even though in her case it was the tree itself who had created the storm by rejecting her. Her development was thereby retarded, so that even in her forties she is pre-occupied with the events of her adolescence, reflecting back on them as if they happened yesterday, and becoming obsessionally involved with men who, like her father, are rejecting and unavailable.

The danger with any new model is that it may easily become overvalued because it had been overlooked before. I believe shame offers an important perspective, but not the most important, and to make it the centerpiece of most emotional problems, as some theorists are inclined to do today (see, for example, Kaufman, 1989) is probably mistaken.

A comprehensive picture of how shame operates in psychopathology is not yet drawn. It may never be. Once grasped, this concept seems to change into a thousand shapes in one's hand. It grows from complexity to complexity until suddenly it seems to be everywhere--and if that's the case, it begins to lose its potency and collapse into relative uselessness. Besides, emotional disturbance is rarely so neat that it can be traced to one source. There are always numerous interwoven factors. Theoretical categories, like Narcissistic Shame, don't always do justice to the reality.

A sustained emotional disturbance in childhood has ramifications throughout the personality. It can affect one's expectations of others, one's habits of being (like proneness to obsessiveness or depression), one's ways of relating, one's treatment of oneself, one's very perception of reality. Damaging early experience can make one fearful, guilty, suspicious, or rageful; skewed family relationships can leave a child overly enmeshed with or dependent upon a parent. Inevitably such experience also distorts one's view of oneself, in part by implanting Narcissistic Shame, which, often unconsciously, helps explain the hurts one has received and why they are deserved, or which inevitably accompanies peculiar or crippling differences ("Mama's Boy!"). And, as we've seen, this, too, can skew one's life, with inhibitions, addictions, complaints, and poses, all designed to keep the sense of shame at bay.

In treatment, the shame phenomenon requires a special sensitivity. The patient is hypersensitive about acceptance and abandonment and uncertain of whether he can trust the therapist with his wound--a wound which, he no doubt senses, the therapy situation has great potential to exacerbate. The therapist needs to win over the hiding, shameful side of the personality and gradually help it to heal. Whether, however, the patient's shame is potent enough, as in Polly's case (see Chapter 4), to be considered the central feature of the disorder, the destination toward which most therapeutic roads must ultimately lead, is another matter entirely.

Although narcissistic shame is just one causative factor in psychiatric conditions, it seems able to work its way into virtually any form of psychological problem, much as bacteria breed in an area of inflammation, whether or not they were initially responsible for the inflammation. As soon as one finds something in oneself to dislike and wish to turn away from, as soon as you feel uncomfortably different or deficient, Narcissistic Shame becomes involved and complicates the equation.

Various factors can intensify this shame even when it's not a core issue. If you've been conditioned to feel that you must be superior in all things, any imperfection may feel like a deformity. If you grew up in a household where differences and idiosyncracies were routinely denigrated, you may be similarly haunted by an anxiety about impending shame. At the very least, Narcissistic Shame acts as a barrier--resistance--against exploration, and, generally, it must be worked through before the deeper areas of conflict can be approached.

To the therapist the relative depth, intensity, and origin of shame will suggest different treatment goals and methods. And so there is bound to be considerable debate over the extent to which shame is now being identified as the core emotion in so many psychiatric syndromes and a concern about getting carried away with this new idea. Precisely because shame does have the ability to get into everything, it is easy to imagine that some of its champions may see it as central when in fact it is peripheral. S. Miller (personal communication, November 9, 1990), for instance, disagrees with Kaufman (1989) that shame is always at the heart of eating disorders and finds some of her fellow shameniks a bit too glib in seeing shame as the underlying factor in all conflicts around aggression. The causality sometimes runs the other way.

Anger and aggressiveness are sometimes inhibited because they have been made shameful, but they are frequently inhibited for other reasons--because one fears retaliation, one is hesitant to compete with or surpass a parental rival, because one lacked an adequate role model, or some combination of these things. If a boy has a father who is unable to be forceful and is not on good terms with his own aggressiveness, the boy may come to feel uncertainty and self-doubt in his masculinity and, at a certain age, ashamed of not having accomplished critical things, like marriage, fatherhood, or career advancement. His inhibition may have other consequences, as well, compromising his freedom to be himself with others and making him susceptible to feeling ashamed of being weak, fraudulent, ineffectual, or sneaky. The inhibition of his aggression may contribute to periodic explosiveness and shame about that, too. But the problem that he ultimately needs to focus on is not shame so much as the unconscious and restrictive identification he's made with his passive father, an identification that has caused him to fail to develop the forceful side of his personality.

According to S. Miller, "The more difficulty people have allowing themselves to be aggressive the more vulnerable they are to shame. But if you can work on what inhibits the aggression, the shame to a great extent will take care of itself." Miller concludes that "As people have been trying to give shame its due in recent years, there has been a tendency for the pendulum to swing too far, to believe that everything is shame and narcissistic stuff" (personal communication, November 9, 1990). It will probably be quite some time before enough research and theorizing accumulates to slow the pendulum and allow a more balanced assessment to take hold.

Chapter 7.

Conclusion

The shame experience is best understood as several different kinds of experiences. A tendency to define shame as just one thing has helped account for the confusion and for some of the debates that exist in the literature. While certain forms of shame are associated with ongoing feelings of inferiority or defect (Universal, Class, Narcissistic), such an imbedded sense of deficiency is not a part of the Existential or Situational shame experience. While shame (especially Situational and Narcissistic) is usually associated with feelings of rejection, abandonment, or loss of one's essential interpersonal connections, this too is not an absolute requirement of the shame experience. While most forms of shame are superego factors, such is not the case with Existencial Shame, which is best thought of as an ego factor. In virtually all cases, however, shame reflects on the self in some way, unlike guilt which reflects more on behavior and on a debt owed to others.

Shame has both an active side, the affect, and a latent side, which is apparent in cognitions, values, and behavioral imperatives. Shame anxiety is something between the two, a sense that the affect is at hand.

Situational Shame, which is associated with civility, propriety, decency, and modesty was on the rise during the years when the feudal system gave way to more modern forms of social organization, an increase that has been documented by Elias. Its decline during this century accounts for the shamelessness that has been observed in recent years.

Narcissistic Shame, which has been on the rise in recent years, is a fundamental issue in both depression and character disorders and the type of shame that is now commonly called pathological. Like the other forms of shame, Narcissistic Shame seems to be inherent the human condition. But the social climate since the industrial revolution is rife with pressures that promote Narcissistic Shame and make it more prevalent in the psychologies of people today. The loss of traditional bonds, the extraordinary rise in the expectations of what one must be, and the increasing difficulty in providing young children with a protective, supportive environment are among the contributing conditions. There has been, simultaneously, a waning of other superego factors, including guilt, which is more prominent in cohesive communities with strong values. As a result, it is appropriate to think of our culture as a shame culture, although a shame culture unlike those found in traditional and primitive societies.

Both the narcissistic personality disorder and the phenomenon of insecure attachment are conditions (sometimes the same condition) in which Narcissistic Shame is prominent. Parental neglect, abuse, or inadequate or inappropriate responsiveness are all potential contributing factors. Inhereted temperamental factors and unfortunate early life circumstances can also play a part in creating a damaging level of Narcissistic Shame in the personality. H. Lewis has argued that it is often more appropriate--and yielding of a more healing therapeutic stance--to see patients as shame-prone rather than suffering from a defective self. She has further insisted that (Narcissistic) shame can develop at any time in one's life.

Shame and power are frequently entwined. Shame is often apportioned, instilled, and activated by group or interpersonal power dynamics. The growth of Narcissistic Shame has been accompanied by an increase in the power-shame dynamic in interpersonal affairs. It works in such a way that one person activates the latent Narcissistic Shame of another in order to dispell threats and eliminate the Narcissistic Shame anxiety he himself is experiencing. This has become a prominent factor in relations between strangers, friends, co-workers, and family members. It can also become a factor in the treatment room. The shame-power dynamic between individuals, like the shame-power dynamic that creates Class Shame, at times enforces a subject-object relationship in which one person is understood to be superior and thus relieved of shame anxiety while the other feels like the problem person in the relationship on a more or less continuous basis. In many relationships such a clear outcome is less evident, and both people, sometimes through subtle maneuvers, manage to threaten each other with Narcissistic Shame anxiety. As H. Lewis, Lansky, Scheff, and Retzinger have demonstrated the threat of (Narcissistic) shame implicit in interpersonal maneuvers can lead to shame-rage spirals and sometimes to physical abuse.

Shame is a troubling subject that people often prefer to avoid, both in themselves and in others. Some current shame theorists believe that shame has been evaded by the field of psychology. While this evasion may not be as widespread as some claim--since shame has been dealt with in the past under other names--shame does seem to have been ignored to some extent, with unfortunate results for patients. Like oedipal guilt, object relations, and other ways of viewing patient disturbances, Narcissistic Shame offers a valuable perspective.

Like the protected relationships of traditional societies--such as the tightly knit family or class--psychotherapy offers a setting in which shame can be worked through. It requires a particular stance on the part of the therapist, and each therapeutic approach--e.g., psychoanalytic, behavioral, cognitive--has tendencies that might make this stance difficult to achieve or easy to avoid. The 12-step programs also offer a protected environment for the expression of shame and hence its containment, often converting a certain amount of Narcissistic Shame into Class Shame.

Having been overlooked for many years, there may be a tendency now to overvalue shame and see it as the central feature in psychopathology, especially depression, character disorders, and abuse syndromes. But an over-emphasis on shame would allow the pendulum to swing too far. The shame perspective should be integrated into other theoretical and therapeutic perspectives to enrich clinical work.

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