CHAPTER 4

Shame and Embodiment

Introduction

In this chapter, we will discuss how shame and the body are connected. After a general introduction and discussion of our framework, we will turn to specific topics. To address body shame adequately, we will widen our phenomenological description by underscoring the impact that the contextual social and material structures have on the phenomenon of shame. The primary concern of this phenomenology is to identify and analyze the hidden universal features, capacities, or essences of the lived body. Social theory, however, explores the dynamic between context and agent from a variety of perspectives, such as gender, power, religion, and politics. Thus, the theoretical resources of social theory add valuable perspectives to the analysis of the shame of the lived body in various contexts. We shall not discuss the structures as such, but rather see how they complement our phenomenological analysis of embodied shame. The reason for this approach should be apparent: the body, as both a social and material construction, is both visible in and part of the dynamics of constructed reality. Thus, in order to give an in-depth analysis of the experience of the shameful body, we need to understand the social and material premises for the presence and the visibility of the body in the world.

As we stated in the introductory chapter, our access to and perspective on reality is dependent on our interpretative resources and competencies. Thus, the shame phenomenon is articulated and experienced on many levels of human experience. It can be experienced as a psychological phenomenon, it can be articulated and interpreted in the social world through the signs and symbols of language, and it can be articulated and experienced both in the body and by the body. Thus, the embodied

character of shame is complicated, because the shameful experiences that people have are manifested in, or tied to, the body in different ways. The body can, for example, present feelings, desires, or arousals that are socially unacceptable or looked down upon and scorned or demeaned when they are displayed through the signs and symbols of the body, or by language or action.

Shame is related to the complex contextual situatedness of the lived body. As bodies, we partake in different and overlapping contexts and activities that may express complex normative expectations to the lived body, of which some may run contrary to each other or fail to fit with the social and/or moral hierarchy of expectations. Shame may also occur due to either the empirical or the logical impossibility of adhering to this complexity of bodily expectations. For example, being the mother of an infant and a toddler, and also being the CEO of a successful company, entails normative expectations that the lived body may not be able to meet. The disparate expectations presented to the body of the caring mother who breastfeeds her child, and being the tough female CEO, may result in an unwelcome interruption of shame when the woman falls short of meeting the expectations or objectives in any or both of the contexts that the lived body inhabits.

A short look at historical change

The history of the body, of bodily functions or displays of sex, gender or, more specifically, the female body, may help to outline the historical topography of bodily shame.[252] This topography also reveals the tight connection between the different philosophical, religious, political, and social constructions of functions and displays of the body. These are powerfully tied to both power and dominance, as well as to stigma, desire, arousal, and sin.[253] A telling example is the history of homosexuality. We need not go far back in our history to find that bodily articulated

252 See, for example, Hans Peter Duerr, *Myten Om Civilisationsprocessen: B. 2: Intimitet*, vol. B. 2, Intimität (Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposium, 1996).

253 See, for example, Clough, *Shame, the Church and the Regulation of Female Sexuality*. We will elaborate in further detail on this in subsequent chapters.

expressions of homosexuality were considered by most as deeply troubling and shame-generating.[254]

However, bodily shame is not tied exclusively to sexuality. The disabled body can also be perceived as shameful. Historically, having a child born with bodily disabilities could be shameful, especially if the child displayed bodily signs of intellectual disability as well, such as Downs syndrome.[255] In Norway, we have a history where such children were stowed away or hidden from exposure to avoid shame on the family. This shameful part of history is sadly not specific to Norway. The history of what was pejoratively called *freakery* is also an example of how fear, shame, but also curiosity, were tightly interwoven.[256]

In our own time, the postmodern emphasis on the complex and embodied social self has brought the experience of the visible and exposed body and body shame into a sharp and new focus. In contemporary society, body shame can, for example, be generated by disease or damage manifested on the skin, such as severe psoriasis, acne, or burn scars. But it can also be a response to lifestyle issues such as obesity. People can experience these bodily issues as shameful stigmas in a culture that cultivates ideals of the perfect, groomed body and a healthy lifestyle and diet.[257]

This renewed focus on bodily shame does not necessarily correlate to an increase in powerful and potentially shaming social expectations. It may also be tied to specific changes brought about by postmodern culture. The social predictability, stability, and protection of class, gender, and culture that were essential elements of modernity have been devaluated to a large extent. In modernity, the social, cultural, religious, and political disciplining was more explicit and more rigorously defined. Then, oppression and devaluation of those that did not easily fall into the defined categories, such as women fighting for equal rights, the disabled,

254 See, for example, David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, *Gay Shame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

255 See, for example, David Wright, *Downs: The History of a Disability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Michael Rembis, Catherine J. Kudlick, and Kim E. Nielsen, *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

256 See Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

257 See, for example, Amy Erdman Farrell, *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

the mentally handicapped and other undesirables, was practiced in ways that left them with the shame of being unrecognized outsiders. However, the emergence of a postmodern Western society entailed a critique of both social categorizations and cultural, religious, and social power plays, and the oppression inherent in these. New values, such as fluidity, change, and the freedom to construct and stage one's life according to one's own ideals, emerged alongside new ways of both constructing, conceptualizing, and evaluating, for example, sex and gender, the individual versus the collective, and of desirables and undesirables.[258]

However, the social disciplining of the individual has not disappeared. It has only shifted and changed into greater complexity and unpredictability. Thus, the experience of increased subjective freedom to stage the identity of the embodied self now comes at a price. In a fluid and shifting society, the many options for identification may become blurred. The flip-side of increased subjective freedom may then turn into an experience of an increased lack of belonging and identity. The complexity of different and potentially shaming expectations can also be experienced as more difficult to handle in a fast and fluid society. The outcome of this is that the potential for shaming increases when social unpredictability increases. This point is closely linked to how we have described shame as a clash of contexts of agency: the insecurity about the extent to which you share the context and conditions for agency with others in a way that can recognize the intentional direction of your own projects and aims may grow.

Furthermore, the virtual society renders the vulnerable self exposed through social media and without protection. Through channels on the internet, snapshots of a teenage boy or girl in a compromised bodily situation may be globally shared, without consent or the chance to be retrieved. In the virtual society, the possibility of being bodily exposed and shamed is an ever-present disciplining threat. The recognition that, for example, compromising photos are "out there" represents a global restriction of the resources available for staging and controlling the embodied self and

258 For an introduction to the fluidity of postmodern society, see, for example, Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005); *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

its place in the world. Social media represents possibilities for continuous exposure to social disciplining of the embodied self and renders it vulnerable to unpredictable and severe demeaning, behaviour degradation, and shaming. Thus, the shame of being exposed, or being under the continuous threat of being exposed, is very much present. Protective strategies, such as hiding from shame, are made more difficult in the virtual society.

Phenomenological characteristics

The movements of shame and the relational body

In the following, we will briefly discuss the phenomenological characteristics of different types of body shame. We will follow the optic presented above and distinguish between the mechanics of shame, the sociocultural context of shame and, finally, the consequences of culturally embedded and embodied shame.

We have argued that shame is a part of a composite cluster of interrelated affective, emotional, and cognitive abilities that makes possible the complexity of human identity, interactions, and relationships. This evolutionally developed and socially constructed architecture of the self expresses its desires, needs, and orientations through embodied agency within a complex web of material, social, and relational structures. Shame may be our response when our intentional agency, our way of expressing ourselves in the world, is interrupted by, for example, being restricted, scorned, devaluated or labeled as unwanted. In such cases, shame appears as a culturally formed protective response when the vulnerable self-defining intentional agency is threatened in a specific cultural context. As such, it connects our personal, individual, and embodied experience with the social world in which we are embedded.

Accordingly, the formation of embodied selfhood and identity through intentional agency entails both an unescapable relationality and sociality through embodied interactions with others. As we stated above, shame is a response that reveals the embodied self as fragile, vulnerable, and exposed to others. We cannot avoid being seen by others, and their evaluation of how we intentionally construe ourselves matters to us. When met with devaluation or scorn, a subject may certainly isolate itself from

others in shame, thus protecting the vulnerable self from further devaluation. However, such responses only reinforce our point: a shameful retreat is necessary because the gaze of the other matters to us. If it did not matter, protective measures would not be necessary.

In other words, shame reveals dynamic and identity-structuring movements of the lived body.[259] As we have attempted to show above, the self is constituted and formed in a complex interplay between the subject and its relations. It is our way of becoming and being-in-the-world. Through sociality, by taking on different roles and partaking in different social groups, we seek to maintain and fulfil our basic need for relationality. The first movement revealed in shame responses reveals this need for relationality and sociality. The interruption of shame through the experience of falling short in someone's eyes reminds us that they are not indifferent to us. It is in this relation to the other that the lived body is constructed; we are because of the Other. Thus, shame is a reminder or an affirmation of the constitutive relationality and closeness of the lived body. The second movement entailed in shame is the sudden shameful interruption when we experience that our intentional agency somehow falls short under the gaze of those to whom we owe our existence. Here, the need for establishing a protective distance is predictable. By moving away and establishing strategies of projection, hiding, or isolation, or just by living through the experience of shame, the embodied self can reaffirm itself as a valuable part of the relational web to which it belongs.

The success of these movements of shame hinges, on the one hand, on the severity of the structural and social conditions that cause shame and, on the other hand, on the personal resources that a person has to cope with shame responses.[260] As shown above, sometimes shame responses may become altogether toxic and incapacitating, freezing a person in a movement that makes him or her unable to handle shame in a way that can remedy and re-situate the lived body within a valuable and supportive relational and social network.

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259 See, for example, Luna Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, (Blue Ridge Summit: Lexington Books, 2015), xv f.

260 See on shame-proneness above pp. 88–89.

Preliminary position: body shame

Luna Dolezal's book *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism and the Culturally Shaped Body* gives a valuable contribution to the understanding of body shame.[261] Some of the themes she presents work well as a backdrop for the understanding of body shame we develop here. As a phenomenologist, Dolezal takes the lived body as her starting point. All forms of shame are manifested and experienced through the body. However, of particular interest to Dolezal are experiences of shame that explicitly arise as a result of how the body is perceived. This approach allows us to repeat an important distinction.

As mentioned above, shame can be experienced through the body in many ways. As embodied selves, deeply seated in a contextual web of relational, social, and material structures, the body is simply our only way of experiencing or – for that matter – being-in-the-world. That does not mean that we are shamed because of the body; we only experience it through the body. When we feel ashamed because our lack of parenting skills has become the talk of the neighborhood, it is not our body that is shamed, but our actions or skills. But as we meet our neighbor's gaze in the street, we may experience the bodily manifestations of shame through our avoiding gaze and burning cheeks.

However, shame experienced because of the body has an altogether different structure than the one just described. On the one hand, we cannot escape experiencing shame through our bodies as embodied selves. To be ashamed because of how our body is socially perceived drives a wedge between our subjective bodily presence and the body as an object that falls short of, for example, aesthetic or moral value. It is essential to note the push and pull forces at play in bodily shame. We are our bodies; to be an embodied being constitutes what it is to be a person present in the world. Thus, the subjective experience of being embodied negates the traditional conception of body and mind as separate instances or entities and pulls them together as one experiencing entity. We simply do not exist in any other way than as experiencing bodily presences; we are bodies among bodies.

261 Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*.

On the other hand, body shame singles out the body as an object for evaluation. Thus, body shame pulls the body as an object away from the embodied self in a variety of ways. Sometimes, it is the very separation and objectification of the body that is perceived as a shameful loss of the self, as in the objectifying sexual gaze. At other times, it may be the subject itself that objectifies its own body because the shame of the body threatens to rupture the self through deep and toxic shame. Thus, shame manifests itself in various movements. Suffice to say, at this point, the wedge between the body as subject and object puts the experiencing body in a situation of opposing needs and concomitant movements: the need to be itself as embodied, and the need for distance to the shameful objectified body.

Body shame and intersubjectivity

Our definition of shame entails that shame – including body shame – is an interruption or a full rupture of the intended objectives of the self. Such interruption seems to rest on at least two premises. The first premise is that someone or something interrupts us. Accordingly, body shame entails both subjectivity and intersubjectivity: we are bodies among bodies. As embodied subjects expressing our intentional objects through agency, we are therefore always under the gaze of the other (actual or not). However, a subject may certainly be hindered or barred from realizing intentional objects through agency without being bodily shamed. Thus, different contextual restraints may lead to a redefinition of agency.

The many years of imprisonment that Nelson Mandela endured on Robben Island made it difficult for him to exert agency according to his former objectives. But it is not likely that it led to shame. Although Mandela's body suffered imprisonment, his black body became a symbol of the oppressive racial apartheid of South African politics. But it was not the exposure of his black body that was at fault. In the eyes of his peers, his black body symbolized the fight for freedom and justice. Similarly, the widespread "Black Lives Matter" campaign in the United States also uses the black body as a symbol in the struggle for equality. There is also a parallel to the aforementioned "shameless Arabian daughters" who

stood proud on Norwegian national television and exposed their faces without traditional Muslim headwear. In all three examples, the black or the unveiled face symbolizes the fight against shame. So, even though Mandela's project had to be altered due to contextual restraints, his black body imprisoned by white men became a beacon of hope and provided motivation for continuing the struggle for equality and freedom in South Africa. Here, the lack of shame corresponds with the coherence between Mandela's agency and that of his peers. This congruence shielded his imprisoned body from shame.

In the case of Bill Clinton, however, the exposure of shame due to his sexual relations with the young intern Monica Lewinsky was something the whole world could follow on national television. His shame was, at least partly, tied to his bodily desires, as they were exposed and judged as leading to agency and actions not befitting a sitting president. The exposure of his infidelity, the unethical use of his power as president and, lastly, his lying on national television, stood in stark contrast to the commonly held expectations as to what kind of objectives are befitting for a person holding the most powerful office in the world. Clinton's acts revealed a gap between contexts of agency: his acts, values, and lack of virtue cast doubt about the moral integrity required of a president. Thus, by giving in to his bodily desires, Clinton revealed a character that suggested either a shameful lack of control over his bodily desires or simply that he did not adhere to common ethical standards of fidelity. Moreover, being exposed as a person who lied under oath and used power for his own pleasure enhanced the impression of incongruence. Being exposed on national television as a liar, in full contradiction with the values and virtues of his powerful office, released shame responses.

To sum up, the first premise of body shame presupposes that the agency of the lived body is always exerted in the context of other bodies within a network of normative frameworks. Shame emerges or appears when bodies exist in some kind of incongruence because intentionality is always embodied.

The second premise is that the interruption or rupture of the intended objectives of the lived body is caused by someone who matters to us in some respect. As we suggested above, shame entails various movements;

it recognizes that we need the other. Therefore, we avoid, withdraw, or hide our shame from the other when our bodies, lives, or acts fall short and are experienced as incongruent with those of others. However, as contexts may differ, so will the many empirical manifestations of the movements of shame. Examples of intense body shame can, for example, be found in narratives from concentration camps during World War II. They describe the shame of being bodily degraded by a tattooed number on the wrist, to be exposed to the unfathomable suffering of fellow men, or to be the body that survived among the many dead bodies of women and children.[262] For the victims of the Holocaust, it is probably absurd to claim that the Kapos and the soldiers mattered to them in a positive sense. However, it is in the identification of the others as lived bodies, no different from themselves, that shame can arise. If the abuse and brutality of Kapos and soldiers were the actions of "mad men" or "monsters," shame would probably have had no place. Primo Levy struggled until his death with this question. In his final book, *The Drowned and the Saved*, he finally concludes, "They were made of the same cloth as we, they were average human beings, averagely intelligent, averagely wicked: save the exceptions, they were not monsters, they had our faces, but they had been reared badly."[263]

Our point is that other people always matter to us because they are the ones in whose faces and in whose actions we can read our own value as lived bodies. Being reduced to undesirable objects that can be subjected to bodily punishment, torture, or death without consequence, is to be reduced to an object that holds no, or only negative, value. In this respect, being a body among bodies exposes both the vulnerability to be shamed and the power to shame. The acknowledgment of being a body among bodies, of sharing the faces of victims and oppressors, is, at the same time, an acknowledgment of the shameful possibility that the roles could have been reversed in a given context.

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262 Todorov, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps*; Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*; Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*; Arne Johan Vetlesen, "A Case for Resentment: Jean Améry Versus Primo Levi," *Journal of Human Rights* 5, no. 1 (2006).

263 Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 202.

Examples such as these raise an essential question: Is body shame always heteronomous, that is, does body shame always have its origin in the demeaning gaze of the other? We have already suggested that shame may occur even though the other is not present. Thus, the internalized gaze of the other may be felt even though there is actually nobody looking. We have further pointed out that late-modern society may represent a disciplining panopticon that renders the body in a situation of constant threat and uncontrollable exposure, and thus makes hiding from the gaze of the other very difficult.

Deonna et al. criticize the well-established hypothesis that shame is a heteronomous emotion.[264] They define shame as the feeling of our being incapable of honoring even minimally the demands entailed by self-relevant values.[265] To restore the moral relevance of shame, they attempt to redeem the emotion of shame from what they call the two dogmas that paint shame as both a social and an ugly emotion.[266] We shall not follow their arguments in detail here, as we will return to their argumentation in the chapter on morality and shame. Suffice to say, at this point, their analysis of heteronomous shame entails that such shame falls short as a moral response. At best, it may serve as a useful social sensibility.[267] Shame can only be a morally relevant response when we realize that we fall short of moral standards and values we have autonomously set for ourselves. Therefore, heteronomous shame falls short as a morally relevant response because it is caused by a recognition of falling short of standards that others have impressed upon us. Dolezal rightly comments that Deonna et al. seem to have forgotten that values are embodied in a complex web of relations and values:

> … there is no meaningful way to keep distinct what one feels and thinks in relation to oneself without reference to the intersubjective realm and the broader milieu. Even though shame can arise in one's own eyes, the primary locus of shame is social, as Charles Taylor argues. Values and norms do not appear out

264 This question will be addressed further in the chapter on shame and morality.

265 Julien A. Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno, and Fabrice Teroni, *In Defense of Shame: The Faces of an Emotion* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 125.

266 Ibid., 21–66.

267 Ibid., 35ff.

> of nowhere, they are constituted and continuously modified by relations of embodied social interaction.[268]

The aforementioned dynamic movements of shame indicate that shame is always a movement towards or away from someone that somehow matters to us. It is also a movement towards or away within a specific constitutive context that defines both the need for shameful movement as well as strategies for movement. The social value attributed to a specific body entails, for example, contextually defined and shared bodily ideals that a specific body is compared to, to which it is accepted as valuable or falls short. Hence, attempts to configure the body as an autonomous entity entail a reductionistic abstraction that loses sight of the complexity of embodied life.

One may, nevertheless, argue that being contextually embedded does not entail the impossibility of setting your own values, or choosing to act accordingly or not, and therefore being ashamed of not living up to your own ideals. The ability to create such a room for the autonomous self is parallel to Elisabeth Benkhe who calls for kinaesthetic awareness as a way of finding ethically sound ways of bodily presence in the context of the other.[269] Thus, it is not so much about finding an autonomous space of freedom between disciplining forces, such as nature and culture. Instead, it is about finding bodily awareness or ethical values to adhere to within the complex and heteronomous web of sociality. Accordingly, at this point, Deonna et al.'s claim about shame's moral relevance holds some merit. However, it is an autonomy well-established and qualified within the borders of a heteronomous context. This obviously entails a redefinition of the concept of autonomy that places it well outside, for example, the Kantian view of autonomy. Such a redefinition is not without merit and has been researched from several perspectives in the feminist tradition.[270] We will return to some aspects regarding this topic in the chapter on shame and morality.

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268 Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, 5.

269 Elizabeth A Behnke, "The socially shaped body and the critique of corporeal experience," in *Sartre on the body*, 231–255, ed. Katherine J. Morris (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

270 See Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, *Relational Autonomy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Body shame: bodies among bodies

Experiences of shame, both in the body and because of the body, articulate themselves in the context of others (actual or not) within complex and normatively framed contexts. Experiences of body shame may, therefore, serve as a map of the relational and social topography between the embodied self and the context. According to Dolezal, reading the social manifestations of body shame may, for example, contribute to our understanding of how the phenomenological primacy of the lived body is shaped and formed into a social and political body by external forces and demands.[271] Thus a phenomenological discussion of shame does not need to take into consideration only the trivial insight that the shame of any lived body is experienced in a specific context. It also needs to take into consideration the contextual complexity and pervasiveness of the shaping push and pull forces within which responses of shame manifest themselves. As we will show in the forthcoming chapter on religion, we see in shame responses the body withdraw, avoid, buckle, and change because of external pressure from powerful social, religious, cultural, and institutional norms and expectations. Thus, an empirically adequate phenomenology of body shame must balance between two pitfalls. First, a one-eyed focus on the essence of human bodily experience that loses sight of the imprint of history, culture, and sociality, and, second, a position where the embodied self is locked in totalitarian contexts without opportunities to, for example, take back a body that is held hostage by toxic shame.

An exclusive focus on essential bodily experience does not offer the necessary resources to explain the variations in shame experiences. It is by taking the situatedness of the shamed embodied self into consideration that the experience may be analyzed, but also remedied. For a young man to both understand and solve his experience of body shame because of his lack of a muscle-toned athletic body, knowledge of both the normative ideals of the body as well as the social mechanisms of body shame are necessary. On the other hand, when the emphasis on the context becomes too heavy or is the only one available, we lose the resources to explain

271 Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, IX.

how even all-encompassing and toxic experiences of body shame can be resolved or worked on through individual effort. We believe there are ways out of body shame, even in the most toxic of contexts. It is the first premise of any therapeutic effort to support victims of abuse that have to deal with the experience of having a dirty and shameful body, that they possess personal resources that can help them cope with the situation. Overcoming shame is not only about facilitating shifts to more positive and liberating contexts. It is also about finding and believing in the transcending powers of the embodied self itself within the limitations and potential of contextual situatedness, and engaging these powers in an ongoing process of complex contextual self-embodiment that can transcend this shame.

Feminist phenomenologist Shannon Sullivan suggests a road between these pitfalls. She borrows the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey's term *transaction* to unfold this co-constitutive relationship between entities entering into an exchange or a relationship.[272] She aims to avoid atomistic and compartmentalizing conceptions that misconstrue the co-constitutive and mutual impact that humans have on each other. Human transactional corporeality includes the physical, the mental, the social, and the cultural dimensions of human life; it is open, permeable, and in constant shift. Thus, bodies are neither matter sealed off from culture or matter imprinted with the meaning of the surrounding culture. Bodies transact, they are activities co-constituted and co-existing in an open-ended and permeable dynamic relationship with context. Thus, there are no bodies and no corporeality in itself. What is essential in our context is her insistence on the co-constitutiveness and mutual influence of bodies in context – in all dimensions. Thus, there is always movement and change.

The abovementioned phenomenologist, Elisabeth Benkhe, holds that by strengthening the awareness of the body, we will be able to establish a position of critique and reeducation of bodily experiences, such as body shame, within the shaping forces of nature and culture. It is not so much about creating a room of freedom as it is about strengthening the internal

272 Shannon Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 1.

shaping forces within the embodied self as a counterweight against the external shaping forces. Thus, bodily awareness helps us to identify, take back, and strengthen the internal forces in our ongoing embodied self-formation. According to Benkhe, the body is neither a ready-made natural physical object, nor a culturally fully defined object, but "… an ongoing style of kinaesthetic self-shaping and situational engagement."[273] The way forward is to retrieve one's kinaesthetic life from its anonymity and take further responsibility for how our bodies are shaped; it is about reeducating and claiming new ownership of the body. Our habitual way of making our bodies known in the world may, for example, be restricted because of the experience of shame. Through the movement of shame, we may take protective or evasive measures to protect our vulnerable embodied self from further exposure. Shameful bodies tend to hide and become small or invisible, or to hide behind aggressive or tough appearances. However, through kinaesthetic awareness, one may be able to establish a position where one can both recognize and even reeducate the strategies of the shameful body. Thus, self-awareness may enable us to identify protective bodily habits that function negatively or add to objectification, either as a result of shame or as the reason for shame due to the inter-kinaesthetic dynamics between embodied selves.[274]

Benkhe's analysis of kinaesthetic consciousness and awareness may certainly play a role as a counterweight against the experience of embodied shame. You may, for example, become aware of your kinaesthetic presence, the way your body shrinks back, withdraws, or closes off the intersubjective space in shame, for example, when listening to a colleague talk about being bullied in your workplace, when no one – including yourself – tried to stop it, and through bodily awareness, you may be able to find other forms of bodily presence that do not add to the hurt and isolation of the one telling the story. However, in her tentative phenomenological analysis of the socially shaped body, she does not take fully into account how the varying powers of external shaping forces may, at least to some extent, support or work against bodily awareness. It is important

273 Behnke, "The socially shaped body and the critique of corporeal experience," in *Sartre on the body*, 233.

274 Ibid., 247f.

not to underestimate the specificity and complexity of the disciplining and shaping forces at play in body shame. The need for protective strategies may be both imprinted in our DNA and embedded in culturally shaped responses. For the person who has been a victim of continuous bullying or abuse since childhood, the neurological and social imprint on kinaesthetic presence may be far more substantial, protective, and challenging to become aware of. It may also be far more difficult to interpret as having to do with, for example, shame, guilt, and fear, and, therefore, ultimately more difficult to understand and eventually reclaim and take control of. Thus, there is a certain correlation between the disciplining force of the contextual imprint, the personal resources of the self and other available resources, and the possibility of kinaesthetic awareness and what Benkhe calls kinaesthetic self-control. Thus, although a given context may both confirm and support an agent's bodily awareness, intentions, and acts, another agent, with different intentions and acts, may find the same context as intimidating, oppressive and shame-inducing as his or her intentions and acts are deemed as being without value. In the complex interplay of agents and contexts, we are disciplined as well as disciplining.

The invisible flow of the lived body

The above discussion of shame and bodily awareness puts us in a position to elicit another helpful distinction: body shame is tightly connected to both the visibility and invisibility of the body. This topic is also discussed by Dolezal and will be further elaborated in our discussion below on different forms of exposed bodies. Dolezal draws heavily on both E. Husserl and M. Merleau-Ponty when she stresses the body as a "double-sided affair."[275] According to her, Husserl identifies four characteristic traits of the lived body in comparison to other material objects. First, the body is both constituted and limited through its sensitivity. We sense heat and cold through our bodies, and this sensitivity is absent in other innate objects. Secondly, the body moves as a spontaneous organ of the

275 Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, 118ff.

will. Thirdly, the body is the point from where all spatial movements are assessed. What is far away or close, large or small, has the spatial body as its point of reference. And lastly, the body is the organ of perception that makes the experience of the external world possible. Thus, through the body we experience the world as spatial objects in relation to our own bodies.

According to Dolezal, Merleau-Ponty adds significant insight into this Husserlian phenomenology of the body.[276] What the above description leaves open is how intentional consciousness moves the body. If the lived body is constitutional for perception, action, and movement in the external world, the lived body is infused with consciousness and intentionality and cannot be restricted to cognitive processes. In a sense, the lived body is intentional: it always holds a stance or a posture towards what is going on in a specific context. Thus, the body as subjectivity, according to Dolezal, is always geared towards possible action and engagement in the world. Furthermore, the intentionality of the lived body, or what Merleau-Ponty calls motor intentionality, perceives the world around not only in spatial orientation but also in pre-reflective sense as part of the former experience of body-defining engagement and acts. The trained mechanic does not scrutinize a ten millimeter nut and cognitively decide to reach out for a ten millimeter spanner. He just reaches out and grabs the spanner. His body knows what to do. Further, he does not reflect over the fact that he holds the spanner in his hand and needs to turn it counterclockwise in order to loosen the nut. He just reaches out, attaches the spanner, and loosens the nut. Thus, through repeated experience, the body has developed a body schema:

> The body schema is a system of motor and postural functions that are in constant operation below the level of self-conscious intentionality. In the most basic sense, the body schema is the subject's non-cognitive awareness of its position, orientation, and movement.[277]

276 Ibid., 21ff.
277 Ibid., 22.

Through repeated postures and motility, the lived body has developed tacit skills and techniques formed as habits in the body (habit body), that kick into action in a context where renewed engagement or action is possible. However, it does not only regulate actions. It also envelops and transforms external objects into extensions of the body. The spanner, an innate external object, becomes pre-reflectively an extension of the hand of the lived body. Thus, through repeated habitual action, the lived body not only forms schemes and habits that regulate posture, stance, and action towards external objects in the context. It is in constant relation to the external world and thereby dissolves the distinction between the subjective and the objective, between external and internal world, through the incorporation of objects as extensions of the subjective, lived body.[278] Dolezal underscores that this is not a layer of ability, habitually formed skills, or series of cognitive choices of actions. Rather, it is a necessary permanent condition of being an embodied self in the world. Thus, the lived body is both available and invisible. It is available in the sense that it is the center for sensing, perceiving, moving, and acting in the spatial world. Further, it is also invisible, or absent, or transparent, as the body is not noticed when it interacts successfully with the world. When a skilled athlete throws a javelin in one fluid and successful motion, there is no consciousness or awareness of the movement of the body nor the javelin. There is just the "flow of equilibrium" with the surroundings.[279] Or, in a more mundane sense, when we skillfully negotiate the morning traffic while we are thinking through our schedule for the day, the steering wheel, the clutch, and the brakes become extensions of the unconscious flow of movements of the lived body.

Body visibility as dysfunction

The habits of the lived body render both the body and its extensions invisible for the subject as they recede from awareness and into the automated

278 For more on the actual acquisition of habitual skills, se ibid., 23 f. and Hubert L. Dreyfus and Stuart E. Dreyfus, "The Challenge of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Embodiment for Cognitive Science," *Perspectives on Embodiment: The Intersections of Nature and Culture* (1999).

279 Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, 25.

body-flow of the skilled subject's unconsciousness. However, the body may become visible or attract awareness again for several reasons.[280] The first and most obvious is the long and arduous process in which we acquire different skills. A young aspiring javelin thrower is very much aware of his awkward gait, the unfamiliar heft of the javelin, and finally, the unbalanced throw that sends him off balance. The same javelin thrower must bring to attention the different parts of the art of throwing a javelin in order to enhance his skills: the steps, the heft, and the snap of the body as the javelin is thrown. Already automated habits of the body can also be interrupted and made visible, both temporarily or permanently. Temporary visibility occurs, for example, when the body becomes visible through some sort of failure to perform the habit in question. When the skilled javelin thrower feels the pain rip through his tendons and muscles, he certainly becomes aware of his shoulder not being up to the task until his injury is healed. Thus, body flow is interrupted as the body becomes a visible obstacle between the body and the external world.

Permanent visibility occurs when former body habits become impossible. Chronic illness leading to a loss of formerly automated bodily functions may serve as an example, although a change in body functions may, over time, lead to acquisition and automation of motor skills substituting the loss. However, permanent neurological changes severing and disrupting the possibility of former body habits, as well as the acquisition of new automated body habits, show how body fluidity is lost when one has to rely on cognition to control bodily motility. Thus, we can argue that cognition introduces an alienating objectification that separates the external world and the self, especially when it is introduced to compensate for the loss of habitual fluid motility.[281]

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280 Ibid., 27ff.

281 Of course, there is much more to be said about the specifics of the interruption of the invisible body. For further reading, see, for example, Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). See also Debra Gimlin, "The absent body project: Cosmetic surgery as a response to bodily dys-appearance," *Sociology* 40, no. 4 (2006), 699–716. The athlete's art of working on the tasks at hand; to keep sharp focus on technique, body posture breathing, in other words separating the elements of fluid motion, necessitates a further differentiation of the concept of bodily visibility/invisibility. However, in this context, the above differentiation will have to suffice.

Anthropologist Thomas Csordas distinguishes between the *dis-appearance* and the *dys-appearance* of the body.[282] The intentional embodied self, is in a state of equilibrium with its surroundings, experiences, moves, and acts through automated responses – at least to a certain extent. In this state, the intentional body is not interrupted or hindered through lack of ability or sudden contextual restraints that impede or block expressions of bodily habits. The body and the external objects through which these habits are expressed remain in a state of available invisibility. But when the habits of the body are interrupted, temporarily or permanently, the automated equilibrium between the embodied self and the external world is lost as we become aware of the failure of the body to perform as usual. Hence, the body *dys-appears*: it becomes visible in its dysfunction, either through lack of bodily ability or because external factors in some way or for some reason hinder or delimit habitual action. According to Dolezal, the body seeks equilibrium with its surroundings by constantly trying "to avoid the intrusion of the body into awareness through discomfort and pain."[283] However, this equilibrium is basically a state of affairs between the motor-intentionality of the embodied self and the external world.

Body visibility and body shame

The above paragraphs about body awareness provide a necessary backdrop for understanding what is at play in body shame. The acquirement of skills and bodily responses is contextually tuned in order to reach the mentioned equilibrium. However, the dys-appearance and objectification of the body is not necessarily caused by a dysfunction of an acquired body-habit itself. It may appear because the actual body habit in a specific context no longer serves to enhance equilibrium. Thereby,

282 Thomas J. Csordas, "Introduction: The Body as Representation and Being-in-the-World," in *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, edited by Thomas J. Csordas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 8 ff. For a discussion of Csordas' Merleau-Ponty-inspired account of embodiment and an introduction to alternative accounts of the embodied self, see Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Identity: The History, Theory, and Practice of Psychological Anthropology*, revised and updated, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 187ff.

283 Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, 29.

the objectification serves to highlight the dysfunctionality of the bodily habit. Dolezal therefore claims, in our view rightly, that any phenomenological account of the body must take into consideration the context in which an embodied self is constituted and exists.[284]

We have previously underscored that the social shaping of the embodied self is constituted in a rather complex web of relations and social and material structures. As bodies, we are always seen or sensed by someone, and thus objectified, as we see, sense and objectify others. This objectification is part of our relational constitution as embodied selves; we are experiencing, perceiving, moving and acting bodies among other experiencing, perceiving, moving and acting bodies. This fact does not have to entail body shame, but it is a fundamental premise for being able to experience body shame.[285]

We have argued that body shame entails several movements – a movement towards as a realization that others matter to us, and a movement away as we need to protect our body from being seen because others matter to us. To this point, we can now add the above insight that body shame entails a dys-appearance and objectification of the body. Our bodies, or parts of our bodies, are not merely our way of being-in-the-world. In situations of shame, they are objectified and seen through the eyes of others as violating spoken or unspoken standards, norms, or rules of aesthetic, social or ethical value, comportment, or action.[286] Hence, it makes sense to speak of shame as related to the dys-appearance that is not tied to disruption of body flow only, but also to disruption of the social flow of the embodied subject.

Acute body shame as regulation

The tension between the need for both closeness and distance can be solved in various ways, depending on the severity of body shame. One

284 Ibid., 32.

285 We are aware of leaving out a far more detailed discussion at this point. Dolezal draws up a larger and more detailed map of these elements than we do here. For further references, see ibid., 35ff.

286 Ibid., 41.

can work through the experience of body shame and thus solve the tension and reaffirm and secure one's standing. One may also move away and protect the body and the self through protective strategies, such as disguise or distance. However, all solutions may come at a price: hiding through disguise or moving away may ameliorate the experience of shame. However, in a society where one is always under the threat of being bodily seen, such a strategy becomes less successful. Moreover, a strategy that disguises or removes the embodied self from the context where it belongs creates a protected gap between the actual self and the real self.[287] Thus, hiding may end up being a strategy that only partially fulfills the intention but, far more seriously, it also moves the embodied self into a position where the need to resolve and belong cannot be met. In order to hide, the subject ends up using resources to maintain the false self instead of developing the true self. Thus, the tension between the described opposing needs of closeness and distance is neither met nor solved. They are merely dealt with in a preliminary and possibly harmful way.

In this context, Dolezal, like many others, draws a line between acute and chronic body shame.[288] Acute body shame comes in many variations, often tied to how the body is comported or held, functions, or appears. Acute body shame may appear quickly and pass quickly. Losing your towel when changing to swimming trunks may, in some contexts and for some individuals, elicit an experience of shame over being seen in a compromising situation. An insecure teenager would probably experience it differently than a seasoned nudist. The shame experience may also vary due to context: if the unfortunate slip happened at a nudist beach, it would be different from the same thing happening by the swimming pool at your high school. Thus, acute body shame relates not only to the subject's vulnerability to shame but also to the varying values or norms embedded in varying contexts. Acute body shame may, as other forms of acute shame, serve a disciplining and regulating role in upholding the rules and norms of society.

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287 Mesel, *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep*, 133ff.

288 Dolezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*, 7ff.

However, some factors may muddle the use of body shame for regulating bodily behavior. Experiencing shame under the gaze of the other swimmers as you walk into a public pool without swimming trunks, accidentally or as part of a bet with your school buddies, may remind you of having crossed a line for what kind of bodily behavior is expected in public pools. The chance is that you will adhere to these regulations in the future to avoid being shamed. Thus, it may serve to uphold the rules and affirm for the other guests that in a public pool, one does not swim naked. This example underscores our previous point about how contexts are deeply saturated with values and disciplining forces. Formal or informal regulations may, on the one hand, serve to secure both freedom and protection against, for example, shamelessness. On the other hand, they may be tacitly oppressive and hinder or interrupt bodily agency by promoting body shame. Thus, if we view body shame as a way of regulating bodily behavior, functions, and ideals, without exposing these regulations to extensive critique, we may easily end up by using body shame as a means to exert implicit or explicit power or domination. In order to accept such regulation, we need to both identify and discuss publicly whether we find these dimensions ethically sound. Let us exemplify: If a medical doctor or a medical student, due to religious regulations, is shamed by, and therefore refuses to treat, patients of the other sex, or patients with diseases related to sexual activity or substance abuse (such as gonorrhea, or cirrhosis of the liver), we find it unacceptable.[289] Such shame is not valid for governing professional behavior. Even though we accept that some religious groups have a right to uphold regulations concerning sex and alcohol as part of their autonomy within a Western democracy, it is not applicable in the context of public health care, as it serves to enhance the body shame of patients that are already in a vulnerable and possibly shameful position.[290] As citizens, we partake in many contexts, with both overlapping and contradicting rules, values, and regulations. These, both tacitly and more explicitly, exert a socializing power on our bodies within these

289 Sophie LM Strickland, "Conscientious objection in medical students: a questionnaire survey," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 38, no. 1 (2012).

290 Our point is not to discuss the right of health personnel to make conscious objections, but to offer a relevant example for discussion.

contexts. Michel Foucault uses the concept *panopticism* as a metaphor for the organization of power in modern society: We are always seen, and the possibility of always being seen does something to us.[291] The disciplining power of always being watched turns us into our own watchers. We are not only disciplined, but also tacitly carry with us the disciplining and internalized power of rules, regulations, and values. Foucault's point is not that the modern organization of power is good or bad. He merely makes an observation about the panoptic mechanics of power in modern society. In a postmodern society, contexts, values, ideals, and regulations are individualized, pluralized, virtualized, and embodied (and thus seen) at an increasing pace. The ability to identify, morally as well as politically, and evaluate the inherent powers at play in the contextual map of which the postmodern embodied self finds itself thus becomes increasingly complex and challenging.

As mentioned above, since the social construction of the embodied self is an ongoing process, provisionality and permeability are existential characteristics of the embodied self: We live, breathe, think, socialize, develop and exert agency through our bodies and our skin.[292] An embodied subject's vulnerability to this complexity of normative internal and external forces varies, due not only to their personal resources but also to the degree of formative and normative pressure these forces exert on the embodied subject. Thus, it is important to identify and evaluate these forces to understand the regulating functions of the experience of bodily shame. The often tacitly and inherently normative power struggle expressed through shaming has been a large part of the oppression of both the black body and the female body. In our earlier example, when the shameless Arabian daughters shed their veils on national television, it was a bodily protest against being shamed, because their unveiled faces did not adhere to the culturally and religiously defined Muslim rules for female bodily behavior in Norwegian society.

Thus, even though our evolutionary account of shame suggests that it may serve a regulatory function, both the complexity and the possible

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291 Michel Foucault, "Panopticism" from *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, in *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 2, no. 1 (2008).

292 Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism*.

structural oppressiveness inherent in postmodern society force a broader examination of the phenomenon.

Chronic toxic body shame and the shamed body

We have earlier mentioned that both blushing and gaze avoidance can be understood as physiological displays of acute but passing shame. They may be examples of evolutionally developed and socially visible bodily manifestations of the shamed body. Such passing bodily manifestations may even serve useful social functions as they are signs revealing what is at play in a social group.

However, there is substantial empirical evidence supporting the claim that severe body shame over time sets its mark on the body itself.[293] Such chronic body shame is sometimes called pathological shame or pathological body shame. We prefer *chronic toxic body shame* for several reasons. First, pathological body shame suggests that the primary perspective is pathological dysfunction or maladaptation, either as a consequence of external pressure or as an inherent trait.[294] However, even though the perspective of pathology may certainly add to our understanding of certain modes of body shame, we should not reduce it to pathology alone. We have suggested that body shame is, as all forms of shame are, an embodied experience rooted in the architecture of the self and manifested within a complex contextual web of structures and forces. Thus, the individual experience of body shame may certainly be maladaptive and isolate and break down the self in the long run. However, it is certainly a point for discussion if it is the subject's emotional response that is pathological. It is also possible to analyze the consequences of the oppressive pressure of the subject's context as pathological, as it impedes human growth, flourishing, and sustainability.

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293 van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*; Kirkengen, *Inscribed Bodies: Health Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse*; Joseph Spiegel, *Sexual Abuse of Males. The Sam Model of Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Mesel, *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep*.

294 Cf. Tangney and Dearing. *Shame and Guilt;* Stephen Pattison, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

In our view, the use of the concept chronic toxic body shame represents a broader and more precise frame of reference for the analysis of body shame. The word *chronic* suggests that this kind of body shame is firmly established in the embodied self. Rather than being a specific and acute response in a specific situation, chronic toxic body shame becomes a more permanent *modus* for how the body is experienced. Moreover, the word *toxic* suggests that this form of shame exposes the subject to an environment or a state of being that, over time, poisons and denies the subject the ability to realize chosen and intended objects through his or her personal agency. Thus, chronic toxic body shame does not merely interrupt agency through temporary interruptions, such as when acute shame suspends agency in a specific context for short periods. Instead, chronic toxic body shame invades the self. To some extent, it subjects the self to a state of rupture and inability to realize intended objects through voluntary agency. Such internalized and enduring toxic shame may send the embodied self into a more or less permanent exile through strategies of disguise or isolation. Thus, the concept of chronic toxic body shame does not only fit better with our initial definition of shame, it also opens up a broader analytical backdrop for our understanding of both the reasons for and the manifestations of toxic bodily shame.

Chronic toxic body shame may, for example, be observed in children who have been subjected to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA).[295] In severe cases, such abuse does not only leave its mark on the body through permanent neurological changes that exile the embodied self from the contextual and relational resources needed to readjust and develop into a healthy self. It may also render the embodied self to a zone of war where heightened *fight, flight and freeze* responses become the social and psychological default setting. Sexual trauma often imprints both fear and deep toxic and chronic shame over being sexually dirty and destroyed. These imprints or self-evaluations are not easily lifted. The

295 Mesel, *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep*; van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*; Kirkengen, *Inscribed Bodies: Health Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse*.

chance is, instead, that the threat of being exposed pushes the embodied subject into further exile. Thus, the more the abuse becomes the main frame of reference for the self-evaluation of the embodied self, the stronger is the chance that its consequences will manifest as permanent and universal traits. Such an embodied self is not a docile, disciplined body in a Foucauldian sense, but a fighting, frozen, or fleeing body: sometimes tragically disciplined – to the core of the central nervous system – interpreting and scanning any context as a potentially hostile and dangerous environment.

Thus, it makes sense to make a distinction between body shame and the toxic and all-pervasive shame of a shamed body. The shamed body is often experienced and perceived as being sexually assaulted, objectified, dirty, shameful, and always under the threat of being publicly exposed as damaged and morally corrupted. As such, child sexual abuse affects both the body and the self-perception of the body, inscribing this violent interruption of intentional agency not only as neurological imprints in the deeper layers of the brain but also in bodily responses such as body posture, reddening of the skin, eye movement, and fight, flight and freeze responses. Thus, the shamed body may be one of the manifested responses to pain or suffering when the body and the self are attacked severely. The experience and the memory of the other's violent break-in, and the concomitant interruption and destructive rewriting of the victim's original immediate agency as this rewriting is manifested in, for example, physical and psychological pain, dysfunctional sexuality, flashbacks or memories that generate fear, guilt, and shame, may in itself generate further shame, thus fortifying the already toxic environment of the victim's agency. Thus, within a phenomenology of the lived body, as mentioned above, bodily shame does not spill over to the self as if body and self were separate. They are intertwined entities in human life. Embodied life entails that we are bodies. Hence, body shame may develop into a shamed body.

Thus, in our analysis, we want to reserve the concept of the shamed body for the deeper and more troubling bodily imprint that chronic and toxic body shame may leave on an embodied self. In her disturbing book, *Inscribed Bodies,* Anne Louise Kirkengen describes the physical and neurological

imprint that CSA may leave on a victim.[296] These imprints do not only affect the interpretative framework a child has for both restoring and developing a healthy self. They also affect how the body may freeze in the continuous experience of being sexually dirty and scared, always objectified and exposed. These imprints, often forcing the victim into a tragic relational and social exile, not only affect somatic and mental health.[297] They may also freeze bodily posture through constantly downcast eyes and bent body posture – always in hiding, in flight, or in submission. Thus, the manifestations of the toxically shamed body are not responses to a specific experience of being bodily shamed in a specific context. They are, instead, automated responses that reflect the experience of always being under the gaze of the other and always being exposed in a dangerous world. If the world was a dangerous place where relational and social safety and trust were not possible, this response would make sense. This is how it is experienced by the abused child or the victim of violence. Due to the traumatic effects of CSA, the child is, therefore, left in an unsustainable war zone. The movements of shame manifest themselves here as well: the child is left *moving away* from relationality and sociality with scant recourses for resolving the need for flight and hiding. Thus, the possible healing in moving towards relational safety, trust, and openness, are tragically denied for some. As such, CSA is both a physical and a psychological attack on the fragility and dependence of bodily human agency, especially in a child where the need for safety is so paramount for the development of a mature self.

Body shame: differentiations

Bodies can be shamed for many reasons. First, one can experience body shame when the body does not meet standards of bodily perfection, for example, when the body displays features or forms that do not adhere to the prevailing trends and standards of a healthy and muscle-toned

296 Kirkengen, *Inscribed Bodies: Health Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse*.

297 See also Spiegel, *Sexual Abuse of Males. The Sam Model of Theory and Practice*; and van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, 143ff. for an overview of the extensive ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) study carried out by Robert Anda and Vincent Felliti.

body. As embodied selves, the body reveals who we are, and when our body falls short for some reason, our global self may fall short as well.

Second, as a variation of the first, body shame can be tied to the body as a visual manifestation of assumed weakness. As embodied selves, the state of the body may be interpreted as our ability to fulfill our personal objectives and ideals through action. The fat, the unclean, or the self-mutilated body may speak of a lack of self-control. Thus shame may be the response when the body is exposed and reveals a disruption between the assumed objectives that an agent supposedly holds – or should hold – and his or her ability to act accordingly.

Third, one can also experience shame when the body becomes an object for the sexual desire of a voyeur. Such a shame response seems to be tied to what may be called an objectification of the body. For the embodied self, the objectification of the body as a means of pleasure by the other may be experienced as a shameful loss of self, as the body is no longer under the subject's control and determined by aims and intentions chosen by him or herself. In the following, we will unfold these three main types of body shame. As the third differentiation is the most prominent cause of shame discussed in the research literature, we shall elaborate on this especially.

First differentiation: the lacking body as an existential reminder

The first form of body shame is, as mentioned above, tied to the exposure of the, for example, disfigured, the aging, the incontinent, the disease-marked, or the scarred body. These bodies are not the result of personal choices or lifestyle issues. They are the result of accidents, diseases, or the inevitable bodily deterioration over time. These bodily presentations do not meet the current trends in cultural standards of bodily aesthetic perfection. Instead, they symbolize the opposite: the vulnerable and timeworn body, the damaged body, or the body marked by disease. As such, they might remind us of our own vulnerability, imperfection and mortality. According to Dolezal, in Western culture we have

celebrated the human transcendence over our body, and repressed our animal bodily nature:

> As such, shame about the body is particularly powerful in that it disrupts our illusion of transcendence – the notion that we are more than *merely* animals – and reveals our undeniable and imperfect corporeality. The body symbolizes our vulnerability, neediness and ultimate lack of control over our own mortality. Hence it is not surprising that the body, especially when it falls ill or fails us, is a powerful source and site of shame.[298]

Thus, the presence of the vulnerable, timeworn or sick body reminds us not only of our vulnerability and mortality, but it also reveals the impossibility of current ideals of bodily perfection. It throws us back to the existential conditions of human life from which there is no escape and, at the same time, shows the futility of our attempts to escape. In a culture where these existential characteristics of being-in-the-world are shunned and stowed away, embodied manifestations of imperfection and mortality may undoubtedly be experienced as shameful.

Philosopher and trauma theoretician Ronnie Janoff-Bulman suggests that in order to protect our vulnerability from the horrors and tragedies of the world, we tend to uphold false assumptions of our safety in a world where accidents and violence may hit blindly.[299] We assume that even though disasters happen all around us, they will not happen to us. Car accidents, our house burning down, or sexual abuse of our children cannot happen to us because we are somehow protected. Therefore, when others become victims of violence or abuse, we tend to rationalize it by creating narratives that can save these false assumptions: the raped girl has probably been promiscuous, or there is probably some dysfunctionality in the family of the suicide victim. Thus, the price for our need to resituate ourselves in order to establish social distance to those inflicted is often paid by those who have

298 Dolezal, L. "The Phenomenology of Shame in the Clinical Encounter." Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy 18, 567–576 (2015), 569.

299 Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma* (New York: Free Press, 1992); "Assumptive Worlds and the Stress of Traumatic Events: Applications of the Schema Construct," *Social Cognition* 7, no. 2 (1989).

already suffered the loss. When social distance is created through body narratives, as in the example of the raped girl, increased body shame may well be this added cost.

The functions and consequences of this social and psychological phenomenon have also been described in studies of child sexual abuse, especially sexual abuse of boys and men.[300] It seems to be the case here that the abused victims that are already shamefully scarred are often the ones that pay the moral cost of our attempts to save our false assumptions of being protected in a dangerous and unpredictable world. Because being a male victim of sexual abuse does not fit the heteronormative narrative of male sexual dominance, the added cost of increased body shame may be experienced through the social distancing and suspicious watchfulness of others. In other words, the victimized body of male sexual abuse falls shamefully short of the social depictions of what the normal dominant male body is. Thus, the stigma of the abused male is subtler than the stigma of the scarred or burned body, where the imperfection is visibly exposed. Rather, it is an invisible stigma based on the assumption that male sexuality is active and dominant. Thus, being the passive victim of sexual abuse becomes somewhat suspicious, as it runs contrary to this assumption. The stigma of abuse suggests that the victim must be responsible – at least partly – for the abuse, and as such reveals a possibly flawed moral character that may turn them into abusers themselves.[301]

Hence, a moral component is added to body shame. As the victimized body reminds us of our existential condition, we may attempt to save our assumptions of being protected by morally staining the victim and both confirming and adding to the victim's shame of being sexually dirty, objectified, and partly guilty.[302]

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300 See Mesel, *Vilje Til Frihet. En Manns Fortelling Om Barndom Og Overgrep*.

301 Often referred to as the Vampire syndrome. See ibid., 124ff.

302 For further elaborations of this, we may point to studies that identify atrocities due to contempt for weakness and vulnerability, as in the work of the Norwegian philosophers Harald Ofstad and Arne Johan Vetlesen.

Second differentiation: when the body reveals the weakness of the will

As the human mode of being in the world is one of embedded and embodied presence, we assert, express, and define ourselves through our bodies as the expressive space we hold in the world. As we saw above, we are bodies that interact – or transact – in a complex web of other bodies, social and material structures, culture, and history.[303] We construe and experience our bodies through habits and actions, both forming and being formed by the environment of which we are a part. Thus, our bodies tell our story, both through the habits of the body and through bodily actions. As bodies, we sing or dance, and we discuss and gesticulate. The clothing of our bodies signals who we are. Some bodies are sculpted through intensive body-work or cosmetic surgery. Some use their skin as canvases of art, telling stories of identity, belonging, or personal history. The athletic and fit body dressed in a running outfit tells at least parts of the story the embodied self wants to be told. Hence, we interact, communicate, and interpret both our own objectives and the objectives of the other through our bodies. Our bodies are meant to be read because our bodies talk. But their talk is embedded, forming and formed in the social and material structures they are a part of. In this sense, the language of the body is articulated within liberating or repressing frames of context.[304] The black body, the female or the male body, the sexually assertive or the sexually abused body, the slim or the fat body are all expressed within a context of aesthetic, social, and moral evaluation and ranking.

This contextually and culturally determined designation of social, aesthetic or moral value to the different bodily representations opens up for this second differentiation of body shame. Bodies talk, and body-talk is interpreted within specific frameworks. However, someone's personal

303 Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism*.

304 In this sense, the language of the body is articulated within liberating or repressing frames of context. Emma Rees, *Talking Bodies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Embodiment, Gender and Identity* (Springer, 2017); Michelle Mary Lelwica, *Shameful Bodies: Religion and the Culture of Physical Improvement*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury, *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Farrell, *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture*.

objectives are not necessarily in accordance with others' interpretations of what the body signals. An example may be the obese or fat body that signals a lack of self-control over bodily desires (to control eating). Nevertheless, the interpretation of this as lacking self-control may be far from the objectives of the acting subject that has a severe weight problem. Thus, being bodily exposed as fat displays an interruption between the objectives of the self and how it is contextually interpreted through the display of the body. In the aesthetic, social and moral hierarchy of body talk, both fatness and lack of control over bodily desires are negatively evaluated. Thus, obesity signals a collapse of one's coherent agency. The ideals of slimness, healthiness, and self-control seem to be substituted with the opposite through overeating, lack of exercise, and lack of self-control, and so on. In other words, the shame of obesity is not only tied to aesthetic or social bodily undesirability. It is also tied to a negative moral evaluation of not controlling but giving in to bodily desires – and thus, to an assumed weakness of the will.

Third differentiation: in the eyes of the other in different contexts

Objectification as commodification

The extraordinary or abnormal body draws our attention through morbid curiosity.[305] One example is the oppressive and sad construction and history of what was called freakery. Earlier, hairy bodies, giants, and little people were displayed as anomalies of nature. Still today, otherness draws the eye. The fact that our gaze is drawn to uncommon bodily features presupposes both a certain kind of objectification and otherness. It is the very act of constituting them as anomalies of nature that makes them accessible to us as objects to be curiously gazed upon.[306] Such an objectivization loses sight of the embodied presence of the other as a person.

305 See Kevin Pinkerton and Shuhua Zhou, "Effects of Morbid Curiosity on Perception, Attention, and Reaction to Bad News," *The University of Alabama McNair Journal* (2008); Suzanne Oosterwijk, "Choosing the Negative: A Behavioral Demonstration of Morbid Curiosity," *PLoS ONE 12, no. 7* (2017).

306 Thomson, *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*.

Whether it is the abnormal or the scarred body that catches our attention or gaze, the mechanism of objectification is much the same. By construing it as otherness, these features are no longer a threat to our own vulnerability. The consequence, however, is that that the embodied self of the other is reduced to a mere object, exposed to the gaze of morbid curiosity or simply objectified indifference. Exposure of bodily otherness in a fluid, transparent, and unpredictable virtual society puts the exposed embodied self in a fragile and vulnerable position likely to cause shame.

The history of freakery also reveals a possibility for handling such body shame. The freak of the travelling circus, whether it was the midget, the giant or the hairy one, went on stage to earn a livelihood. It may well have been the only employment possible. But for the sake of the argument, let us assume that he was a free person choosing the circus life. Accepting a contract where he was to be part of the program alongside tamed animals, clowns, and other circus artists, he also accepted a contractual commodification of himself as a body to be gazed upon. Through his performance, he sells his best asset: his body. As an embodied self, he chose to objectify this asset as something of negotiable value. But when the circus lights died down and the spectators left, he walked back to his trailer no longer as a commodity but as an embodied self. Hopefully, he was treated as a person by his fellow circus artists, not as the commodified freak. One might ask when the vulnerability and possibility for shame would be most prevalent? It follows from the argument above that he would be more vulnerable to shame offstage, where his intended project was no longer posing as a commodified freak to be gazed upon, but rather to be himself.

The point of this little prelude is not to give a simplistic and misguided version of the problematic history of what was pejoratively called freakery. Rather, it is to identify and unfold a specific form of shame by linking the bodily commodification of the circus artist to a more present phenomenon: the bodily commodification of selling sex. What we have so far called the objectification of the exposed body is one of the main causes of body shame, especially female shame. Selling sex may exemplify one important strategy for handling objectification. However, it is essential for us to make clear that this is only part of the picture. We do not take

into account the abusive backgrounds, the trafficking, the street violence, and the traumatizing effects of prostitution in the following analysis. Our point is merely to draw up an example to elicit the above-mentioned shame strategy.

As already argued, objectification entails a reduction of the embodied self. In one sense, being objectified is to lose some control over the embodied self – or the self as body. When a young girl has her digital photo taken in the shower without her consent, and it is distributed on Instagram or other SoMe channels, she loses control both of who sees it and how they see it. Thus, the photo, as an objectification of herself, can be the object of ridicule by classmates or used as a voyeuristic object for persons unknown to her. Others can now define her body as an object of ridicule, sexual object, or of no interest.

Is it possible to take back control? Is there a strategy to reduce the shame of such objectification and self-loss? When a woman decides to – or is forced to – prostitute herself, she accepts/must accept that her body, as part of her embodied self, is commodified and commercialized as a sexual object. Then the buyer is given at least some control of her body within the frames of contractual boundaries related to what kind of sexual services he is offered. In other words, prostitution entails a separation of self and body through willing – or forced –possibly shameful objectification.

Maddy Coy addresses this topic in a research article that explores women's accounts of prostitution, especially how they narrate their lived experience of the body.[307] According to her study, there is great variation in how women selling sex manage the ownership over their body as well as the self/body relationship. This is predictable. One crucial premise for understanding these women's negotiations of bodily ownership is that it often takes place within a context of violence, abuse, and drug addiction. In a situation where corporeal ownership is already taken away through abuse and or/forced prostitution or addiction, the negotiation of the value of the body as a sexual commodity can be construed as one way

307 Maddy Coy, "This Body Which Is Not Mine: The Notion of the Habit Body, Prostitution and (Dis) Embodiment," *Feminist Theory* 10, no. 1 (2009).

of attempting to regain control over a body that is lost through earlier sexual objectification. To take control is to exercise a form of agency in which the embodied self accepts the objectification and commodification of the body. For many of these women, their living conditions have from early on been determined by child abuse, sexual objectification, degradation, and loss of control over the body. Within this oppressive framework, they have been treated and valued as sexual objects constituting harsh and restricted frames for exercising agency and forming habits of agency. According to Coy, many of these women have lost the perception of corporeal ownership through abuse and rape. By claiming some kind of control by being agents of sex work, they reposition, reassert, and exercise agency through the body as their expressive space. However, this attempt to reposition and reassert does not necessarily change either the oppressive framework or the habitual template from which these women exercise their agency. Exercising agency by taking control over the body and by negotiating its value still takes place within the oppressive context of the sex trade. Consequently, even though sexual transactions can be read as negotiations of ownership to the body, and thus may be perceived as acting meaningfully through the body by the woman selling sex, it still reproduces the oppressive framework of objectification and sexual commodification in which the woman fights for control.[308] Hence, the strategy for overcoming shame and regaining agency comes at a high price.

Body shame as disruption and the resources of context

Can the example of a prostitute's attempts to regain ownership of the body through negotiating value add to our preliminary definition and differentiation of shame as manifesting the rupture between the chosen objectives of the self and expressions of agency? We believe it can. However, one needs to bear in mind the initial premise for Coy's analysis: that the women attempting to take control over the body through selling sex do so within an abusive and violent framework that disciplines habits of both reflection and action. This comment underscores a more general

308 Wendy Parkins, "Protesting Like a Girl: Embodiment, Dissent and Feminist Agency," *Feminist Theory* 1, no. 1 (2000).

point: the chosen and intentional (bodily) objectives and the possible accompanying bodily actions of the embodied self are constituted and set within a broad and sometimes complex contextual frame. Thus, the experience of exercising embodied agency through acting in accordance with objectives is both constituted and informed by the given relational, social, and material framework. To repeat an earlier point, the extent to which shame can be overcome is dependent on the impact of this context, as well as the personal resources available to the subject.

Even though contextual embeddedness is a premise for any individual's choices and actions, the construction of frameworks differs significantly, as does their outcome. The contextual framework of a girl growing up in a home with a violent and sexually abusive father, and who later turns to prostitution and drug addiction, is qualitatively very different from a girl growing up in a nurturing and loving family, and who later on becomes a teacher. In this sense, the contextual frame of both choice and action can deplete or even deny the embodied self the necessary resources and expressive space to both choose and act on supportive and liberating bodily objectives as well as experience and handle body shame. Accordingly, the development of a stable and mature embodied self, hinges – at least to a certain extent – on the quality of the context. The strong disciplining power of dysfunctional and oppressive contexts of, for example, violence and abuse, will reproduce sexual objectification and shame, and offer scant resources that one can use to transcend such contexts. Liberating contexts, however, tend to give the individual bodily expressive space to freely exercise agency through chosen bodily objectives, without interruption and concomitant shame. Such contexts offer resources that support both the reproduction of flourishing contextual frameworks, as well as transcendence and further development. Thus, to overcome shame by regaining control is not only dependent on personal resources, but also on the accessible contextual resources.

Body shame as disruption in contexts with impossible ideals

Body shame is not only a response when disruption or rupture is caused by clashing contexts with different sets of values and norms, generating objects and actions with different and/or opposing bodily desirability.

The interruption of shame can also occur within the context of the person themselves, when the context is such that it makes it difficult – or impossible – to realize the choice of bodily objectives through action. As we have mentioned above, when the impossible bodily ideals of the trending culture become our objectives, the possibility of realizing these ideals becomes very slight. The gap between the chosen bodily ideals or objectives and the possibility of realizing these through bodily action, increases the possibility for disruption between objectives and action – and hence the possibility for body shame. Such shame need not originate from a context that reduces or impedes the possibility of realizing bodily objectives. When adolescent boys and girls are shamed because their bodies do not adhere to or match the bodily ideals they pick up from the popular culture and make their own, it is not because of lack of contextual support. On the contrary: whole industries thrive financially on dietary programs offering slim and healthy bodies. Cross-fit studios, gyms, and spinning centers offer toned muscles, and clinics offer surgery and injections as medical short-cuts to the ideal body. Hence, the contextual resources do not impede the ability to close the interruption between chosen bodily objectives and actions. It is the impossibility of the ideals themselves that leave many adolescents in a virtually exposed and shameful limbo between impossible ideals and exposed bodies that falls way short of expected bodily norms. As we mentioned above, in postmodern culture, this bodily limbo is always under threat of being visibly displayed, demeaned, and ultimately without the possibility of retreat to safety.[309]

309 For a sociological introduction to the transparency and fluidity of postmodern culture, see, for example, Bauman, *Liquid Life*; *Liquid Modernity*. For a narrower introduction to youth culture, see, for example, Ole Jacob Madsen, *Generasjon Prestasjon: Hva Er Det Som Feiler Oss?* (Oslo: Universitetsforlag, 2018); Jean M. Twenge, *I-Gen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood (What This Means for the Rest of Us)* (New York: Atria Books, 2017); *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Free Press, 2006); "The Evidence for Generation Me and Against Generation We," *Emerging Adulthood* 1, no. 1 (2013). For a discussion of Twenge's analysis, see both Madsen, *Generasjon Prestasjon: Hva Er Det Som Feiler Oss?*, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, Kali H., and M. Brent Donnellan, "The Dangers of Generational Myth-Making: Rejoinder to Twenge," *Emerging Adulthood* 1, no. 1 (2013); Kali H. Trzesniewski, M. Brent Donnellan, and Richard W. Robins, "Is 'Generation Me' Really More Narcissistic Than Previous Generations?," *Journal of Personality* 76, no. 4 (2008).

Body shame as disruption in overlapping contexts

But can choosing objectives and acting in accordance with them within a given framework also generate shame? How can the chosen aims and actions of a woman selling sex generate shame when what she actually does is an attempt to transcend the limiting context and take some control over her body? One line of reasoning here is based on how we, as citizens, partake in a network of overlapping contexts where we take on different roles. When we seek recognition, our choice of objectives is tied closely to the normative expectations of the different roles that present themselves in different contexts. We have seen that role behavior that does not meet normative standards may easily be experienced as shameful. However, the complexities of human life may also present themselves as intersecting and normatively clashing role expectations, as well as in their moral ranking. One example can elucidate this point:

A woman selling sex is also a daughter or a sister to someone, and she may be selling sex to support both her addiction and her child, of whom she is desperately afraid of losing custody. In the network of overlapping contexts and concerns, she is woven into a complex web of relations and roles where norms and values differ in both content and moral ranking. Thus, to sell sex and commodify her body is a way of reasserting her ownership of the body and thereby attempt to close the gap between her experience of being an embodied self and losing the body through objectification. However, she is also a mother, a role in which expectations entail desirable objects that run contrary to the objective of selling sex. A mother selling sex will most likely be evaluated as unfit to take responsibility for the caring and upbringing of a child. It is not unlikely that shame may occur in this web of overlapping contexts. Thus, gaining control over her body through selling sex may be construed as a meaningful and even role-transcending action in a context where sexual objectification, abuse, and violence have defined her role behavior. However, the context and role of motherhood certainly entail normative expectations that run contrary to selling sex, even when this in itself allows her to overcome shame to some extent. The intersection between morally ranked contexts and role expectations can thus enhance the experience of shame, as one is bodily exposed and found morally lacking when the child welfare service discloses that the mother sells sex to

support herself. However, external exposure is not necessarily a premise for shame. The socially ingrained role expectations, as well as the desirable objectives of motherhood, obviously clash with the objectives of selling sex. Thus, the woman may experience a permanent rupture: the objective of providing her daughter with a relatively safe and nurturing environment is inconsistent with the objective of taking control over her body by relating to it as a sexual commodity.

As subjects with manifold roles in overlapping contexts there are differing norms and expectations as to what the body should be like, how it should act or behave. Thus, exerting agency successfully hinges – at least to a certain extent – on the degree of freedom and lack of oppression in the different context in which an embodied subject partakes. In late modern society, this is made difficult because the virtual *Argos Panoptes* seem to invade all contexts. Thus, shame as a reaction to interrupted agency may present itself more permanently and/or more suddenly as the contextual complexity develops.

Shame and the female body

In a fresco in the Brancacci Chapel in Florence, the Renaissance painter Masaccio depicted the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden (1425–1427). One interpretation of the fresco is that Adam and Eve hide their shame under the gaze of the almighty God. Thus, it may represent an important historical insight into the phenomenon of male and female body shame. They attempt to hide their shame differently. Adam holds his hands in front of his face covering his eyes. Eve holds one hand over her vulva and covers her breasts with the other. As such, the fresco depicts a central and historical phenomenological difference between male and female body shame. Adam is the active one, who is ashamed because he is exposed as the one who has seen. Therefore, he hides his eyes. Eve, the passive one, is ashamed because she is exposed – she is the one who is seen. Therefore, she hides her body.[310]

310 Claire Pajacvzkowska and Ivan Ward, "Introduction: Shame, Sexuality and Visual Culture," in *Shame and Sexuality. Psychoanalysis and Visual Culture.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

Origin: evolution and existential threat

This chapter will elaborate on the social construction of female embodiment, and the shame related to the experience of disrupted embodiment in different domains and contexts. As we shall see, feminist literature more than suggests – and rightly so – that the explanations for both past and present experiences of various degrees of disruption or rupture of female embodiment can be found in a plethora of disciplining power strategies. These are exercised to a varying degree of intent – promoting and securing male dominance and patriarchy.

However, this is not the sole frame of reference for the analysis of female body shame. The anthropologist and philosopher Hans Peter Duerr suggest that female body shame, including what leads to the covering of genitalia as in the fresco by Massacio, can be viewed as an adapted function in the evolved organization of human societies, for example, in couple relations, and the distinction between private and public.[311] Through shame, the sexual attraction of the female body is hidden from the public gaze and privatized. This hiding serves to reduce dysfunctional male rivalry and strengthens the couple's relation as the institution that has, historically, best secured the survival of offspring.[312] Other theories attempt to account for the historical development of apparent male power strategies that have secured dominance and inequality by using body shame as a tool.[313] The underlying assumption is that although death is unavoidable,

311 Duerr, *Myten Om Civilisationsprocessen: B. 2: Intimitet*, B. 2, 207ff.

312 His five-volume magnus opus *Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozess* is, above all, a sharp critique of the two-volume seminal work *The Civilizing Process* by the sociologist Norbert Elias. The dispute between Duerr and Elias, and the following rather vivid scholarly debate, has thrown important light on the influential civilization thesis of Elias. For further reading of Duerr's perspective on female shame, see volume 2 *Intimitet.* However, in this context we will not dwell more on the evolutionary topic of shame as we have briefly covered this earlier in the book.

313 For an introduction, see Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (London: Souvenir Press, 2011); Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*; Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski, and Sheldon Solomon, "The Causes and Consequences of a Need for Self-Esteem: A Terror Management Theory," in *Public Self and Private Self* (Springer, 1986); Brian L. Burke, Andy Martens, and Erik H. Faucher, "Two Decades of Terror Management Theory: A Meta-Analysis of Mortality Salience Research," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14, no. 2 (2010); Jamie L. Goldenberg and Tomi-Ann Roberts, "The Birthmark: An Existential Account of the Objectification of Women," in *Self-Objectification in Women: Causes, Consequences, and Counteractions*, ed. Rachel M. Calogero, Stacey Ed Tantleff-Dunn, and J. Thompson (Washington, D.C: American Psychological Association, 2011).

all beings are biologically programed to struggle for life, for survival. However, humans are the only species fully conscious of this basic fact of life. Thus, our awareness of the existential discrepancy between our mortality and our struggle to survive causes anxiety that needs to be resolved. Due to our symbolic capacities, we can deny or defuse the unavoidable consequences of our own corporeality through religious or philosophical strategies. Thus, we interpret these phenomena within cultural systems that render them culturally meaningful, regulated, and even idealized. These strategies often involve power-struggles to establish cultural fortifications that secure a meaningful symbolic distance to the existential threat of death.

It is in this context that some scholars suggest we should understand the repression and regulation of female embodiment. The underlying assumption is that female bodies, and the reproductive biological processes and parts of female bodies, represent a threatening reminder of the unavoidable biological cycle of life. However, the same body and body parts also serve as objects of desire and sexual attraction to heterosexual men.[314] The discrepancy between these two approaches to the female body is solved through various strategies of cultural objectification and subsequent self-objectification. However, we shall not follow this theoretical approach in detail here but return to it as we move into the specifics of female body shame.

We have emphasized the contextual embeddedness of the embodied subject and the disciplining structures within which a subject exerts its agency. We have also underscored the importance of overlapping contexts. The various theoretical accounts which try to explain the emergence and existence of disciplining frameworks along long evolutionary lines that over time discipline and regulate behavioral adaptations need not conflict with the close-reading of the disciplining powers at play in specific contexts. Both may be relevant for the contextual displays of shame and contribute to a more nuanced picture of female body shame. However, as our focus in this study is on the contemporary context, we shall treat both theories about the evolutionary context and theories of

314 "The Birthmark: An Existential Account of the Objectification of Women," 84.

existential threat only as part of the backdrop of current female body shame.[315]

Female embodiment: historical lines

Late modern society presents new challenges to female embodiment. According to Chrysler and Johnston-Robledo, women's relationships to their bodies are complex:

> The body should be a source of pleasure, the enabler of agency, and the mediator between the world and the Self. However, for most women, at least some of the time, the body is a disappointment, a source of anxiety, and a site of labor. The body is a self-improvement project for girls and women.[316]

The project of female embodiment – or the project of *doing gender* as West and Zimmerman called it in their seminal article from 1987 – has been and is a precarious project.[317] Developing a secure and positive experience of embodiment is made difficult, both at present and historically, by always being evaluated and often devalued. We need not make the historical account very extensive to emphasize this point. The female body has been treated as men's property. Hence, rape under Babylonian law was treated as a form of property damage. According to Rose Weitz, it was not until 1984 that a man in the USA could be convicted for raping a

315 A further discussion would hve to deal with the consequences of viewing female body shame as part of an evolutionary account of couple relations, and also what the distinction between private and public has meant for securing survival. In this context, it activates important interdisciplinary discussions between, for example, evolutionary biology, anthropology, feminist studies and ethics. However, the many difficult and contested topics of evolutionary ethics, such as the problem of what *is* and what *ought* to be (is – ought), cannot be taken up here. For an introduction to evolutionary ethics, see, for example, Michael Ruse and Robert J. Richards, *The Cambridge Handbook of Evolutionary Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Scott M. James, *An Introduction to Evolutionary Ethics*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

316 Joan C. Chrisler and Ingrid Johnston-Robledo, *Woman's Embodied Self: Feminist Perspectives on Identity and Image* (American Psychological Association, 2018), 11.

317 See C. West and D. H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," *Gender & Society* 1, no. 2 (1987). This widely cited article has become a classic study in both sociology and gender studies. For a short introduction to the discussion and development of the concept, see, for example, numerous articles from a symposium on Doing Gender published in *Gender & Society*, 2009, vol. 23, No. 1. See also Sarah Fenstermaker and Candace West, *Doing Gender, Doing Difference: Inequality, Power, and Institutional Change* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

woman to whom he was married.[318] In both Greek philosophy and medicine, the female body was viewed as an insufficiently developed male body where the sexual organs were located inside the body due to a lack of heat in the early developmental stage of the embryo.[319] The view that females are passive, fragile, closer to nature and inferior, but also more driven by sexual passions and, therefore, morally more dangerous, has been documented in a variety of ways throughout Western history. Thus, by being a reminder of the natural and the corporeal, as well as being sexually attractive, women pose a threat that men attempt to solve by imbuing a distance between the superior qualities of cognitive, moral, male agency and the more inferior and natural agency of female embodiment which lacks in both cognitive and moral capabilities. Such theoretical configurations of gender, mind, and body, and the definition of moral, emotional and rational qualities attributed to these, have been a central part of the oppressive framework that the feminist movement has had to struggle against. Shame has played a central part both in the construction and enforcement of gender roles and in gender definitions within these frameworks.

This mind-body split poses severe challenges to the very idea of embodiment in the current feminist discussions of gender construction. In principle, the idea of embodiment runs counter to the possibility of a split where the body is separated from the self and objectified as a separate entity. It also links up to our previously discussed topic of what we, in a preliminary sense, have called objectification, which we will unfold in greater detail here.

Objectification of the female body

Objectification has been put forth as one of the central challenges for both female embodiment and female shame, especially sexual objectification. Broadly defined, objectification implies that the body is being

318 Rose Weitz and Samantha Kwan, *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8.

319 Ibid., 3.

negatively used, controlled and owned through one's physical properties.[320] For example, many women experience it as extremely shameful to have their bodies reduced to sexualized flesh in the gaze of the other. However, we need to ask whether the different conceptualizations of objectification within feminist discourse offer an adequate framework for understanding shame in this context. To be treated as an object does not in itself necessitate shame responses. We call on physical therapists and plumbers because they have bodies and physical skills that are up to the task at hand, and they are not ashamed of it. Furthermore, when one part in a sexual relationship experiences desire because of the sexual attractiveness of the body of the other, it can be a source of pleasure for both. Thus, objectification need not be problematic in itself. Accordingly, it is questionable whether the broad definition above may be useful to elicit the specific connections between objectification and shame responses.[321] In our view, we need a more nuanced analysis of the concept of objectification and its role in shame processes. Timo Jütten draws up two main accounts of sexual objectification: the *imposition account* and the *instrumentalization account*.[322]

The imposition account

The starting point for our discussion of sexual objectification is the *imposition account*.[323] In her seminal book *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*,

320 Rachel M. Calogero, Stacey Ed Tantleff-Dunn, and J. Thompson, "Objectification Theory: An Introduction," in *Self-objectification in women: Causes, and counteractions* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2011), 5.

321 Ibid.

322 Timo Jütten, "Sexual Objectification," *Ethics* 127, no. 1 (2016).

323 For further reading, see Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Putnam, 1981); Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990). The development of a more formalized theory of objectification is an attempt to catch and conceptualize much of both the theorizing and the research on female objectification, in order to offer a conceptual platform for further research. For further reading into objectification theory, see, for example, Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts, "Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1997); Rachel M. Calogero, Stacey Ed Tantleff-Dunn, and J. Kevin Thompson, *Self-Objectification in Women: Causes, Consequences, and Counteractions*, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2011).

Catharine MacKinnon claims that to be sexually objectified means having a social meaning imposed on your being that defines you as something to be sexually used.[324] Accordingly, sexual objectification is always wrong because it always takes place within a context of male dominance and female oppression. It imposes a social meaning that undermines both equality and autonomy, as well as rendering the female body as an object to be instrumentalized and used. The cultural imposition of immoral values pervades the context and leaves no chance for the possible sexual objectification of male – female desire and pleasure to be played out in conditions of autonomy and equality. Thus, the many variations of being sexually instrumentalized and objectified produce – intentionally or not – variations of shame manifested within a wider frame of political and historical oppression.

Even though this account has been seminal in revealing the oppressive premises for female embodiment through both history and the present, it has been challenged for its sweeping analyses and lack of sensitivity to context.

The instrumentalization account

Martha Nussbaum's account entails the close reading of literary texts that reveal helpful distinctions between different dimensions of sexual objectification that are not equally objectionable from a moral perspective.[325] To elicit and understand what is morally problematic and shame-producing about sexual objectification – which Nussbaum calls a *loose cluster-term* – we need to be sensitive to the context in which the objectification occurs. The imposition account, where sexual objectification is always morally problematic, conflates the different ways in which different dimensions of objectification play together.[326]

As mentioned, sexual objectification between equal and consenting partners can, for example, be a rather pleasurable part of sexual life and thus not shame-producing. In her reading, Nussbaum distinguishes between seven ways of treating a person as a thing:

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324 Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, 140.

325 Martha C. Nussbaum, "Objectification," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 24, no. 4 (1995).

326 Patricia Marino, "The Ethics of Sexual Objectification: Autonomy and Consent," *Inquiry* 51, no. 4 (2008).

1. Instrumentality: the objectifier treats the object as a tool for his or her purposes.
2. Denial of autonomy: the objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
3. Inertness: the objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.
4. Fungibility: the objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type, and/or (b) with objects of other types.
5. Violability: the objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into.
6. Ownership: the objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, that can be bought or sold, etc.
7. Denial of subjectivity: the objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.[327]

However, to identify these dimensions does not in itself answer the question of whether all forms of objectification are morally problematic. Thus, in order to analyze shame resulting from objectification, and specifically from sexual objectification, we need to analyze which of these dimensions of objectification that are present in shame.

Furthermore, these are not mutually exclusive dimensions. Often a plurality of these dimensions will constitute a shame reaction. For example, in a situation of persistent sexual abuse, more or less all of the above dimensions will be in play. Nussbaum herself does not answer what cluster of features would constitute a sufficient condition for a morally problematic objectification of persons.[328] The only dimension she seems to identify as always morally objectionable is *instrumentalization*, that is, treating others merely as tools for one's own purposes.[329] In relation to sexuality, this sort of objectification seems to be closely tied to other

327 Nussbaum, "Objectification," 257.
328 Ibid., 258.
329 Ibid., 289.

dimensions, such as adenial of subjectivity and autonomy, boundary violations, and ownership such as commodification. All these forms may be morally problematic and can be experienced as shameful within the cultural framework of male dominance.

However, Nussbaum's context-sensitive reading of literature shows that other dimensions do not always have to be morally problematic as long as they are based on consent. Even though she does not list up criteria for when objectification is morally acceptable, it does seem to entail a form of relational symmetry, mutuality, and some form of intimacy.[330] However, one may object that using literary examples – although picked from a wide range of sources from *Playboy* to D. H. Lawrence – entails a stylized reduction of the broader experience of human life. Thus, one may argue that this method of literary close-reading may be sensitive to the context of the chosen literary texts, but not to the context of the female experience itself.

Critical remarks

Although Nussbaum's differentiations have merit, they have been contested as well. It has been argued that in sexual objectification, only one morally relevant value is at stake: respect for autonomy.[331] Hence, there is nothing morally wrong with the sexual objectification implied in, for example, anonymous casual sex, prostitution, and pornography, as long as it is based on consent. In fact, Nussbaum's criteria of intimacy and mutuality only muddy the water because inherent relational ties and feelings may influence and even thwart a free and autonomous choice. But even though autonomy should be the only moral reference point, it is difficult to ensure autonomy and consent in a political and cultural context where female embodiment and female autonomy have had a history of being oppressed and undermined. Accordingly, in this respect, we are still no closer to a fine-tuned analytical tool that can separate shameful and non-shameful objectification of the body.

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330 Marino, "The Ethics of Sexual Objectification: Autonomy and Consent"; "Philosophy of Sex," *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 1 (2014).

331 Ibid.

Another critic, Lina Papadaki, argues against both the imposition account and Nussbaum's differentiation between morally negative and positive objectification.[332] She criticizes the Kantian-based imposition account for being overly pessimistic and drastic in its description of the consequences of sexual objectification. Being utilized by somebody as a mere sexual object does not necessarily lead to serious harming of rational capacities or humanity. Objectification comes in many forms, with varying degrees of intent and with varying degrees of harm. Being the recipient of catcalls on the street is certainly different from being the victim of physical sexual abuse, even though both may imply some form of sexual objectification. Thus, Papadaki opts for a more differentiated concept that allows for forms of sexual objectification that do not lead to serious harming of the other. On the other hand, she criticizes Nussbaum's differentiated account for being much too inclusive. If objectification includes any form of consensual instrumentalization of the other, as Nussbaum seems to suggest, we objectify all the time. In short, Nussbaum's account does not give sufficient help in the struggle against shameful sexual objectification:

> Furthermore, once this concept's association with the negative and morally problematic is weakened, and it becomes, as in Nussbaum's case, something ordinary, widespread, and in many cases a positive and wonderful part of our lives, there is a further risk: the risk that the fight against (negative) objectification is undermined. The plea to end objectification, vividly put forward by Kant, MacKinnon and Dworkin will no longer sound so urgent and pressing; it might even sound misguided, if objectification is thought to be, in many cases, a positive and valuable part of our lives, something we are not willing to give up.[333]

Papadaki suggests a definition that covers what is morally objectionable in the imposition account, but also includes Nussbaum's account of what makes negative sexual objectification morally unacceptable:

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332 Evangelia Lina Papadaki, "Feminist perspectives on objectification," in *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2010); "What Is Objectification?," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (2010).

333 Papadaki, "What Is Objectification?" 28f.

> Seeing and/or treating a person as an object (seeing and/or treating them in one or more of these seven ways: as an instrument, inert, fungible, violable, owned, denied autonomy, denied subjectivity), in such a way that denies this person's humanity. A person's humanity is denied when it is ignored/not properly acknowledged and/or when it is in some way harmed.[334]

Papadaki establishes four categories that may seem important for the analysis of female body shame. Above we have suggested at least two main categories of shame: acute and passing shame, and toxic shame. The main distinction between these two is the degree of harm shame inflicts on the self, especially over time. Of course, it has not only to do with the harm inflicted by objectification, but is also dependent on the fortitude and resilience of the self. However, as embodied agency is a precarious and vulnerable project, distinguishing between degrees or categories of potential harm at least establishes one helpful reference point for the analysis of shame. Papadaki distinguishes between reductive objectification that harms the individual's humanity (rational capacities) and non-reductive objectification that merely ignores or does not fully acknowledge an individual's humanity. Referring to the examples used above, to be the victim of physical sexual abuse is certainly to harm a person's humanity. It denies the person a right to ownership of their body, to free consent, and inflicts irreparable damage to both present and future embodied agency. But being the receiver of a sexualized catcall from a stranger in a bar hardly poses a threat to neither present nor future embodied agency, even though it is part of the structures within which the precarious prospect of female embodiment takes place. It may nevertheless be experienced as degrading and generate acute shame as it ignores that the body belongs to someone and is someone. Such disrespect and lack of recognition of a person's humanity is sadly the experience of many women.

Papadaki also distinguishes between intentional and non-intentional objectification. This is an important distinction for the analysis of female body shame. In cases where, for example, violent sexual abuse and rape are used as a military and ethnic strategy and weapon in war (as in the

334 Ibid., 32.

Balkans War), the intent to seriously harm is obvious.[335] This presence and acknowledgment of harmful intent have consequences for the experience of shame, how it is manifested, and why it occurs. Such shame is often tied to the violation itself; of being reduced to an instrument or an object without moral value or, as in the case of the Balkans War where Bosnian women were raped by Serbian soldiers so they would carry the children of the enemy, as part of a strategy of ethnic cleansing. The emotional conflicts of these women, where shame certainly played a large role, are hard to imagine.

However, when the possible harm is a consequence of tacit and unacknowledged objectification, shame is more difficult to pinpoint. When both the objectifier and the objectified harbor no ill will towards each other and there is no intention to overlook or seriously harm, the inherent and potentially objectifying attitudes and values of the social topography become more difficult to identify. Thus, in such instances the presence of unexplained body shame may be an important identifier of challenges that need to be met or addressed. When young girls experience body shame that keeps them from partaking in PE activities in school together with their friends and peers, similar shame and hesitance may not be seen among boys. Thus, it seems crucial to search for tacit and unintentional disciplining mechanisms as they may seriously hamper and interrupt the natural flow of embodied agency and not allow for equal opportunities to develop and flourish into healthy embodied selves. Such unidentified and tacit disciplining frameworks are, in some ways, a more significant challenge than those that are obviously violent and oppressive: the latter is easier to fight against because we know who or what is the enemy. But the unidentified, unintentional, and unacknowledged remnants of a gendered past may still reside as tacit disciplining frameworks in our value systems, habits of role interpretation and – not least – the regulation of the space in which we allow ourselves and others to exert bodily agency.

However, Papadakis does not solve the unavoidable Kantian mind-body split inherent in the concept of objectification. Thus, she fails to

335 Vetlesen, *Evil and Human Agency: Understanding Collective Evildoing*, Chapter 4.

take fully into account the role that the body plays in human experience. The phenomenological experience of being an intersubjective body in the world implies both being looked at as well as looking at. It implies bodily sexual attraction, and it implies objectified materiality. This fact is not in itself a problematic human experience, as suggested by the other accounts. Instead, it is constitutive for human experience, especially sexual experience. Sexual attraction, bodily pleasure, and erotic encounters may even serve to enhance or fulfill the potential of human experience and subjectivity. Hence, framing such experience solely in negative terms, as in the imposition account, serves to restrict the experiential potential of human embodiment regarding sexual experience. The question is, rather, how to determine what makes some forms of bodily sexual experience morally problematic. We argue that bodily shame is not described adequately within the framework of a phenomenology of the body that sees objectification as the main culprit.

To help us further here, we turn to Ann Cahill. She takes as her starting point the phenomenology of (sexual) difference. Our human condition is that we are bodies among bodies, contextually and precariously exposed, and vulnerable to others. Being objectified, gazed upon, and treated as a material body does not entail losing ownership of our bodies, being denied subjectivity, or being pushed into passivity and shame, and losing the capacity for active consent. Bodily agency presupposes primarily being acknowledged as a body. So, according to Cahill, objectification is not the problem as such. She suggests that what is morally problematic is when we are gazed upon or acted upon in such a way that we lose our ontological distinctiveness and specificity. She claims that the problem under such circumstances is that we become derivatized:

> To derivatize is to portray, render, understand, or approach a being solely or primarily as the reflection, projection, or expression of another being's identity desires, fears, etc. The derivatized subject becomes reducible in all relevant ways to the derivatizing subject's existence …[336]

336 Ann J. Cahill, *Overcoming Objectification: A Carnal Ethics*. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 32.

Thus, derivatization is different from objectification. Being made into a derivative of the other is when our bodily ontology is denied its distinctiveness and specificity, and is reduced to sameness. What is morally problematic, according to Cahill, is, therefore, not so much that we are bodily objectified – gazed upon or treated as objects, but that our bodies are reduced to an object *in a specific, reductive way*. When, for example, a young woman is gazed and acted upon as the mirror image of the other, her bodily distinctiveness – herself – is lost in the eyes of the other. This experience of loss or discrepancy between her bodily self and the reduction to the mirror image of the desire of the other may be one that interrupts her self-actualization and causes shame.

This conceptualization provides a better starting point for understanding female body shame. It is a common human experience, not only a female experience, that there need not be any shame in being acknowledged as a material body. We precariously assert and develop our embodied agency in an intersubjective context of bodies. Thus, being acknowledged in our bodily distinctiveness can be a self-affirming experience. But shame may also be the response when our bodily presence and our material body is not recognized as part of a natural and positive way of expressing embodied intentional agency in the world. A preset norm of objectification as morally problematic may thus serve to thwart such a positive experience of sexual bodily pleasure as part of the active flourishing of human agency.

Female self-objectification or self-derivatization

Our next step is to briefly sketch how the concept of sexual derivatization can be linked to the concept of self-objectification. This is an essential tenet in the understanding of the continuous societal reproduction of body shame. Within mainstream feminism, self-objectification has been one of the critical theoretical constructs that aim to explain how the oppressive order of patriarchy has been upheld not only by men, but also by women through self-policing. The basic feminist position is widely acknowledged, and rather succinctly put by the feminist Sandra Lee Bartky:

> In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the conciousness of most women: They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other.[337]

The sum of the daily experience of being under the gaze of the male other, of being Eve hiding from the gaze of Adam as in Masaccio's fresco *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, leads to an internalization of this objectifying gaze. In this sense, the female experience is not only one of sexual objectification through the eyes of the male other. It is also an experience of both viewing and treating oneself as a sexual object. This colonization of the mind, as Roberts puts it, leads to a self-imposed objectification of docility and passivity where power and control are lost.[338] First unfolded in the seminal work of Simone de Beauvoir, it threatens the female self and female authenticity.[339] This external and internal defining frame has obvious consequences for how females construct their bodies. In most feminist accounts, it is about social regulation and control.[340] It defines, for example, the social and physical space for movement and agency, and the ideals by which an agent is evaluated. It also defines what proper and improper behavior are. The result, however, is disrupted or thwarted agency and shame, such as when subjects are scorned or negatively evaluated because they cross these established borders.

Consequently, the frame of agency for female embodiment is not only challenged by external and internal restrictions, it is also pushed towards an agency of sexual objectification and docility in which shame is permanently a tacit possibility. We have earlier pointed to the fact that the bodily ideals that define this successful female embodiment are unattainable for most. Thus, it renders the female body as a constant "work in progress" through inner monitoring and self-surveillance. According to Calogero et al., for some women, this external vantage point of bodily

337 Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, 72.
338 Tomi-Ann Roberts, "The Woman in the Body," *Feminism & Psychology* 12, no. 3 (2002).
339 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1st American ed. (New York: Knopf, 1953).
340 Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn, and Thompson, "Objectification Theory: An Introduction," 8.

self-scrutiny and self-objectification becomes a persistent trait.[341] For others, self-objectification becomes a state one falls into and out of. These traits or states reflect the subject's way of attempting to express agency within the restricting ideals of female embodiment, and it correlates, to a certain degree, to body shame as either a constant possibility where self-policing is a persistent trait or as a possibility related to on/off states of self-policing.

Thus, as Beauvoir claims, authenticity is at stake, as the view of the body that is the goal of agency belongs to someone else. In the words of Frederickson et al., "Far beyond the idea that adolescent girls simply do not like the size and shape of their maturing bodies, girls learn that this new body belongs less to them and more to others."[342] The others to whom she then "belongs" may interrupt her agency at any given time and cause shame to appear. To avoid the risk of shame appearing, she may develop an inauthentic lifestyle in which she constantly tries to conform to ideals or hide her failure to achieve them. Thus, the threat of shame determines life and agency.

As a girl matures into womanhood, her body also matures into the public domain – but not solely as her own. By becoming the target of increased sexual objectification – not only by men but also by her female peers – the realization sinks in that it is not so much herself but her body that is evaluated. Although the objectification and self-objectification are present earlier also, it is in puberty that the girl integrates with the objectification/self-objectification framework of society. Throughout adolescence, attention and focus double: she both becomes an object and sees herself as an object. This doubling – combined with an increasing tendency to self-police – may seriously hamper or disrupt former cognitive, emotional, and bodily flow processes. The normative (and oppressive) borders and conditions of

341 *Self-Objectification in Women: Causes, Consequences, and Counteractions* (American Psychological Association, 2011), 10f.

342 Barbara L. Fredrickson et al., "That Swimsuit Becomes You: Sex Differences in Self-Objectification, Restrained Eating, and Math Performance," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75, no. 1 (1998): 193.

embodied agency become all the more visible, both from the outside and from within the subject. They render the subject in a double bind situation; on the one hand, bodily lacking as compared to the norms set, and on the other hand, with stolen agency by being rendered passive, docile, and objectified. Hence, self-objectification can be a female way of participating in the flight from the corporeal body. However, it comes at a price. In the discrepancy between positive and life-affirming embodied agency and the external/internal normative mechanisms of objectification and docility, shame appears as a response to disrupted or thwarted embodied agency.

Is it possible to link this analysis to the concept of derivatization? To do so, we need to draw up a few rough and intersecting lines as a backdrop for shame. First, as we saw above, to speak about derivatization is better because it allows us to draw a line between positive and negative experiences of being seen and treated as both having and being a body in the world. Against this backdrop, shame may be the result of interruption of bodily agency through not being recognized and acknowledged as an ontologically distinct body. Then, we are made into a derivative, a mirror image of somebody's dreams and desires. Moreover, shame may also be the result when a positive, self-affirming bodily experience of being a sensual/sexual object in the gaze of the other is thwarted and labeled as negative and dehumanizing.

Self-derivatization may be constructed along the same lines. To self-derivatize is to internalize and police an ontologically reductionistic bodily image mirroring the desires and needs of the other. This result is the same double-bind situation as in self-objectification. The precarious and potentially self-constituting and self-affirming situation of being a specific embodied subject among other embodied subjects is restricted, denied, or interrupted. It is so because the bodily image policed both internally and externally is ontologically not our own. Thus, the discrepancy between unaffirmed body-self and affirmed body-image is easily perceived as both lacking and shameful. If this reduction to sameness implies docility and passivity, it also negatively disrupts any positive and self-affirming experience of being a material body in the world.

Niva Piran: The experience of female embodiment in context

Five dimensions of experience

So far, we have attempted to sketch a position that allows for both an active and self-affirming, as well as a negative and derivatizing, experience of being a visible and attractive body in the world. However, we have sketched neither the conditions nor the dimensions of experience. Thus, the next important question to ask is: what kind of structuring conditions seem to promote either a positive body experience or a negative experience of body shame that reduces the ability to exert agency within the boundaries of a given context?

As shown by Davis, there is a need for more empirically based knowledge to understand both the specific structures and conditions under which female embodiment takes place, as well as the dimensions of how female embodiment is experienced in late modern society. Studies show that the intersection between body and culture is complex and far more difficult for girls than for boys, and it comes at a price.[343] As mentioned, late modern virtual society also presents new structuring conditions that may well be novel to both the understanding of male and female body shame.

In her recent and well-researched book *Journeys of Embodiment at the Intersection of Body and Culture: The Developmental Theory of Embodiment* (2017), clinical psychologist Niva Piran analyzes the results from a rather comprehensive empirical multi-method research program that aims to explore critical dimensions of the *experience of (female) embodiment* (EE) across the lifespan. What emerges in the analysis are five related dimensions where the quality of the experiences are graded from positive to negative.[344] These five dimensions are:

343 For the link between experiences of embodiment and well-being, see, for example, Niva Piran, *Journeys of Embodiment at the Intersection of Body and Culture: The Developmental Theory of Embodiment* (Waltham: Elsevier, 2017), 8ff.

344 Ibid., 4.

1. Body Connection and Comfort versus Body Disconnection and Discomfort
2. Agency and Functionality versus Blocked Agency and Restraint
3. Experience and Expression of Desire versus Disowning Desire
4. Attuned Self-care versus Disrupted Attunement, Neglect, and Self-harm
5. Inhabiting the Body as a Subjective Site versus as an Objectified Site

We shall not expound on all the different dimensions of the experience of embodiment. Suffice to say, these dimensions provide a broad and complex dimensional map for understanding female engagement in the world. The chance for an overall positive and constructive experience of embodiment rests on a comprehensive set of dimensions. These dimensions map the possibilities and the routes to a positive experience of embodiment. However, the possibilities for negative and disruptive experiences are plentiful, as well.

Disruption of agency, for example, through blocking, carries consequences for the other dimensions of embodiment. The experience of positive embodiment and agency hangs precariously in the balance between two factors we have already stressed several times: a) The degree of repression or freedom – or as Piran would call it – risk factors or protective factors in external structures that provide pressures and opportunities; and b) The maturity or fortitude of the embodied subject. As shown in the analysis of Benkhe mentioned earlier, the internal forces of the self may serve as a counterweight against external shaping forces. Piran's dimensions show both the severe and complex consequences of the loss of positive experience of embodiment, and manifest the comprehensive context in which body shame is situated:

> In this process of disruption, the body becomes an uncomfortable "other" site – agency is dampened, ownership of desires is challenged, and compromises to self-attunement are frequent. Moreover, the carefree lack of self-consciousness found in early childhood – "I did not care about what I wore or what I looked like" – is lost as well. These compounded losses, associated with inhabiting a docile, feminine body, markedly change the way adolescent girls engage with

> the world. Further, examining social processes that shape embodiment during adolescence clarifies that in creating docile bodies, all domains of the EE are concurrently targeted. As girls are initiated into owning and inhabiting women's bodies, their bodies become less safe, their embodied agency gets penalized and negatively labeled, their appetites problematized, and acting in attunement with their needs is questioned. Simultaneously, the body becomes an objectified site.[345]

In our context, the above analysis is important because it suggests clearly the external-internalized context that causes shame. Previously, we have argued that shame may be seen as resulting from the clash of two different contexts of agency: the subject's immediate and uninhibited self-realizing agency clashes with the (imagined) context of the other. The present analysis suggests that such a clash and the accompanying shame not only occur as the result of specific, particular instances but are conditioned by deep and tacit structures that are embedded in the socialization process of the female self.

Accordingly, imagine a young and fragile teenage girl working to establish a positive sense of self. The norms and expectations of the youth culture she belongs to are basically bodily in character. They evaluate her success through bodily standards that she, in her view, will never be able to meet, no matter how much she works out or diets. Thus, the fullness and potential of her human experience may, sadly, be evaluated through reductionist and barely attainable bodily ideals that are bound to cause shame unless she can liberate herself from them.

This reduction to the body also implies a definition of what it essentially is to be a young teenage girl, as it focuses on the evaluation of the docile and objectified – or more precisely the derivatized – body as the measure of success. Thus, she may experience a shameful gap between these impossible ideals and her appearance as her body becomes the material site where her lack of success is measured. This derivatization or reduction may lead to *dysappearance*, that is, she loses her natural self-awareness in which the body is the non-objectified extension of the

345 Ibid., 11.

self. Instead, the body becomes disconnected, being reduced to a derivative object under constant scrutiny, as it does not meet cultural standards. Thus, the reduction to solely body and the impossibility to conform may easily end up in an experience of being blocked, restrained, or losing the possibility of following your dreams, goals, intentions, and projects. The result may well be profound and toxic body shame, self-harm, as well as anxiety and depression, when an overall positive experience of embodiment is denied or made too difficult. This underscores the severe moral dimensions at play in the social context of female embodiment.

A social theory of embodiment

The second aim of Piran's research program is to develop an empirically based social theory or model that explores the relationship between social processes and embodied experiences.[346] The Developmental Theory of Embodiment (DTE) that emerges through her empirical analysis suggests that:

> … the multitude of social experiences described by girls and women shape their body experiences via three core pathways: experiences in the physical domain, experiences in the mental domain, and experiences related directly to social power. The theory contends that both protective and risk factors are organized along these three pathways, with the positive and negative aspects being conceptualized as Physical Freedom (vs. Corseting), Mental Freedom (vs. Corseting), and Social Power and Relational Connections (vs. Disempowerment and Disconnection).[347]

According to Piran, in the transition from girlhood to womanhood, disruptions are common in all of the above domains. The empirical findings also show that experiences in all domains are essential for a positive experience of embodiment. A context may, for example, offer opportunities for freedom of movement. Thus, it enhances the possibility of positive experiences of embodiment. At the same time, it may be characterized by discourses that expose the positive experience of embodiment to risk.[348]

346 Ibid., 10ff.
347 Ibid., 17.
348 Ibid., 21.

Positive experiences in the physical domain reflect the quality of the experience of physical engagement with the world. Such engagement is defined as the freedom to move and participate freely in activities without any constraints, being safe from violation and coercive body alteration practices, and also freedom and support to express natural desire as attunement to bodily needs. According to Piran, girls' and women's experiences of physical freedom or physical corseting are crucial to how they construct or shape their experience of embodiment. The societal structures that serve to discipline girls and women's sense of physical freedom hold critical keys to a positive experience of female embodiment. One prominent example is to be able to exert agency through physical activities, safe from harassment, abuse, and rape. However, the statistics of female abuse, rape and harassment show that girls and women are still at risk in society. Thus, they are constantly exposed to the risk of shame resulting from a disrupted agency – or corseting of agency – because they are denied protection to exert agency according to their intentions or desires.

A subtler example would be safety from cultural expectations and coercive pressure to engage in unwanted body modification practices (such as dieting, cosmetic surgery, etc.) that disrupt the ownership of the body and portray it as deficient, shameful, and in need of upgrading instead.[349] As we saw above, even though different practices of bodily alteration can be the choice of the subject themselves, it does not alter the fact that it is a way to manage the shameful gap between the ideal body and the experience of a body found lacking.

In the *mental* domain, an experience of being able to exert oneself in critical discussions without being corseted by constraining and regulating social discourses that simply reproduce the gender status quo is crucial to a positive experience of embodiment. Piran identifies two main clusters of such restraints: appearance-related discourses where one portrays the female body as a deficient object, and comportment related discourses that portray it as a passive body. Both clusters of discourse hold the potential to disrupt the experience of the body as a powerful and

349 Ibid., 19.

worthy site from which to engage with the world.[350] The appearance-related discourses – the body as a deficient object – include two well-known discourses: the discourse of the objectified body and the discourse of the female body as an object for the male gaze. The comportment-related discourses – women as docile – include four separate discourses. The first discourse, women as submissive/demure, has a long and documented history. The second, engagement in feminine activities, is – according to Piran – so powerful that girls and women tend to think it is part of their wanted self-expression. The third, woman as desired but desireless, portrays females as an object to be desired. Here, women, in their desirability, hold the responsibility for male desire. Thus, the regulation of female desire does not only mentally corset women's agency, but it also reinforces the continued supremacy of the male gaze. The patriarchal shaping of relational patterns shows how the heterosexual structuring of relationships disrupts the relational connections between young girls when they reach puberty and turn to in-fighting and policing among themselves.[351]

Accompanying these corseting discourses, Piran also finds linguistic dichotomies and labels that further regulate female embodiment.[352] These are crude reflections of the discourses. Dichotomies such as *tomboy – girly girl*, *slut/prude*, *nice/loser*, or expressions like *bitch*, *dependent*, and so forth, all regulate the different social dimensions of female embodiment, whether it be freedom in the physical domain, such as freedom to move or to express desire, or in the mental domain, through the right to freely exert oneself through voicing your opinion in your arena of choice. In Piran's words:

> … different social constructions limit diverse girls' and women's possibilities of embodied engagement with the world. These possibilities can be expressed through widely disseminated molds of social expectations, dichotomized constructions, or labels. These mental molds are entrenched in individuals' lives and are therefore mistaken as natural or inevitable. Toward the goal of positive

350 Ibid., 21.
351 Ibid., 22.
352 Ibid.

> embodiment, the varied forms of Mental Corseting need to be named and contested, to allow for passionate and meaningful engagement with the world.[353]

The impediments that follow from such limitations are likely to contribute to experiences of shame. For a girl struggling with embodiment, both discourses and linguistics may offer rather scant or limited resources for finding a language and a story in which she can find support for a free and positive experience of embodiment. Instead, she may find herself in situations in which she repeatedly struggles to avoid or overcome the shame that is caused by such constraints. According to Piran, there is also an apparent lack of supportive discourses that facilitate female embodiment on its own terms:

> The research program on embodiment highlights missing discourses related to women's embodied worth, power, passions, or their right for safety. Through this absence, girls and women of diverse social locations learn about their compromised worth within social structures of power.[354]

Discourses do more than discipline or set the parameters and norms for how one can exert agency. They also define worth, both in measure and kind. A teenage girl that needs a safe, protective, challenging, and constructive discourse and a narrative in which to interpret or experience her embodied life may easily end up mentally corseted within discourses and narratives that limit, devalue, and even internalize interrupted agency.

The third core pathway along which girls and women shape their embodiment experiences is through experiences of social power and relational connections. The quality of these experiences influences significantly the possibility for a positive experience of embodiment. This pathway includes four categories: Freedom from Prejudice and Harassment, Freedom from Appearance-based Social Power, Empowering Relationships, and Membership in Equitable Communities.[355] As in the other domains, the resources for positive embodiment are decided by the degree of freedom and support given.

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353 Ibid., 24.
354 Ibid., 22.
355 Ibid., 24.

As stated above, the intersection between body and culture is complex, and the task of embodiment is far more difficult for girls than for boys – and it comes at a price. It affects well-being and may, negatively, for example, produce isolation, shame, negative self-esteem, and depression, and predict severe conditions such as eating disorders and substance abuse.[356]

Conforming to the ideals of the marketplace? Cosmetic surgery

The female body has, to a large extent, been objectified through commodification in the late modern marketplace. In a consumer culture, we are literally bombarded with film, pictures, and text displaying female body ideals of both slimness, curviness, sexuality, and attractiveness that are unattainable for most bodies.[357] These idealized body-displays promise success, health, and happiness. Thus, the exteriority – the skin – talks. It symbolizes the degree of success in the body-project. In the words of the feminist Sandra Lee Bartky:

> We are presented everywhere with images of perfect female beauty – at the drugstore cosmetics display, the supermarket magazine counter, on television. These images remind us constantly that we fail to measure up. Whose nose is the right shape, after all, whose hips are not too wide – or too narrow? The female body is revealed as a task, an object in need of transformation.[358]

However, the difficulty of succeeding in this transformation may leave a gap between, on the one hand, the normative ideals and, on the other hand, as a body among bodies, the inevitable display of a body that does not conform to these ideals. The shameful experience of being flawed not only becomes the mirror through which, for example, a teenage girl sees her body. It also structures her identity, her interactions, and the way she exerts her agency in the world in a profound sense.[359] The gap mentioned has proved to be fertile ground for the grooming industry, especially for the industry of cosmetic surgery that promises bodily alterations

356 For an introduction to the possible consequences of struggling with embodiment, see ibid., 1.

357 Sarah Grogan, *Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women and Children*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 65ff.

358 Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, 40.

359 Kathy Davis, *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 63.

according to the ideals of the day. Thus, the increasing popularity of cosmetic surgery has contributed to a medicalization of the female body, as well as contributing to further commodification through a tendency to reduce the female body to alterable body parts.[360] The female body, as a work-in-progress, has become a marketplace for big money.[361]

Feminist philosopher Kathryn Pauly Morgan claims that those who undergo cosmetic surgery conform to beauty ideals set by males and their exploiting and colonizing heterosexuality. Although the choice of undergoing cosmetic surgery may appear both empowering and liberating, it implies an acceptance of the female body as raw material to be formed and molded into the recognized norm of male supremacy. The choice is willingly helped along by highly priced cosmetic surgeons full of promises of a better life.[362]

Others, however, suggest that cosmetic surgery is not always about adhering to beauty standards. In a rather personal study, Kathy Davis takes on her earlier feminist views on cosmetic surgery along much of the same lines as Morgan and others.[363] She points to several empirical studies conducted in the Netherlands that suggest a more nuanced picture. Here, women did not have cosmetic surgery because they wanted to become more beautiful, but because they wanted to be normal like everybody else:

> … cosmetic surgery stories are presented as a trajectory of suffering.[6] They begin with the woman's realization that something is seriously amiss with her appearance and follow her through a period of several years during which she comes to regard her body as an insurmountable constraint – a condition which leaves her "uprooted, at least to a certain degree, from the mundane common world and its normal course of affairs" (Riemann and Schütze 1993: 345). She describes her hopelessness and resignation as she discovers that there is nothing she can do about her problem. Her story takes on a quality of impending doom, becoming

360 Chrisler and Johnston-Robledo, *Woman's Embodied Self: Feminist Perspectives on Identity and Image*, 51.

361 For an introduction to the feminist discussion of cosmetic surgery, see Jane Megan Northrop, *Reflecting on Cosmetic Surgery: Body Image, Shame and Narcissism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 31ff.

362 Ibid., 46.

363 Davis, *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery*, 2ff.

> a "downhill path" or vicious circle (Riemann and Schütze 1991: 348–349). The stage is then set for cosmetic surgery as the event which interrupts the trajectory. It allows her to take action and regain a sense of control over her life.[364]

As a conclusion to her survey of these studies, Davis points to how such surgery may, in fact, be a manifestation of female agency. Therefore, she claims, it is possible to see:

> cosmetic surgery [as] an understandable step in the context of an individual woman's experiences of embodiment and of her possibilities for taking action to alter her circumstances. They show that while the decision is not taken lightly and, indeed, remains problematic, it can be the best course of action for some women.[365]

Hence, if we ask why women desire and decide to undergo a practice that is both dangerous and oppressive, the answer is found in their need for developing another and different self. According to Davis, if you sidestep the few surgery-addicted females displayed in American reality shows, undergoing cosmetic surgery is not predominantly a capitulation to the norms and wishes of friends, husbands, or others. Instead, it mirrors the self's need to change in order to overcome a feeling of shame that has locked a person in a negative life trajectory. However, Davis does not refute the broader context – that the female body is always under the gaze of others, as we pointed to above. Her point is that the choice to undergo cosmetic surgery made by the women in her study is not characterized by succumbing passively to external pressure, as Morgan seems to suggest. Instead, it is a voluntary choice in a challenging setting. Davis describes it as an act of opposition for many females. It takes courage, especially because many have to confront objections from both family and friends.[366] While still objects of critical scrutiny, they have taken steps to alleviate the pain of being found lacking.[367] However, herein lie the dilemmas for women deciding to undergo cosmetic surgery; on the one hand, they hope to alleviate pain, secure a positive experience of embodiment

364 Ibid., 160.
365 Ibid., 162.
366 Ibid., 133.
367 Ibid., 173. For further discussion on the findings and analysis of Davis, see 172ff.

and create a more extensive space for agency within a gendered social order and, on the other hand, they also recognize that the same oppressive order produces both the pain and the restricted agency.[368]

Hence, cosmetic surgery may serve a shame-reducing function as it conforms the body to prevalent bodily ideals. Through surgery, the body is modified; breasts are augmented, chins lifted, or noses straightened out. Thus, the shameful gap between the ideal and the actual display is nullified, or at least lessened, to the degree that shame is manageable. However, the women in Davis' study are well aware of how they also confirm the oppressive gendered order by undergoing such surgery. This fact may also produce shame – at least when confronted with the many objections from friends, family, and themselves – also when they still choose to go through with it. According to Davis, this explains both the desire for and the problem with cosmetic surgery. It is desirable because it holds the promise of a more positive sense of embodiment and may create a wider space for exerting agency. But it is also problematic because it preserves the social order that produces the shame, negative bodily experience of embodiment, and restriction of agency. Hence, the analysis of female embodiment is like holding a mirror to culture that may well serve to shed light on the different forms of shame.[369]

We have attempted to show that the responsive movements of body shame, and more specifically female body shame, must be understood as a contextual phenomenon as circumscribed in earlier chapters. The different manifestations and responses, and their severity, are not only closely linked to the degree of freedom or oppression these contexts provide, but also to the maturity and development of the embodied self as described in Chapter 3 on shame and psychology. None of these things can be separated in order to understand body shame: we are bodies among bodies in an unending transaction with both structures as well as other embodied selves. Our ability to find strategies to handle shame adapts to the same contextual framework.

368 Ibid., 179.

369 Piran, *Journeys of Embodiment at the Intersection of Body and Culture: The Developmental Theory of Embodiment*, 257.