

The Shame of Shamelessness

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An important question that is often raised, whether directly or indirectly, in philosophical discussions of shame-inducing behavior concerns whether the experience of shame has unique moral value. Despite the fact that shame is strongly associated with negative affective responses, many people have argued that the experience of being ashamed plays an important motivating role, rather than being an obstacle, in living a moral life. These discussions, however, tend to take for granted two interrelated assumptions that I will be problematizing: 1) that the subject's shame is warranted; 2) that the shame is directly attributable to the subject's own actions. I challenge these assumptions by turning to a phenomenon I call secondhand shame, namely, shame that is induced by another person's shameless behavior. This essay examines the gender and racial dynamics that so frequently intensify secondhand shame, and suggests that this troubling phenomenon, when shared as a group experience, can be morally transformative, particularly when it leads to unified public resistance to shameless conduct.

As feminist, critical race, and disability theorists have demonstrated, it is impossible to make an assessment about the ethical value of shame without also considering what I would call the power dynamics of shame, specifically the fact that sexual, racial, and other minorities have historically been more prone to be shamed by others, even if they have done nothing to deserve their moral condemnation. Thus, it is clear that we cannot resolve philosophical questions about the moral worth of shame without a critical examination of whether an individual *should* be ashamed in the first place. In this essay, I examine how an individual's *failure* to experience shame can actually *produce* a strong sense of shame in other people. My contention is that this "secondhand" experience of shame on the part of another when there is no "firsthand" experience of shame by the original agent has its own unique ethical dynamic that deserves further exploration in its own right. Given the shame that citizens around the world report experiencing when their predominantly male political and civic leaders behave shamelessly, and given our ubiquitous social media's own role in shaming people who might not otherwise (and perhaps should not) feel any

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shame, it is also urgent to consider the gendered and racialized implications of the displacement of shame from men to women and from those who enjoy racial privileges to those who do not.

I begin with a critical reading of Sartre's voyeur example in *Being and Nothingness*, in which the voyeur's shameful conduct is readily apparent to Sartre's readers even if it is not witnessed by anyone else. To reveal the limitations of this classic account of shame-before-the-other, in which I have brought shame on myself by my own actions, I turn to Sandra Bartky's and Frantz Fanon's powerful depictions of gendered and racialized shame in which women and other minorities can be shamed by others even when the former are not engaging in morally inappropriate behavior. Next, I introduce psychologist Sylvan Tomkins's discussion of the "contagious" effects of shame to make sense of the secondhand shame bystanders so frequently feel when witnessing the shameful behavior of others. Though secondhand shame is an especially understandable response when the shameless perpetrator is our political representative, a member of our own community, and/or a family member, it is nonetheless problematic when it leads other people to perform the moral labor that should be undertaken by the person who is acting shamelessly. Ultimately, I argue, the positive, transformative value of shame is best realized when it motivates public, collective *resistance* both to the shameful conduct and the perpetrator's shameless response.

SHAME AND BEING-FOR-OTHERS

"My original fall," Sartre tells us,

is the existence of the Other. Shame—like pride—is the apprehension of myself as a nature although that very nature escapes me and is unknowable as such. Strictly speaking, it is not that I perceive myself losing my freedom in order to become a *thing*, but my nature is—over there, outside my lived freedom—as a given attribute of this being which I am for the Other. (Sartre 1984, 352)

In this well-known passage from the section on "The Look" in *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre makes a series of provocative assertions about the relationship between self and other, implying that if we were not beings-for-others, that is, social beings who coexist in an intersubjective world shared with and also shaped by others, we would never experience certain emotions such as shame or pride. On his view, shame and pride confer a *nature* upon me, a fixed, "thing-like" status, which I would neither experience nor identify with if I were not seen and judged by others. More specifically, for Sartre, shame and pride are inherently other-oriented or what we might call "boomerang" emotions that are called forth in response to the responses to my actions of actual or even merely possible others.¹ Thus, even though I may experience shame or pride in private, to be ashamed, on this account, is always to be ashamed-before-the-Other. Indeed, since we are beings-for-others even before we are

born, it should not be surprising that an actual other need not be present to trigger my shame.

Sartre's famous voyeur example provides a concrete illustration of how this complex, affective dynamic between self and (absent) other plays out.² One of the reasons this example is so powerful and, as we shall see, so problematic, is that Sartre's use of the first-person narrative voice in presenting the scene subtly encourages his readers, whether we are male or female, to identify both with the voyeur's actions and with his ashamed response. More specifically, this act of identification produces what Sylvan Tomkins calls "a contagious shame response" whereby the reader is able to experience the shame of the voyeur vicariously without even having to engage in the shameful act (Tomkins 1995, 155).

Beginning with a critical discussion of Sartre's example of the voyeur, I explore some of the hidden gendered consequences of our ability to take on the shame of another even and especially when that other feels no shame for his shameful behavior. My title, "The Shame of Shamelessness" refers to this distinctive phenomenon that I am calling "secondhand" shame, that is, shame that is vicariously experienced by another person who merely witnesses, but does not directly participate in, a shameful act. I argue that this "displaced" shame involves an *affective transference* whereby I take on or "own" the shame of shameless others, and, in so doing, tacitly accept the moral responsibility they are themselves rejecting for their shameful behavior.³

"Let us imagine," Sartre begins, "that moved by jealousy, curiosity, or vice I have just glued my ear to the door and looked through a keyhole" (Sartre 1984, 347). He goes on to describe the voyeur as exercising his, or rather, since I am imagining myself as the voyeur, my own transcendence in this situation, freely gazing, as long as I remain undetected, upon the spectacle that I expect and perhaps dread to see within.⁴ Although Sartre starts out by claiming that I may have a range of motives for peering through the keyhole, such as jealousy, curiosity, or vice, he very quickly seizes upon jealousy as the presumptive motive and runs with it. He observes that "there is a spectacle to be seen behind the door only because I am jealous, but my jealousy is nothing except the simple objective fact that *there is a sight to be seen* behind the door" (348). Thus, through what Sartre calls a "double and inverted determination" the voyeur's (or my) jealousy defines what will count as the compromising spectacle, and it is this same anticipated betrayal that will serve (albeit retroactively) as the justification for his (or my) jealousy.

Though Sartre doesn't address this specific point in any detail, there is clearly a complex temporality at work in this mutually constitutive relationship between the spectacle-to-be-seen and the jealousy, for whereas the shameful spectacle is merely a *possibility*, the voyeur is (or I am) clearly *already* jealous, since this jealousy is precisely what motivates the project to "catch the guilty parties in the act" by spying on them through the keyhole. It is significant, I am suggesting, that the jealousy motivates the voyeur's (or my) behavior in the situation, even if the situation does not, in fact, warrant his (or my) jealousy; moreover, it is only by witnessing the shameful conduct of another through the keyhole that the voyeur's (or my) own shameful conduct can be retroactively vindicated.

As previously noted, Sartre's use of a nongendered, first-person narrative voice to describe the actions of the voyeur clearly is intended to lead Sartre's readers, whether they are male or female, to identify with him. The success of this identification can be measured by the extent to which the reader also feels the wave of shame experienced by the voyeur in the next scene, when he thinks he hears footsteps coming down the hallway and fears that he is about to be discovered in the act of spying. For after providing us with a complicated web of intrigue that includes the voyeur, the reader, Sartre, the keyhole, the room beyond it, and the people ostensibly within the room, Sartre abruptly interrupts any additional speculations/projections/fantasies on the voyeur's and/or reader's part about what might be happening on the other side of the door. He does this by rupturing the solipsistic, hermetic world that, up until this point, has been defined by the voyeur's jealousy, his gaze, the keyhole, and the spectacle he expects to see through it. For, instead of letting us ponder further what might actually be taking place behind the door, or whether the jealousy the voyeur feels is even justified by the actions he suspects are occurring, the voyeur, and vicariously the reader as well, *becomes the shameful spectacle-to-be-seen*. In the process, moreover, the spectacle itself is radically transformed. It is no longer defined by what is (or may be) going on within the unseen room but is instead centered upon the spying activity going on outside of it. The voyeur, it seems, is about to be caught red-handed in the act of spying on other people who are unaware that they are being seen.

How does the voyeur, or by extension I, respond? "[A]ll of a sudden" Sartre tells us, "I am conscious of myself as escaping myself. . . I have my foundation outside myself. I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other" (Sartre 1984, 349). What both the voyeur and I powerfully recognize in this situation, Sartre suggests, is the freedom of the other who is about to discover us spying in the hallway, specifically his or her freedom to judge my behavior, and therefore *me*, as a *shameful person*. Sartre elaborates on this point a few pages later, asserting that:

by my very shame I claim as mine that freedom of another. I affirm a profound unity of consciousness, not that harmony of monads which has sometimes been taken as a guarantee of objectivity but a unity of being; *for I accept and wish that others should confer upon me a being which I recognize.* (351; my emphasis)

This latter is a compelling, yet also a rather strange claim. If one accepts Sartre's view that a human being, or in his words, a being-for-itself, lacks a fixed nature altogether, and that we experience the nothingness, contingency, and pure possibility that lies at the heart of our existence in anguish, his assertion that I *want* to experience the unity or consistency of being that a fixed nature can provide is quite persuasive. This is even more obviously the case when other people "confer upon me a being which I recognize." However, this seems to ring true only if the recognition (and therefore social *validation*) I am obtaining from the other as *being* a particular *kind* of person is morally praiseworthy, aesthetically pleasing, or personally appealing in some other way. For unless the voyeur or I am a masochist, it seems unlikely that

either he or I would wish to have the other endow us with a *shameful* nature, especially since this latter is a negative character ascription that typically denotes someone who fails to live up to her own and/or other people's moral standards. Just as Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, discussed the "inducements to complicity" that lead many women to accept a socially inferior position as the less important, "second sex" with respect to the men in their lives, so too, I would argue, are there "inducements to shamelessness" that have led many men to disavow that their own and/or other men's demeaning treatment of women is in any way shameful.⁵

Although Sartre seems to be counting on his readers to identify with the voyeur's shame at being caught spying, rightly suggesting that this experience of shame does not require anyone to actually see me, but can be triggered merely by a sudden sound in the hallway, the voyeur scenario would play out quite differently if he (or I) felt no shame at the thought of being discovered while engaged in such clandestine activity. This latter situation, in which other people might be judging my actions to be shameful but I feel no shame about them, is actually much more common, I believe, than Sartre's voyeur example might lead us to acknowledge. In fact, a refusal to be ashamed of oneself might even make a great deal of sense on a Sartrean account. This is because, despite the "unity of being" that the "possession" of a shameful *nature* might offer me, it is only in bad faith that I could even accept the judgment of another that I *am* shameful or even, to use a positive example, deserving of pride, since, according to Sartre, a being-for-itself can always transcend through her free choices any nature that is bestowed upon her, whether by herself or others. And yet, even though for Sartre there is no *self* to bear the weight of or assume responsibility for my shame, there is nonetheless an existential source for my shame as well as any responsibility I may feel for the situation that has given rise to it, namely, my "*recognition* of the fact that I *am* indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging," that is, the fact that I am a being-for-others and not just a being-for-itself (Sartre 1984, 350).

As I hope to have illustrated, Sartre's account of shame is strangely equivocal. On the one hand, insofar as I am actually seen and judged by others, and can be caught in compromising situations by them, the experience of shame-before-the-other does not seem surprising or even unusual; instead, it seems like a natural consequence of what Linda Martin Alcoff refers to as my "public identity," that is, the concrete, embodied self that I present to the world and that is seen and responded to by others.⁶ On the other hand, Sartre also seems to rule out a genuine experience of shame when he states that: "I can be ashamed only as my freedom escapes me in order to become a *given* object" (Sartre 1984, 350). This is because my freedom never really does escape me on his account. Insofar as my transcendence prevents from me being reduced to a specific object, such as a table or chair, the experience of shame seems to be a project in bad faith. It involves accepting myself as purely a being-for-others, thereby denying my nonunified, that is, non-thing-like nature as a being-for-itself that Sartre defines as "being what it is not and not being what it is" (Sartre 1984, 28).⁷

To complicate matters further, if shame, as Sartre claims, involves my "*recognition* of the fact that I *am* indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging,"

then it would seem that this act of objectification by the Other is itself sufficient to produce a feeling of shame. If this is so, however, then the clandestine spying that might otherwise be viewed as the legitimate cause of the voyeur's shame is not a necessary feature of the shaming process. Indeed, as Frantz Fanon, Sandra Bartky, Robert Murphy, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, and many other critical race, feminist, and disability theorists have emphasized (Fanon 2008; Bartky 1990; Murphy 1990; Garland-Thomson 1997), women, racial minorities, people with disabilities, and other people with nonnormative bodies that don't readily fit the white, male, thin, able-bodied, ideal that Audre Lorde refers to as "the mythical norm" (Lorde 1990, 282), have historically suffered the shame of being looked at and found wanting even without engaging in morally questionable behavior like Sartre's voyeur.

SHAME AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* offers us one of the best-known, early critiques of Sartre's racially neutral account of the look even as he affirms, with Sartre, the power of the look (or even the possibility of the look) to produce a shameful response. As in Sartre's example, Fanon's shift to a first-person (and in this case autobiographical) perspective in presenting an affectively charged scenario, namely, an innocent pedestrian's shame in response to the fear his presence unintentionally provokes in a little boy, encourages the reader to identify with the experience being described. And yet the specific, racist dynamics of Fanon's example, where a little white boy sees a black man passing by and cries out, "Maman, look, a Negro; I'm scared" requires a more complicated analysis than the voyeur example of who the reader may be identifying with and why (Fanon 2008, 91).⁸ For given the pervasive, stereotypical depiction of black men as violent sexual predators, a "controlling image" (to use Patricia Hill Collins's expression) that has been remarkably consistent across diverse cultures and historical time periods, it seems entirely possible that both white women and white men might identify more with the little white boy in his fear of the black man than with the blameless pedestrian (Collins 2000).⁹ The latter, Fanon suggests, functions as a "phobogenic object," the very sight of which produces uncontrollable, irrational fear and profound anxiety.

Another reason a white woman, in particular, might be more prone to identify with the little boy than with the black man is that the experience of having your very presence be a source of terror for another person is so alien to most white women. By using a first-person perspective to describe the black pedestrian's response to the little white boy's cry, however, Fanon challenges even his white female readers to see this scenario from the black man's perspective, a perspective that incorporates an entire racist (epidermal) history that is indissolubly associated with his abject body. "I was responsible" he tells us,

not only for my body but also for my race and my ancestors. I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features;

deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders. . . . Disoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man, who had no scruples about imprisoning me, I transported myself on that particular day far, very far from my self and gave myself up as an object. (Fanon 2008, 92)

This traumatic, yet tragically common experience of racial profiling is triggered merely by Fanon's visual appearance, not by anything he has done. Fundamentally disrupting one's relationship with one's own objectified body, Fanon's poignant description of what it feels like to grasp oneself as an object, a fearful object, the very sight of which is capable of scaring a little boy, offers us a powerful example of the pathologizing effects of racial shame. In his words:

My body was returned to me spread-eagled, disjointed, redone, draped in mourning on this white winter's day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is wicked, the Negro is ugly: look, a Negro; the Negro is trembling, the Negro is trembling because he is cold, the small boy is trembling because he is afraid of the Negro, the Negro is trembling with cold, the cold that chills the bones, the lovely little boy is trembling because he thinks the Negro is trembling with rage, the little white boy runs to his mother's arms: "Maman, the Negro's going to eat me." (93)

Sandra Bartky, paraphrasing Susan Miller, offers us a working definition of shame that helps to reveal the psychic damage generated by this fateful encounter between a "lovely (innocent?), little boy," and the "bad" black man whose only crime is being unable to eliminate his blackness so that he can just be seen as a (white) man. "Shame," she asserts, "can be characterized in a preliminary way as a species of psychic distress occasioned by a self or a state of the self apprehended as inferior, defective, or in some way diminished" (Bartky 1990, 85). Like Fanon, Bartky emphasizes that one need not have done anything immoral or socially unacceptable to bring on this distressing experience of shame. Both stress that the look that objectifies and oppresses me, especially if I am a woman, a racial minority, and/or a person with visible disabilities whose body transgresses societal norms, often catches me unawares, forcibly reminding me that I am indeed a being-for-the-other and that I have very little control over this public self that the other sees. For this strange, stereotypical, and static figure that I do not recognize yet with which I am forced to identify is indeed *my body*, a body that is being looked at and judged by others. In this situation, the "unity of being" I attain, like the infant in Lacan's mirror-stage (Lacan 1977), is established upon a *méconnaissance*, a misrecognition; unlike the infant's "jubilant" identification with her specular image, however, this misrecognition is internalized and "owned" in shame. As Bartky observes:

[Shame] requires if not an actual audience before whom my deficiencies are paraded, then an internalized audience with the capacity to judge me, hence internalized standards of judgment. Further, shame requires the recognition that I *am*, in some important sense, as I am seen to be. (86)

“If,” Bartky continues a few pages later,

women are more shame-prone than men, the cause is not far to seek: Women, more often than men, are made to feel shame in the major sites of social life. Moreover, it is in the act of being shamed and in the feeling ashamed that there is disclosed to women who they are and how they are faring within the domains they inhabit. (93)

The racialized and gendered experience of shame, for both Fanon and Bartky, is ultimately a very effective form of social control. To be shamed by the other is to be “put in my place,” a site of social, political, and moral inferiority from which it is difficult to escape. Whereas Sartre’s voyeur can quickly recover his agency upon discovering that the approaching footsteps in the hallway are not another person after all, perhaps heaving a sigh of relief and resuming his spying activity or abandoning the project altogether because he determines that it is too risky to proceed, the shaming experiences described by Fanon, Bartky, and so many other critical race, feminist, and disability theorists are not so easily shaken off. For they are triggered simply by one’s physical appearance and not, as in the voyeur’s case, by one’s actions. Thus, whereas the voyeur could have chosen not to put himself into a compromising situation in the first place, and is rightly shamed for his clandestine behavior, a woman in a sexist society, a person of color in a racist society, or a person with disabilities in a society that enforces what Robert McRuer calls “compulsory able-bodiedness” has no such choice (McRuer 2006, 2). And, as we all know, these are never separate societies, each enforcing its own brand of discrimination and oppression, but one society in which the shame of having a nonnormative body is magnified with each bodily norm that one is seen as transgressing.

SHAMELESS BEHAVIOR AND SHAMEFUL RESPONSES

One of the dangers of focusing so heavily, as Sartre, Fanon, and Bartky do, upon the first-person experience of shame and its negative consequences, despite the undeniable power of these accounts, is that it is easy to let the “shameless” behavior of others, which so often accompanies and intensifies these shameful responses, recede from view. If shame involves a kind of turning inward, a distressed recognition of an inferior or diminished self that comes to us from an other (whether real or imagined), then shamelessness, I would argue, involves by contrast a projection *outward*, a refusal to internalize shame, and therefore a rejection of its pathologizing terms. On the one hand, this might seem like the psychically healthy route to take, even if it is often difficult to pull off in practice, since it inoculates me from the disapprobation of others by disavowing the responsibilities entailed by my being-for-others. Yet the experience of shame that floods my psyche, reddens my face, and causes my heart to pound when I am exercising my agency, like Sartre’s voyeur, and engaging in blameworthy conduct that demeans others (and myself in the process), as opposed to the racialized and gendered shame described by Fanon and Bartky that is inherited as one’s birthright in a

racist and sexist society regardless of what one says or does (or doesn't say or doesn't do), and that functions as a form of social control, can and does perform important moral labor. Specifically, it is a visceral, affective call to responsibility that forcibly reminds us that our actions never occur in a vacuum but inevitably reverberate beyond ourselves, affecting not only others but also the larger society in which we live.

If, as noted earlier, shame is a "boomerang" emotion in which my relation to myself is mediated by the other, it should not be surprising that the repudiation of shame (and of the other) does not eliminate shame altogether; instead, it almost always finds a new target, a new home in which to take up residence, namely in the heart of the witness to both the shameful conduct and the shameless response. These are not rare occurrences, moreover, for history has provided us with countless examples of people who have suffered the psychic damage of this secondhand shame. They include women who "stand by their man," attempting to hide their shame while he behaves shamelessly toward others and toward them, as well as racial and sexual minorities, colonized peoples, and people with disabilities who have been coerced into taking on the burden of shame for the shameless behavior of those who oppress them. And this brings us to the true shame of shamelessness, namely, that it forces other people to do one's own moral labor.

Although the affective call to responsibility produced by secondhand shame can be useful and even appropriate in cases where we are implicated in the shameful conduct of a larger body to which we belong (as when the actions of our country or our political representatives shame us, for since it is our country, and they are our representatives, even if we disapprove of the actions, they are undertaken in our name), by taking on the other's shame, I may be tacitly allowing the other to preserve his shamelessness. This secondhand shame, moreover, can exponentially intensify the moral burden for those of us who experience it, for as witness to the shameless behavior of others, I am ashamed for their shameful behavior as well as their shameless response. In addition, I may also end up taking on the shame of other witnesses who are actually relishing, rather than being ashamed by, the demeaning spectacle they are seeing. It is this "collateral" damage created by shameless behavior, I am suggesting, that so often remains invisible. This is because we are heavily socialized, at least in contemporary Western societies, to adopt an individualistic perspective that encourages us to focus on the behavior and its perpetrator, and not upon those bystanders who may be witnesses to it. Yet, I would suggest, the shame that arises in response to shamelessness is itself a moral consequence of our being-for-others, and of the tremendous responsibilities associated with this crucial dimension of our existence. It is therefore a distinctive, but by no means uncommon, racialized, sexualized, and gendered phenomenon to which we can and must pay more attention.¹⁰

THE TRANSFORMATIVE ENERGIES OF SHAME

In his classic account of shame, Tomkins emphasizes what I have been calling the "boomerang" effects of shame, noting that:

[B]y virtue of the readiness with which one individual responds with shame to the shame of the other, the sources of shame are radically multiplied. The individual can now be shamed by whatever shames another. This one in turn will have transmitted a shame he may have learned from someone else's shame response to him. (Tomkins 1995, 156)

Tomkins's account of the affective circulation of shame from one person to another can help us to see how shame, while traditionally associated with (allegedly) inappropriate behavior on the part of a single individual, can readily become a shared group experience with diffuse and complex effects. Shame, in short, travels. It is not a static or self-contained phenomenon but an intersubjective experience with the potential to circulate far from its original source. Indeed, its "ripple effects" may even reverberate throughout a given community, luring people who never experienced the original shameful event but who simply heard about it second- or third-hand into its ever-expanding web.¹¹ In Tomkins's words:

the human being is capable of being shamed by another whether or not the other is interacting with him in such a way as to intentionally shame him, or interacting with him at all. The human being is capable through empathy and identification of living through others and therefore of being shamed by what happens to others. (159)

This "contagious" quality of shame, Tomkins suggests, can actually serve a positive social function even as it remains a negatively charged experience. In particular, he observes that:

the fact that the other identifies sufficiently with others to be ashamed. . . *strengthens any social group and its sense of community*. Just as contempt strengthens the boundaries and barriers between individuals and groups and is the instrument par excellence for the preservation of hierarchical, caste, and class relationships, so is *shared shame a prime instrument for strengthening the sense of mutuality and community whether it be between parent and child, friend and friend, or citizen and citizen*. (156; my emphasis)

In the case of shameless behavior, shared shame may certainly be experienced, yet significantly, it does not include the individual or group who initiated the shameful conduct. Instead, the socially and morally desirable response of shame is disavowed (whether implicitly or explicitly) by the perpetrator(s), so the shame is affectively transmitted to others who, as suggested earlier, become doubly ashamed, for now they are ashamed not only of the shameful conduct, but also the shameless (and therefore shameful!) response. Although many theorists, like Tomkins, have granted shame's positive social utility, its power to call us to responsibility for our own actions or the actions of other members of our community and to bind us more closely to one another in the process, it is clear that the phenomenon of secondhand shame poses unique moral challenges for any group solidarity that emerges from this shared experience.

In her essay, “American Shame and the Boundaries of Belonging,” Myra Mendible offers a materialist critique of the status of the community formed in response to shameful behavior, noting that in the contemporary United States, “shame is a hot commodity. Stories and images of disgraced politicians and celebrities solicit our moral indignation, their misdeeds fueling a lucrative economy of shame and scandal” (Mendible 2016, 1). As news and social media outlets fiercely compete with one another to be the first to expose the most shameful “secrets” that the individuals or groups in question would rather have kept hidden, the very process of mass-producing these shameful episodes for public consumption, Mendible suggests, enables those of us who are outraged by them to “play out a fantasy of community that otherwise eludes us” (1).

Mendible’s mistrust of mass-produced shame arises in direct response to American society’s obsession with the shameful conduct of rich and famous people. This obsession, she suggests, deflects our attention away from our shameful lack of response to the oppressive conditions of economically, socially, and politically disadvantaged people whom we consign by our indifference to an abject existence on the margins of mainstream society. “Where,” she asks,

are the outcries of moral indignation at the incarceration of a generation of young black men, the demonization of immigrants, the injustices committed in our name on “foreign” or “alien” bodies? This is the unacknowledged shame that binds us in silent resignation, the shame whose name we dare not speak; the shame that is a condition of American life for those who have the “wrong” bodies or the “wrong” desires. (3)

It is notable that Mendible identifies not one but two mutually reinforcing, yet frequently unrecognized sources of shame in this passage. Indeed, our failure to appreciate the stigmatizing shame “that is a condition of American life for those who have the ‘wrong’ bodies or the ‘wrong’ desires” is a direct function of the disavowed shame of mainstream society for the unjustified abject status we confer upon people whose bodies violate gender, sexual, and/or racial norms. These latter individuals are forced to occupy what Judith Butler refers to as “zones of inhabitability.” As Butler trenchantly observes, it is these:

By focusing upon the shameful exploits of the rich and famous that offer such lucrative “tabloid fodder for mass consumption,” Mendible argues, we are able to ignore “the embodied conditions where shame does its work” (Mendible 2016, 1–2).¹² Her depiction of shame as an active agent that “does its work” in specific material contexts, coupled with Tomkins’s point that the contagiousness of the shame response, may “further amplify shame which has already been experienced” and enables us to see how even “the intensity of the counter-action against shaming may be understood

as a response to such a *hall of mirrors of shame*" (Tomkins 1995, 154–55; my emphasis).

A specific strategy that has been somewhat successful in resisting shaming practices directed at specific marginalized communities has been for members of that community to publicly affirm pride in the very qualities that have made them the object of shame.¹³ Yet though a proud attachment to a stigmatized identity has often been regarded as an empowering response to the unjustified shaming of socially and politically oppressed groups, David Halperin insists that pride does not eliminate the shame that serves as its *raison d'être*. In his essay, "Why Gay Shame Now?" Halperin follows Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in claiming that pride is grounded in shame, indeed is indebted to shame, and so cannot and should not leave it behind. Mendible critiques the commodification of shame for public consumption, but Halperin suggests that the gay pride movement has served a similar function. More specifically, he maintains, it runs the risk of letting both gay and straight people off the hook from confronting the "zones of uninhabitability" where many women, people of color, queer people, disabled people, and trans people continue to reside even as some (mostly white, well-educated, able-bodied, monogamous, and middle-class) lesbians and gay men, who once shared this space with them, proudly proclaim (often at their peril) their definitive emancipation from the closet of gay shame (Halperin 2009).

Does this mean that gay pride should be condemned or, on the other hand, that we should not find the peccadilloes of the rich and famous to be shameful even if they are shamefully commodified? Not exactly. With respect to the gay pride movement, Halperin cites Leo Bersani, who maintains:

the only kind of gay pride that is endurable is a gay pride that does not forget its origins in shame, that is still powered by *the transformative energies that spring from experiences of shame*. Without that intimate and never-forgotten relation to shame, gay pride turns into mere social conformity, into a movement. . . with no more radical goal than that of "trying to persuade straight society that [gay people] can be good parents, good soldiers, good priests." (Halperin 2009, 44; my emphasis)

Halperin's invocation of "the transformative energies that spring from experiences of shame" is especially instructive, I would argue, for understanding the potential power of secondhand shame that emerges in direct response to the shameless conduct of others. An especially noteworthy example is Donald Trump's shameless conduct toward his political opponent Hillary Clinton during the 2016 US presidential campaign. It is clear that his adamant refusal to express any shame for the astounding number of inaccurate and insulting accusations he has made (and continues to make) about her, his defiant lack of remorse for his sexist remarks about and sexually predatory behavior toward countless other women over the years, as well as the almost daily barrage of offensive tweets and comments he has made (and also continues to make) about Mexicans, Muslims, and undocumented immigrants, has had unprecedented political effects. Indeed, the shared shame his outrageous conduct has produced has indeed turned out to be, citing Tomkins once again, "a prime instrument

for strengthening the sense of mutuality and community” across a diverse coalition that includes not only millions of outraged and ashamed Americans but concerned citizens from all over the world.

What is perhaps most noteworthy about this new resistance movement is that its most public expression took the form of an explicitly gendered protest that became the largest demonstration in US history: the “Women’s March on Washington,” which occurred the day after Trump’s inauguration on January 21, 2017. Though over four million people marched in solidarity that day in Washington, DC, other US cities, and in cities around the globe, this collective action, it must be noted, has not discouraged (and arguably has even incited further) Trump’s shameful behavior toward women, minorities, the media, and his critics. Yet even if the Women’s March and the other organized protests that have followed it have been ineffective in squelching Trump’s penchant for shamelessness, they have drawn upon the “transformative energies of shame” through increasingly creative (and often quite comic) strategies of resistance.¹⁴ Indeed, the empowering effects of secondhand shame are readily apparent in these highly visible protests, for they have united an extremely diverse coalition of people around the world in a common cause. However, it is also crucial to remember that the strength of this new community is directly the result of Trump’s shameful and shameless behavior, a “double whammy” if you will, which intensifies the moral outrage that binds together those of us who oppose it.

NOTES

I am indebted to *Hypatia*’s anonymous reviewers and to the many colleagues who provided critical feedback on earlier versions of this essay.

1. Moreover, as I emphasize in this essay, shame is often experienced not only in response to my own (real or hypothetical) actions but also when another person acts shamefully and I witness his behavior.

2. Luna Dolezal offers an incisive reading of the “world-forming character” of the voyeur’s jealousy in *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body*. She observes that his jealousy “organizes his world, shaping his actions, responses, and experience within a particular situation.” And, she adds, it “not only colours his intentional relation to the physical realm, but also shrinks his world. The voyeur’s preoccupations, attentions and desires spiral in a tight circle around his jealousy” (Dolezal 2015, 103). If we read the voyeur’s abrupt transition from being the subject of jealousy to being an object of shame in Sartre’s scenario through Dolezal’s analysis, we can understand the voyeur’s radical shift in perspective as fundamentally altering and reorganizing his world around a new, yet equally constrained axis.

3. For a detailed account of the affective transfer of shame, see volume II of Tomkins 2008. Describing the transformative effects of this intensely intercorporeal and intersubjective experience, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank assert that “shame, as precarious hyperreflexivity of the surface of the body, can turn one inside out- or outside in” (Sedgwick and Frank 1995, 22).

4. Though Sartre uses a neutral, first-person pronoun to refer to the voyeur, the latter's stereotypical male jealousy as well as Sartre's previous masculinist examples make it clear that Sartre is envisioning him to be a man who is spying on a woman with whom he is in a relationship but who he suspects might be betraying him with another man on the other side of the door. Indeed, Sartre's depiction of the voyeur's behavior and feelings evokes the classic, sexist scenario of an overly possessive man, dramatically incarnated in the form of Marcel Proust's jealous protagonist in "The Prisoner" volume of *In Search of Lost Time* (Proust 2003). The latter goes to the extreme of keeping his lover Albertine under constant surveillance to try to prevent her from engaging in an imagined act of infidelity with someone else.

5. It would be an interesting (though rather depressing!) project in its own right to explore how not only gender but also race and class privileges multiply the "inducements to shamelessness" that encourage so many men to collude with one another in sexually objectifying women in public as well as private settings. Although, as we have seen with the sustained outrage that resulted from the October 2016 release of the 2005 Access Hollywood tape that recorded Donald J. Trump's infamous statement: "I like to grab them by the pussy," a statement uttered in reference to a married woman whom Trump (a married man) found attractive but who rejected his advances, this type of behavior is no longer as readily accepted as it used to be (at least not for public officials!) (Fahrenthold 2016). The appreciative laughter we hear on the tape from Trump's male compatriots reminds us that extremely sexist behavior that would not be acceptable in public when one is in "mixed" company is often a source of titillation in a private, all-male context. Indeed, Trump's comment became a source of embarrassment for Trump and his companion Billy Bush only when the recording was discovered and aired on social media. But this is a topic for another essay!

6. See the "Real Identities" chapter of Alcoff's *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* for a more detailed discussion of public identity, which Alcoff defines as "our socially perceived self within the systems of perception and classification and the networks of community in which we live" (Alcoff 2006, 92–93).

7. In contrast to being-in-itself, which, Sartre tells us, "is what it is" a being-for-itself "is what it is not and is not what it is" (Sartre 1984, 28–29), because it has a past (that which it no longer is) and a future (that which it will be but is not yet) that also help to constitute who we are at any given moment in time.

8. Although I have suggested that Sartre's example strongly evokes a male voyeur who is spying upon a female lover, I would argue that women can also identify with the voyeur whom Sartre is depicting in the first-person because the experience of sexual jealousy is not restricted to a particular gender, race, or social class. By contrast, the experience of anti-black racism, though it often takes different forms depending on whether its target is black men or black women, is indeed racially specific and so may be harder to identify with if one does not share that racial identity or if one is raised with white-skin privilege.

9. Collins uses this term to describe the damaging effects of negative (and in the case of the "super strong black mother," allegedly positive) stereotypes of black women, but it is a sad truth that any oppressed group can suffer from controlling images that profoundly influence how they are regarded, treated, and (de)valued by other people, some of whom may even share that group identity.

10. To say that shame is gendered and racialized does not mean that race and gender are the only or even the most salient dimensions of this experience. Class standing also clearly plays an important role in how, when, and why one person can be shamed by another in a particular social situation. Visible impairments, moreover, can also be a source of shame not only for disabled individuals themselves but also for those who respond to the disability with repulsion and then feel shame for this socially unacceptable response.

11. Indeed, I would suggest, shame can even become unmoored from the original event that triggered it. When this occurs, it becomes what we might call “free-floating shame.”

12. “The embodied conditions where shame does its work” is the focus of Mendible 2016. Several recent monographs and anthologies also take up this important project, drawing our attention to specific, shared experiences of shame, including Halperin and Traub 2009; Farrell 2011; Johnson and Moran 2013; and Dolezal 2015.

13. Such strategies have tended to be most effective for the people who are actually members of the group that is being shamed; movements celebrating racial, gender, sexual, and other minorities have been less successful in altering their oppressors’ view of them.

14. A particularly salient example of the latter are the “America First” videos parodying Trump’s January 20, 2017 Inaugural Address that went viral on social media. After the first one was aired by a comedy team from the Netherlands on January 24, 2017, it was quickly followed by other nationalistic spoofs from countries large and small, including France, Germany, Portugal, Switzerland, Moldova, Israel, Denmark, Tunisia, Bosnia, Lithuania, India, Malta, and Poland (The Indian Express 2017).

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