UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À TROIS-RIVIÈRES

RECONSIDERING THE TRANSFORMATIONAL POTENTIAL OF QUEER SHAME

MÉMOIRE PRÉSENTÉ
COMME EXIGENCE PARTIELLE DE LA
MAÎTRISE EN PHILOSOPHIE

PAR
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SEPTEMBRE 2021

This master's thesis is dedicated to all the queer theorists, academics, activists, warriors, and survivors. May your combined accomplishments continue to move and engage people as they have moved me.

This master's thesis is dedicated to anyone who right now feels like an Other, *in fields of shame suffused by unattainable norms of a society that has you estranged. May it contribute enough to your personal experiences to make you understand that it truly* does get better.

This master's thesis is dedicated to all the future queer theorists, academics, activists, warriors, and survivors. May my contribution be just significant enough to highlight the sufferings of some living in silence and enjoin some others to listen.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation culminates and brings together the ideas I have been juggling since I began my graduate studies. It is the result of some three years of extensive and demanding studies, readings and personally engaged writings. It is also the first time I have begun and completed a writing project of this magnitude. I could not have completed it without the help of people who deserve recognition.

I first wish to affectionately thank my supervisor, Professor Naïma Hamrouni, for her more than judicious advices, for her patience despite my various lacks of understanding, and for being such an inspiration, continually driving me to go further, to work harder, to read more and to challenge myself in the face of new insights. I consider this baggage of wisdom and of academic and personal growth to be invaluable and truly indispensable in my journey as a young academic.

I also extend my warmest gratitude to Professor Marie-Josée Drolet, with whom I have worked extensively for the last three years, and from whom I learned, namely, the basics of diligent research.

I must also thank my friends, who hopefully will identify themselves. Our long and elaborate exchanges and discussions contributed admirably to my thought development and constituted a pleasant comfort in the face of my doubts.

Finally, I would like to lovingly thank my parents, who had to wipe my many waves of emotions and my crises of uncertainty. I want you to know that if you felt at times helpless to answer my doubts or questions, your attentive, patient, and loving listening was particularly indispensable to me.

Preface

When I was in high school the school organized end-of-year trips to some major city (Toronto, Boston, New York, etc.) for each grade for a few days. Hotel rooms were allotted to teams of four students, so we had to find partners. By this time, I had already *come out* for a while: the trip organizers knew about it, as did all my classmates. The same was true for a friend of mine who was openly lesbian. I was not comfortable sharing a room with boys I was not friends with, and neither was she. We came up with the idea of teaming up and sharing a room.... The organizing committee did not want to hear anything on the open pretext that it would be too 'risky' for a boy and a girl to share a room on a school trip, and that even if we had signed permission from our parents (which we had), it was against school board policy. In the end, I shared a room with another openly gay boy with whom it was much more likely that *something* would happen. The organizers did not seem to care.

I began my preface with this story to eloquently show how queer people's lives can become intertwined with heteronormativity. The more I read and wrote about heteronormativity, about shame, about the ideal of masculinity, and about the oppression that these seemingly almost disjointed concepts can engender, the more I came to understand how I have always struggled with them. That, in fact, I have so far lived my life both crumbling under and resisting the heteronormative system. Moments of overwhelming shame, anger, incomprehension, and indignation made me question myself and my place in a society that apparently constantly questions my very existence. And which consistently persists in highlighting my *non*-adherence to its rigid and strict standards dictated by heteronormativity, which makes me feel, as queer feminists put it, both highly visible and invisible at the same time (Hennessy 2017, *cf.* Rich 1980). The fact that I do not fit in with such standards, of course, *is something for which I should be made to feel ashamed*. Or so tells me the heteronormative system or the heterosexist discourses within which I daily evolve. However, such words as 'heteronormativity' or 'heterosexism' were not yet mine

back then, when I first started realizing that my certain '*lifestyle*' was at odds with the societal norms that surrounded me. To that point, nor was the idea of shame already mine to combine with ideas of oppression originating in that heteronormative system. I was not there yet. But I still reflected on myself (and still do) when I became confronted with what I would now like to call 'epiphanies of heteronormativity', either expressed explicitly through heterosexist discourses or expressed implicitly in my understanding that behaving in a certain way might involve my being socially judged, or excluded. But more than that, it is as if certain existences and identities did not (and could not) exist within heteronormative systems. Indeed, they are so powerful and their grasps so all-encompassing that some realities have no place to exist, and are in fact ignored, silenced and erased.

I remembered the "high school trip" experience when I first was introduced to Adrienne Rich's article entitled 'Compulsory heterosexuality[1]' (Rich 1980). In this article, she develops the concept of "compulsory heterosexuality" to refer to how society takes the sexual desire between a man and a woman for granted and as a *necessity*, as if there were no other possibility for the sexual fulfillment of oneself. She shows how compulsory heterosexuality contributes to the invisibilisation of all other sexual identities, which then become (socially constructed as) deviant (Rich 1980: 632). Compulsory heterosexuality is at play in the school board rooming policy, which would not let an openly gay student share a room with an openly lesbian student. In fact, it is so deeply and insidiously entrenched in people's minds that it sometimes may lead to decisions that are contrary to what it originally meant to avoid (in this case, sexual relations between students).

[1]In her text entitled 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', in which she contends that heterosexuality must be understood above all as a political institution that serves as a tool allowing for men to dominate women, Rich offers a new way of thinking about heterosexuality following an analysis of male domination within all spheres of women's lives. Her text, indeed, first published in 1980 in *Signs*, figures amongst some of the most influential and defining of Rich's career, which, spanning nearly 70 years, has had influence both in poetry and in philosophy while mainly concerned with issues affecting women's lives and what she calls the lesbian existence.

Compulsory heterosexuality is also reflected in the inability of such school policy to believe that a boy and a girl can be just friends. The incapacity to conceive of this, which in turn sets up separation rules between boys and girls, reinforces and feeds the heteronormative biases that permeate society. Indeed, such biases feed off compulsory heterosexuality which encourages schools to keep boys and girls apart, as if their not caring about it would unfurl a series of sexually debauched events. [This need for separation itself contains many outdated heteronormative and patriarchal premises that are often not dared to question, namely the underlying idea that "boys will be boys", which reinforces the idea that their sexual 'urges' are masculine (essential, biological and inescapable) and natural (immutable), and that (thereby) they cannot (and should not) be controlled.]

Growing up gay, I have "encountered" heteronormativity often and came to realize how it enforces socially constructed norms as if they were undeniable laws of nature. I have encountered it when I first came out to my dad at seven, only to be told that I was too young to know for sure[2]. When my strong desire to wear makeup is met with equally strong feelings of inadequacy. When I am shamed publicly for unknowingly wanting to buy women shoes or earrings because they're colorful and beautiful. When I'm told I'm too loud. That my laugh is too high-pitched. And I feel profoundly surrounded by heteronorms when I'm told that I "walk gay."

Shame and outrage now seem inseparable to me. To be publicly shamed simply because of what one looks like or because of whom one decides to love and have sex with is an outrage. It is outrageous that heteronormativity demands for people to behave in certain ways when it comes to gender identity performances or sexual desires. And it is even more outrageous that heteronormativity disseminates shame to those seemed subversive. Many end up performing adaptative preferences (*cf.* Khader 2011) to

[2] On that note, why is it that only queer children are too young to know? Why is it perfectly fine for a 4-year-old girl (my niece) to have little boyfriend*s* in kindergarten, while I'm (supposedly) too young to know that I'm gay at seven?

soothe away their burning shame. Nonetheless, it remains outrageous to notice that many queer people live beside themselves in social roles and personal identities which they have not made their own. Which have been imposed on them socially, and which they use to 'pass'. Outrage still when a person constructs their personal identity through the *internalization of shame*.

I end this preface with the powerful words of Hannah Gadsby: "I sat soaking in shame... in the closet, for ten years. Because the closet [...] is not shame-proof. When you soak a child in shame, they cannot develop the neurological pathways that [...] carry thoughts of self-worth." (Bruzzese *et al.* 2018) This is what my dissertation is about. It is about shame. It is about heteronormativity. And it is about queer people. It is about how queer people are made to internalize shame, which in turn reinforces heteronormative systems. Until there is an adequate understanding of all facets of shame, but more importantly, of the ways in which queer people are systemically shamed and the place that this shame occupies in the reproduction of heteronormative oppression, we cannot hope to live in a world where everyone is fortunate enough to feel that their lives have value.

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I discuss shame as it is experienced by queer people. While some recognize the transformative potential of "queer shame"(Sedgwick 1993, *cf.* Halperin & Traub 2009), I suggest that it can only truly play this role if this emotion is first understood as painful for queer people, whose lives within heteronormative societies are particularly marked by "nonconformity". In the first chapter, I examine the main conceptions of shame in psychology (Freud 1905, 1933; Tomkins 1962, 1963, 1991; Kaufman 1989), philosophy (Sartre 1943; Williams 1993; Nussbaum 2004), and feminisms (Bartky 1990; Manion 2003; Mann 2018; Weiss 2018). This allows me to reconstruct an adequate definition of shame with which I can discuss queer shame. In the second chapter, looking specifically at the lived experiences of shame amongst queer people, I discuss the works of some who believe that shame can potentially be transformational (Sedgwick 1993). I take this understanding to be insufficient without a proper understanding of queer shame as painful and stemming from heteronormativity (Ahmed 2004; Foucault 1978, *cf.* Fanon 1952). More specifically, I argue that: (1) it is a painful emotion intimately connected to heteronormative social structures and (2) that this emotion can form the basis for political contestations of heteronormativity.

Résumé

Dans ce mémoire, je traite de la honte ressentie par les personnes queer. Si certaines autrices reconnaissent le potentiel transformateur de la « honte queer » (Sedgwick 1993, *cf.* Halperin & Traub 2009), je suggère qu'elle ne pourra véritablement jouer ce rôle que si cette émotion est d'abord comprise comme étant douloureuse pour les personnes queer – personnes dont la vie au sein de sociétés hétéronormatives est particulièrement marquée par la « non-conformité ». Dans le premier chapitre, j'examine les principales conceptions de la honte provenant des champs de la psychologie (Freud 1905, 1933; Tomkins 1962, 1963; Kaufman 1989), de la philosophie (Sartre 1943; Williams 1993; Nussbaum 2004) et des féminismes (Bartky 1990; Manion 2003; Mann 2018; Weiss 2018). Cela me permet de dégager une définition adéquate pour traiter de la honte queer. Dans le deuxième chapitre, en me penchant plus spécifiquement sur l'expérience vécue de la honte chez les personnes queer, je présente les travaux d'autrices qui considèrent que la honte possède un potentiel transformateur (Sedgwick 1993). J'estime que cette compréhension est insuffisante si elle ne permet pas de voir que la honte queer est avant tout douloureuse et qu'elle découle de l'hétéronormativité (Ahmed 2004; Foucault 1978, *cf.* Fanon 1952). Plus précisément, je défends que : (1) elle est une émotion douloureuse intimement liée aux structures sociales hétéronormatives et (2) que, contrairement à ce qui est généralement tenu pour acquis, cette émotion peut constituer le fondement d'une contestation politique de l'hétéronormativité de nos sociétés.

(Arguments- and Research-Based) Glossary

In this section, I propose a list of words and their definitions or conceptualizations that I use in the following pages, that inspire my writing or that I believe could benefit my reader's comprehension. Please note that they are in no way exhaustive or definitive. They are but my humble attempt at offering some conceptual clarity.

2SLGBTQIA+

This is the acronym I use in this dissertation to refer to people who self-identify with or are identified with sexual or gender identities that are socially minoritized. Its letters and symbols mean to encompass, amongst others, Two-spirit people, lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, Trans* people, intersex people, asexual people, and queer people. Although these people are put together under this "umbrella" acronym, one should not omit that (1) they represent diverse and unique persons, (2) whose desires and identities may not always be adequately represented by it. Additionally, one should bear in mind that not everyone agrees with the use of this acronym, as (1) it may contribute to invisibilize some people in the midst of promoting others, and because (2) it does not show the sometimes conflicting relationships between the people represented under each symbols (*cf.* Jeffreys 1994, 2014). Finally, some use other "variations" of the acronym, such as LGBT, or LGBTQIA, etc. I prefer to use the longest acronym possible, to avoid omitting people. However, by and large, as is discussed in the introduction and through this master's thesis, I prefer to use queer, since it allows, namely, for more political leverage.

Agender

Comprised within a broader understanding of gender as non-binary (see **Non-binary**), **agender** people do not subscribe to currently (socially) held gender norms, and their gender identity will thus be neither masculine or feminine (or undefined).

Amatonormativity

Coined by Elizabeth Brake in her 2011 book *Minimizing Marriage: Marriage, Morality, and the Law*, **amatonormativity** refers to the "[...] belief that marriage and companionate romantic love have special value" and the "assumptions that a central, exclusive, amorous relationship is normal for humans, in that it is a universally shared goal, and that such a relationship is normative, in that it should be aimed at in preference to other relationship types" (Brake 2012:). To put it differently, Brake questions the social necessity of being in relationships, and points that to pressure people into forming, say monogamous married couples, may make some people, who do not fit this valorized scheme, at odds and, thus, seem abnormal (*i.e.* asexual (see **Asexuality**), aromantic (see **Aromantic**) or nonmonogamous people).

Androgyne

Also comprised under non-binary gender identities (see **Non-binary**), androgyne gender blends, blurs or annuls the lines between gender binaries. An androgyne person, may identify as both masculine and feminine, as neither, as both female and male, as neither, or as something else.

Aromantic

Aromantic people generally do no desire to engage in romantic relationships but may experience sexual desires and attractions.

Asexuality

Someone who identifies as **asexual** (or *ace*) generally does not feel or experience sexual attraction towards others (or have little to no interest for it). Asexuality is sometimes misconceived simply as a desire "not to date anyone at the moment" or mixed up with aromantic understandings of love. However, asexual people may engage in romantic relations, but they will hardly develop a sexual component.

Bigender

People who identify as **bigender**, which, again, can be incorporated under the umbrella of non-binary (see **Non-binary**), have two gender identities, sometimes at the same time, sometimes alternatively. There is a kind of gender fluidity (see **Genderfluid**) in the expression of this identity. Moreover, while it is often assumed that the two genders of a bigender person are masculine and feminine, it should be qualified that, for some people, the pair may include two non-binary gender identities.

Cisgender

We consider a person to be **cisgender**, as opposed to trans* (see **Trans*** below), when the gender they were assigned at birth, their biological sex and bodies, and their personal identity all fit together.

Femininity

Femininity refers to what one performs, following socially enforced norms, in order to be seen as feminine. It is important to see that femininity does not correspond exclusively to being a woman. Women can perform their gender identity in a feminine way, but men can also demonstrate femininity. In fact, people with fluid gender expression may even claim some of the social norms and conventions that make up the scripts of femininity. Moreover, femininity is not just for cis-gender people, as trans* people can also express it. As such, femininity may encompass the gender expressions of many diverse individuals. Really, though, the central element in understanding femininity is the hierarchically subordinate place it occupies vis-à-vis masculinity. Indeed, in heteronormative Western societies, masculinity generally dominates femininity: masculine gender expressions are valued while feminine gender expressions are often heavily criticized (or even belittled), and men who embody masculine ideals tend to occupy better social positions than others (e.g., "effeminate men or women who are perceived as "masculine") (*cf.* Dea 2016, Windsor 2015).

Genderfluid

People who identify as **genderfluid** may experience and express their gender identity (which, again, is not necessarily masculine or feminine) in a vast array of possibilities, at different times, on different occasions and with different people.

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity comprises the words "heterosexuality" and "normativity". Heterosexuality, which is composed of "hetero" (*i.e.*, different) and "sexuality" (*i.e.*, pertaining to sex [from Latin "*sexualis*"]), refers to a sexual or emotional attraction to a person of the opposite sex. Etymologically, normative can refer to the Latin word "*norma*", which means "rule", and to the Ancient Greek word "*gnōmōn*", which translates into "something that guides". Thus, the (etymological) meaning of heteronormativity would probably be the *normalization* (as a *natural social rule*) of the sexual or emotional attractions of opposite sexes.

In fact, in developing queer theory as an academic discipline, queer theorists greatly relied on historical and genealogical approaches, since many wished to question the (self-evident) natural development (as opposed to socially constructed) of heterosexuality (Mayer 2018: 85). In fact, some, like Jonathan Ned Katz (1995) and Louis-George Tin (2008), pointed out that heterosexuality, far from being natural, has been socially and culturally constructed through time. If heterosexuality has been invented, it means, then, that it is held in place through social practices, norms and conventions. It also means that things could be otherwise.

Queer theorists, thus, generally understand heteronormativity as a broad concept which brushes up against several layers of human life. For Michael Warner, heteronormativity is the "[...] elemental form of human association, as the very model of intergender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community,

and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist" (Warner 1991: *xxi*). In other words, this means that heteronormativity is an encompassing and almost undetectable normative system (Mayer 2018: 83). As a system, it "organizes sex, gender and sexuality in order to match heterosexual norms" (do Mar Castro Varela, Dhawan & Engel 2011: 11). This system contributes to the creation and reinforcement of a rigid equation between a person's biological sex and her gender expression. More specifically, it consists of socially instituted norms that make heterosexuality seem inevitable (*cf.* Corber & Valocchi 2003). That make heterosexuality appear normal and natural (*cf.* Berlant & Warner 1998). This means that any behaviour, attitude or coupling that does not fall under the scope of the heterosexual norm may be seen as *nonconform*. Indeed, "living within heteronormativity culture means learning to see straight, to read straight, to think straight" (Sumara & Davis 1999: 202).

Early discussions of heteronormativity also sought to criticize heterosexual privileges. For instance, Michael Warner discussed the totalizing tendency of heterosexual privileges: "[...] so much of heterosexual privilege lies in the heterosexual culture's exclusive ability to interpret itself as society. Even when coupled with a toleration of minorities sexualities, *heteronormativity has a totalizing tendency* [...]" (Warner 1991: 8; my emphasis).

Heterosexism

Heterosexism is a form of discrimination targeting people who are (or are viewed as) not heterosexual. Heterosexist discriminations comprise and is reinforced by attitudes or ideas which favour heterosexuality. It propagates the idea that one is heterosexual until proven otherwise (Welzer-Lang 1994: 57). Heterosexist discriminations, discourses and attitudes can be internalized. In this case, internalized heterosexism refers to the fact that a person from a sexual minority group comes to accept and integrate the negative prejudices or discriminations towards queer people and non-conforming gender and sexual identities (Murgo *et al.* 2017).

Homonormativity

For Lisa Duggan, who coined the term, **homonormativity** points to "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption contestation" (Duggan 2002: 179).

Intersex

Following feminist philosopher Shannon Dea, we consider **intersex** to refer "to people born with ambiguous genitalia, with sex chromosome abnormalities, or with some misalignment between their sex chromosomes and their anatomy" (Dea 2016: 83). Dea further notes that intersex people generally fall under three categories: (1) individuals whose reproductive organs are ambiguous due to the way their sex chromosomes are organized (e.g., congenital adrenal hyperplasia); (2) individuals whose reproductive organs are ambiguous but whose sex chromosomes do not have "abnormalities" (e.g., vaginal agenesis); and (3) individuals whose reproductive organs are not irregular, but whose sex chromosomes are (e.g., Turner's syndrome). Further, intersex is a term that is now preferred to hermaphrodite, which was at risk of "representing people so categorized as somehow mystical or exotic" (Dea 2016: 102).

Masculinity (see Femininity)

Masculinity refers to what one performs, following socially enforced norms, in order to be seen as masculine. In other words, masculinity it is not related to the biological sex "male" but involves masculine behaviors (Morris & Blume Oeur 2018: xi). Such behaviors can be performed by anyone, independently of their biological sex or their birth-assigned gender. Further, what ought to be noticed in this definition is the expression "socially enforced". What that means is that people do not always voluntarily choose to perform their gender in the way they do, but sometimes are socially compelled to. As an illustration, we can think of an effeminate young boy who will learn to "toughen up" to be socially accepted. But we can

also think of a woman who feels more comfortable performing gender acts socially seen as masculine.

As a social construction, masculinity is inscribed, within patriarchally-driven systems, as a set of (idealized) norm from which all persons must situate themselves and which implies *the subordination of the feminine*. This norm calls for certain behaviours in order to be socially considered masculine, but also implies that punitive measures are taken against offenders. Indeed, these punitive measures contribute to the emergence of anti-effeminacy thinking, based on the belief that, for example, a man must avoid looking or behaving in an effeminate manner at all costs. According to R. W. Connell, "certain constructions of masculinity are hegemonic, while others are subordinated or marginalized" (Connell 1992: 736). That is, hegemonic masculinity comprises practices which contribute to the persistence of women's dominance by men.

As part of the heterosexual system, anti-effeminacy translates as follows: the fact of displaying an effeminate image for a man implies that he is perceived as homosexual, and this in a negative way. Already, this allows us to see part of the shame emanating from the heteronormative system which, in accordance with these *anti*-effeminacy norms, is laid on queer people who are constantly in danger of deviating from the ideal of the division between masculine and feminine.

Non-Binary

Non-binary gender identities do not subscribe to socially held norms about gender and do not align perfectly with either side of the binary composed of masculinity and femininity. People who identify as non-binary, thus, may wish not to follow the lines of the binary conceptions of gender, may blur the lines of gender and depart with most commonly held ideas about gender, and may wish to perform many genders or none at all.

Queer

According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *queer* means to refuse a monolithic, smoothed out and

homogeneous conception of sexuality and gender. To put it differently, queer refers to the idea that the multitude of possibilities that can play on people's gender and sexual identities cannot be appropriately understood following constraining categories which monolithic heteronorms otherwise impose (Sedgwick 1994: 7). Rather, she contends that fixed categories need to be shattered and expanded if one is to be better able to address and understand the diversity of sexualities and gender expressions.

Queer theory, then, asks questions about personal identity and its relations with gender and sexual desire performances. Mostly, one of the premises of queer theory holds that heteronorms enforce significant social binaries, regarding gender and sexuality, but also concerning class, race, ableism, etc., which need to be disrupted or expanded. It interrogates what it means to conform to sexual norms and what is involved in disrupting them. It also integrates intersectional perspectives in order to question, following Sommerville (2000), how the categories of sex, gender and race relate to one another (*cf.* Johnson & Henderson 2005).

Shame

(For a more thorough and well-conceptualized understanding of **shame**, see chapter 1.) I understand shame to refer to a painful emotion which arises when one's failure or "badness" is highlighted in front of others' gaze (be it real or imagined). One often experiences shame as an incapacity to reach one's ideals (be they personal or social [*i.e.* internalized]). All in all, shame testifies to one's interdependence with others.

Third Gender

In some cultures and communities around the world, people identify themselves or are identified by terms that fall under the umbrella of the "**third gender**" (or third sex), insofar as their gender or sexual expressions are not exactly comprised within currently held expressions of "man" and "woman". This is not a matter of blurring the lines of differentiation between binary gendered expressions, as is the case

with gender-fluid people, for instance, but rather of expressing *another* gender identity. The terms *Mangaiko*, used by the *Mbo* people of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and *Mashoga* (plural form of *Shoga*, in Swahili), used by people of some regions of Kenya and Tanzania, for example, refer to people whose gender and sexual identities would fall under the category of third gender (*cf.* Murray & Roscoe 1998).

Trans*

We use the asterisk here at the end of the prefix *trans* to indicate the vast array of gender and sexual identities that exists and to highlight that it does not refer to as *cis*gender man or woman. Trans*, then, more specifically designates the words transgender, transman, transwoman, transsexual, transmasculine and transfeminine. (It should be noted further that other sexual and/or gender identities like gender queer, agender, two-spirit, genderfluid, non-binary, gender non-conforming, bigender, third gender, androgynous, etc. do not properly fit under either cisgender or trans*.)

Two-Spirit

Two-Spirited people, for many indigenous and aboriginal people in the world, are "seen as being neither men nor women, but as belonging to genders of their own within cultural systems of multiple genders" (Lang 1997: 114). Two-Spirit identities "[place] the emphasis on gender diversity – rather than on sexual orientation – and its inclusion in a cultural and spiritual system" (Depelteau & Giroux 2015: 66). In this sense, Two-Spirit identities ought not to be reduced "to a sexual orientation or equating it with 'gay,' 'homosexual,' or even 'berdache'", because "[from] their perspective, sexual behaviour cannot be separated from the social roles occupied by Two-Spirited people and the world of relationships to which the term "Two-Spirit" refers (Depelteau & Giroux 2015: 66).

Introductory Remarks

Pride and Shame

June 1970. Chicago. On a warm sunny day in mid-June, under the scornful, disgusted and, still, curious gazes of onlookers and police officers, a group of people whom society deemed sexual deviants were gathering. In truth, these people, some of whom openly and unashamedly claimed their "non-conforming" sexual and gender identities, were preparing to embark on one of the first public demonstrations in the world to oppose the social injustices they were experiencing and to openly proclaim their right to love freely. On that day, after many meetings, the Chicago Gay Liberation gathered some 150 people, carrying banners and signs, and marched from the "Burghouse Square" to the Civic Center (now Richard J. Daley Plaza). This march, which today seems small in comparison to the huge gatherings that Pride parades can generate in many cities around the world, was echoed by many other gay and lesbian rights organizations, and other marches were gradually organized in New York, San Francisco, and Philadelphia. In Montreal, the first Pride Parade was held in June 1979 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Stonewall. Gradually, June became a special time of celebrations for many queer people. For our collective social imaginaries, it is in fact more and more synomous with Pride, which, through its grandiose marches, gathers people from all walks of life in partying celebrations all around the world. But June is also a moment to remember the first times gay and lesbian people mobilized publicly against marginalization, heteronormative oppressions, and police brutality. Above all, they marched and chanted their pride to affirm that *love is love*.

March 2003. Ann Harbor. In late winter, the first and only Gay Shame Conference was held at the University of Michigan, which papers are collected in the 2009 book *Gay Shame*, edited by David Halperin and Valerie Traub. During the Conference, many prominent theorists explored the potential of shame to deploy "some alternate strategies for the promotion of queer sociality" (Halperin & Traub 2009: 4). That

said, the conference itself echoed the Gay Shame Movement, which sought to rethink the primacy of pride within the *mainstream* gay community. Gay Shame[3] contested the assimilationist rhetoric found in many of the mainstream gay community's claims to political and societal power through pride. Such a contestation is echoed in the work of Lisa Duggan, who is credited for coining the word "homonormativity". For Duggan, *homonormativity* points to "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption contestation" (Duggan 2002: 179). To put it differently, the *Gay Shame Movement* rejected the hypocrisy of the gay mainstream which proudly flaunts its most beautiful features so that society would accept it, while at the same time *silencing* and *invisibilizing* those within it who are deemed subversive and whose "lifestyle" is shamed (*i.e.* "people with the 'wrong' bodies, sadomasochists, sex workers, drag queens, butch dykes, people of color, boy-lovers, bisexuals, immigrants, the poor, the disabled" [Halperin & Traub 2009: 9]). According to the proponents of Gay Shame, by employing the rhetoric of pride so fiercely and by indulging the dominant heteronormative norms and narrative, the gay community has come to reproduce the patterns of oppression it originally sought to escape from. Gay Shame enjoined many to reconsider differently exactly just how truly queer shame is and how it may be important to queer people's conceptions of personal identity.

Even if Gay Shame movement eventually came to pass, its core ideas concerning queer shame are still very much relevant. In fact, Gay Shame, in seeking to interrogate the point and place of shame within

[3] Perhaps some conceptual clarity is needed here, if only to distinguish between the different iterations of Gay Shame that will be found in the present dissertation. Through this master's thesis, whenever I use the expression 'Gay Shame', I mean to refer both to the activist movement (Gay Shame Movement) and its ideas, and to the ideas and arguments which have emerged both in queer theory and at the Gay Shame Conference. If I wish to refer specifically to one of them, precisions will be provided. *Gay Shame* (with italics) is used to refer specifically to the 2009 book edited by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub. If I need to refer to the emotion of shame, as experienced by queer people, I will use (with some exceptions) the expression "queer shame".

queer people's lives and experiences, somewhat drew on the works of authors, like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, amongst others, who aimed to conceptualize and understand the transformational and positive potential of shame (Sedgwick 1993). However, I am not entirely certain that the shame queer people experience (*qua* queer people) ought to be primarily understood as potentially transformative. My point with this dissertation is to (1) gain a thoroughly conceptualized understanding of the notion of shame, so as to suggest (2) that we may consider the potentially transformative and positive roles of shame for queer people only insofar as we first comprehend shame as a painful emotion which queer people feel because of the heteronormative structures that surround them.

Following feminist and Cultural, Gender, and Media Studies Emeritus Professor of English Sally R. Munt (2007, 2019), I understand generally *that feeling shame is an important experience in the formation of personal identity for queer people living in heteronormative societies*. According to her, in fact, "[h]istorically, for homosexuals to be classified within the ordering/signifying [heteronormative] system, to be allotted a social place, they must be put into place by shame [...]" (Munt 2019: 227). In fact, heteronormativity's hegemony asks people to conform to certain rules, to *perform* gender and sexuality following certain scripts (Butler 1988). Heteronormativity, indeed, should be understood as a large and complex system which dictates how one should behave towards oneself and others, how one should feel, and how one should think. But it should also be understood as a system which enforces social consequences upon those who do not fit within its ideals. For instance, it *demands* that a man ought to marry (*amatonormativity, cf.* Brake [2012]) a woman and have children with her. It demands of men to be masculine and of women to be feminine. Masculinity and femininity, in the context of heteronormativity, are gender identity performances which comprise social norms closely and carefully dictating how one should perform their gender as a fluid continuation of the biological sexes they were assigned at birth. Following Edward Morris and Freeden Blume Oeur, I contend that masculinity, while it refers to socially

constructed norms that can be performed by anyone, sets expectations against which all must situate themselves (Morris & Blume Oeur 2018: *x*, *cf*. Haslanger 1995). Young boys are still currently penalized for wearing dresses. And girls are usually reprimanded for expressing their anger too loudly (or at all). Masculinity also often involves the subordination or domination of femininity (Mikkola 2019, *cf*. MacKinnon 1989), be it performed by women, trans* women, effeminate men, etc. What is more, it should be noted, quite interestingly, that many critical masculinity studies' authors deplore the virtual non-existence of university academic departments dedicated to the study of masculinity and men, while there exist a plethora of academic departments dedicated to feminist, trans* or race studies (Horlacher 2015). While this absence may be real (but growing less and less so), it must also be confronted with the fact that virtually no definition of femininity exists that is not necessarily tied to a prior understanding of what masculinity is (*cf*. Paetcher 2018).

The Need to Discuss Shame

The reflexive process that drove this dissertation, and the underlying thoughts that feed it, essentially stem from an inclusive understanding of what it means to live together, recognizing that openness to others and their differences is important for the achievement of a just society whose members are committed to the fulfillment of all its citizens (*cf*. Young 1990, 2000). In this sense, I believe inclusivity requires a deeper understanding of how shame is comprised within oppressive heteronorms that marginalized or discriminated groups, communities or individuals have to compose with. Such a comprehension may lead to a better appreciation of the lives of minority people and thus enable the identification of strategies aiming to, eventually, eliminate those oppressions. I believe that if we are to achieve a more inclusive society for marginalized queer people, it is important to understand what shame is, especially since their existence and identity development seem to depend, within heteronormative societies (where one is heterosexual and *cis*-gender until proven otherwise) on the confession of one's

difference (often expressed as a 'coming out').

Experiencing acute shame over extended periods of time can have serious consequences both for the physical and mental health. Where physical health is concerned, shame can render one more prone to risky and self-destructive behaviours, such as addiction to alcohol or drugs, and eating disorders (Dolezal & Lyons 2017; Masheb 1999). For Dolezal and Lyons, in fact, shame "is so pervasive, so corrosive of the self and so potentially detrimental to health, that there is considerable utility in considering it an affective determinant of health", because it can be linked with other destructive behaviours like alcoholism or drug abuse (Dolezal & Lyons 2017: 257).

Further, shame can be detrimental to a person's mental health, as studies have shown that it increases the risk for a person to experience depression and anxiety and can even lead to suicidal ideation (Dickerson 2004; Lewis 1971; Mokros 1995; Scheff 2001). Some even consider shame a "transdiagnostic phenomenon", *i.e.* as part of many psychopathology diagnostics, such a depression (for which shame is important, both as a symptom and as an obstacle to recovery) (Yakeley 2018: S21). Other physiological responses to shame may include nausea, chest tightness, and lethargy. Especially even, shame induces the body with stress, which is characterised by "a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation" (Mish 2014). In this sense, chronic stress, which may occur as a result of long-lasting shame, may give rise to painful conditions to the muscular and skeletal systems, can contribute to cardiovascular difficulties and gastrointestinal problems (which, in turn, may influence the emergence of mood disorders). What is more, in that it triggers long-lasting demands on the nervous system, chronic stress may bring someone to feel drained, thereby diminishing the effectiveness and scope of other bodily functions, including reproductive functions (APA 2018). The preceding paragraphs eloquently highlight the relevance of questioning the role and point of shame, and of seeking new avenues in "dealing" with it.

2SLGBTQIA+ vs Queer

Before detailing the chapters composing this dissertation, I address here in length why I choose to use the word queer instead of the by now more and more recognized acronym 2SLGBTQIA+. Before embarking on such explanation, I wish to stress that I do not in any way deny the importance of the acronym or the significant gain in terms of civil rights and social recognition that is evidenced (in ways) by its increasingly widespread collective use. Indeed, it is personally comforting and very encouraging to see that the acronym has increasingly become a part of our lives[4]. Notwithstanding, there are practical and political reasons for which I would rather use, as far as this dissertation is concerned, the word queer. The first reason I choose to use the word 'queer' is rooted in a political understanding of what queerness means. Mimi Marinucci, for instance, uses the word queer following the work of Gayle S. Rubin in *Thinking Sex* (1984). She emphasizes how sexualities and gender expressions are diverse and suggests that "everyone is at least a little queer". "The use of queer (rather than lesbian and gay, or LGBT+), she writes, as the conceptual alternative to normative sexuality can *facilitate a sort of unity of purpose in resisting the hegemony of normative sexuality*" (Marinucci 2017; my emphasis). In other words, using the word queer does not make it superior or preferable to the acronym. Rather, it better appreciates the existence of people whose experiences *are* queer and recognizes the claims of queerness as important in opposing heteronormativity[5].

The second reason for which I prefer using the word queer instead of the acronym 2SLGBTQIA+ consists in my acknowledging that this latter means something. Its letters refer to the lived experiences and identities of *many diversified people*. If can I lay claim to some of the experiences underlying the letter

[4] I was pleasantly surprised, for instance, to notice that Netflix now offers a selection of LGBT-identified films on its streaming service. I felt this was a real step forward, especially compared to the fact that when I was younger, I had to search every nook and cranny on the internet simple to find mention of a single queer film, often in a foreign language, and unavailable in my country.

[5] See also Marinucci, M. (2016). *Feminism is Queer: The Intimate Connection Between Queer and Feminist Theory* (Expanded Edition). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

G, I would never dare do the same for the other letters. More specifically, my personal standpoint as a white gay man does not allow me to lay claim to the standpoints and experiences of the people represented in the other letters: lesbian, two-spirit, asexual, etc.[6].

In effect, drawing from a feminist standpoint theory perspective, the posture which I adopt recognizes that knowledge is shaped according to social positionalities, and that epistemic privileges are associated with them. This different standpoint gives queer people access to certain strains of knowledges and perspectives which are not available to non-marginalized people (without them risking appropriating the lives and experiences of others). As such, I believe that a research like mine "should begin with the lives of the marginalized" (Bowell 2020, *cf*. Harding 2004).

This means that, as a white gay man, I can access certain knowledge that non-gay people do not have. However, this also comes with blind spots. My perspective and positionality are therefore partial: I do not have access to all the knowledge associated with other queer positionalities. Despite these possible blind spots that may not make my point of view as comprehensive as it could be, I remain among those who believe that research on this topic must begin with perspectives such as mine, which are committed to diversity and the inclusion of perspectives that otherwise remain marginalized. In writing this text, I start from my personal experience of shame (as a white queer man) in order to address the general experience of queer shame. My point of view is my own and through it I gain legitimacy to speak about queer shame. Nevertheless, this can potentially run into difficulties. First, while my being close to my research subject grants me legitimacy to discuss queer shame (by virtue of my positionality), the scope of my analysis is likely to be limited to the shame which cis-gender, gay, white men may experience. Indeed,

[6]Although I do not wish to expand abundantly on this (since it is not the point of this dissertation), I recognize that my political stance on queerness is disputed. For instance, critical feminist thinker Sheila Jeffreys has, for a long time, been critical of the emergence and the spreading of the word queer because, in her eyes, it only contributes to invisibilize women, especially lesbian women, within 2SLGBTQIA+ circles (Jeffreys 1994; 2014).

the legitimacy of my positionality follows me both in the preambles of my research and in its results. Alternatively, this means that my research may not be as inclusive as it should be. In particular, it may not be the most accurate reflection of queer women's, queer racialized people's, or queer trans* people's experiences of shame. Broadly, I am aware that my using the term "queer" rather than the acronym 2SLGBTQIA+ does not preclude theoretical blind spots. I wish to make it clear, however, that this is not because of any lack of regard for the experiences of these people or my unwillingness to strive for inclusion. I only wished to remain true to my own positionality

With all that in mind, the second reason is mostly an ethical and political concern. In turn, I believe that by using the word queer in this research, I am better able to (1) criticize heteronormativity and account for the experiences of queer people, as well as (2) not risking appropriating voices that are not mine or speaking for others. (However, a word of caution: I use the word queer, but it is important that readers remain aware that *my use is incomplete and partial.*)

Plan of the Dissertation

This dissertation has two chapters. In chapter one, I discuss conceptualizations of shame stemming from works in psychology, philosophy, and feminisms in order (1) to propose an encompassing account of its main contours, and (2) to bring forward my own workable definition of shame, which draws on the works of Nussbaum (2004), Bartky (1990) and Ahmed (2004). In chapter two, I assess Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1993) account of queer shame as potentially transformational against the works of Ahmed (2004), Foucault (1978) and Fanon (1952), who propose conceptions of shame embedded in structural social forces. In fact, I argue that shame can be transformational for queer people only insofar as it is understood primarily as a painful emotion which queer people experience because they are viewed as *deviant*. This brings me to suggest that queer shame may serve as a *political lever*, since it exposes and challenges heteronormative norms.

"Shame is what keeps us in line, what prevents us from discovering not so much who we are, but what we might become."
(Michael Bronski, "Foreword" to *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sexuality*, 2004

"I suppose that a lifetime spent hiding one's erotic truth could have a cumulative renunciatory effect. Sexual shame is in itself a kind of death."
(Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, 2007)

1. Conceptualizing Shame

What is shame? What does it feel like to be ashamed? Or to be *shamed by others*? What consequences does this emotion have on one's personal identity? What does experiencing shame entail for the way people live together? Such questions inform contemporary researches on shame, which are carried out from different disciplines communicating with and influencing one another. The first influential studies on shame originated in psychology, notably with the work of Freud at the beginning of the 20th century. Having influenced the theories of shame in both sociology and philosophy, for instance, psychological works on shame largely predates contemporary research in queer theory about shame and heteronormativity, which developed in the academy in the early 1990s.

In any case, it appears that shame is an important emotion to consider if one wants to better understand the dynamics of oppression queer people still experience today. This is precisely why the aim of this first chapter is to conceptually engage the works of authors in psychology, philosophy, and feminisms who have sought to theorize and conceptualize shame. Inasmuch as there are currently little to no writings that propose an exhaustive and encompassing account of the contours and nuances of shame, let alone queer shame, I seek here to provide an accurate picture of the influential writings that have addressed the issue of shame, so as to stress its complexity and its relevance. This is an important first step to take before reflecting in subsequent chapters on the relationship between shame and oppression.

This chapter comprises three main parts. In a first part, I will discuss how shame has been conceptualized in psychology, by discussing the canonical works of Freud (1905, 1933), Tomkins (1961, 1962) and Kaufman (1989). The second part focuses on important philosophical contributions, namely that of Sartre (1943), Williams (1993) and Nussbaum (2004). A third part considers significant contributions by critical feminist philosophers whose conceptualizations of shame as a gendered emotion are significant. Thus, this chapter is primarily a literature review, at the end of which I intend to identify a pertinent and appropriate definition of shame.

1.1. Psychology

Shame has been important in psychology from Freudian psychoanalysis and its successors (*cf.* Jung 2009) to current work in critical psychology (*cf.* Liu 2017). This section focuses on three central authors who addressed shame in the field of psychology: Sigmund Freud (1905, 1933), Silvan Tomkins (1962, 1963, *cf.* Sedgwick & Frank, 1995), and Gershen Kaufman (1989).

Sigmund Freud (1905, 1933)

Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud is amongst the first prominent thinkers to address shame, namely through his theory of the psychosexual development of children. Freud's theory of psychosexual development is now famous: few have never heard of the oedipal complex. Briefly, the oedipal complex, for the little boy, consists of a phase of rivalry with the father and a desire for the mother[7]. This complex is "resolved" when the boy, who becomes aware that his mother does not have a penis, begins to fear castration. This fear leads him to reject his mother[8] (Dea 2016: 71-73). This is where shame arises for

[7] In greater detail, Freud's Oedipus complex is based on the play Oedipus Rex (Oedipus Tyrannus), by the ancient Greek playwright Sophocles, in which Oedipus kills his father (Laius, the fallen king) and marries his mother (Jocasta), thus fulfilling (unbeknownst to him) the prophecy of his life. The play relates how Oedipus goes in search of his father's killer (ignoring his own responsibility). When the truth is revealed to the characters, Jocasta commits suicide and Oedipus stabs his eyes out.

[8] However, if shame is primarily located in the body for Freud, philosopher Bonnie Mann's reading of his work also situates it in the concealment of genitalia deficiency, which is mostly the burden of women. Women, in fact, must

Freud. It is closely linked to the body and its sexual impulses, which the ego wishes to repress. In other words, shame corresponds to the ego's defense against the (bodily) manifestations of the *Id*, which is, in Freudian terms, the main seat of bodily urges and basic instincts. More broadly, shame, understood as the repressions of corporeal urges, has to do with the (possible) pleasure that can be obtained from one's own reproductive organs, both sexually and physiologically (urination and defecation) (Hazard 1969: 253).

Shame is also importantly social, as it implies the fear of being disapproved by others when exhibiting some behaviours. In this sense, therefore, shame "is a painful affect [...] concerned with sexual matters [...] to the extent that [they] evoke [...] the disgust or contempt of others" (Hazard 1969: 253). Finally, Freud emphasizes that shame has both an individual and a social utility. Individually, he suggests that shame contributes to the 'normal' development of the subject's personality and self-conception (Freud 1905: 238-239). Socially, shame functions to sublimate (thus repress) sexual energy into activities allowing for people to live together (Freud 1905: 178).

Silvan Tomkins (1962, 1963)

In the 1960s, psychologist Silvan Tomkins developed a conception of affect that differed from that of Freud by separating it from its attachment to bodily urges. For many queer theorists who have (and still do) referenced him, this seemed to point to a queer-er understanding of shame. As Sedgwick and Frank suggest, perhaps Tomkins never intended to conceptualise shame in an anti-heterosexist manner, but his writings nonetheless display conceptual flexibility and a desire to engage with alternative models (other than the Freudian, universalist and dogmatic ones rooted in corporeal urges (Sedgwick & Frank 1995: 7).

"attain" heterosexuality by bypassing two difficulties, according to Freud's understanding: they must change (1) their object choice identification from female to male and (2) their erogenous zone from the clitoris to the vagina (Mann 2018: 402). These speculations, Mann notes, are what leads Freud to believe that girls are motivated differently than boys to achieve heterosexuality. Simply put, Mann notes that, in Freud's writings, shame consists essentially in the emotional force that fuels the heterosexualisation of women through their envy of the penis (Mann 2018: 402). (Mann's conceptualisation of shame will be discussed further in section 1.1.3.)

Tomkins does not deny the importance of biological and sexual impulses, but his theory of affect makes the duality between biological and social determinants even more significant (Liu 2017: 51).

Shame is, according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank's interpretation of Silvan Tomkins' work in *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (1995), a *proto*-affect. It originates in the primary relationship that a baby develops with its mother, in the mirroring of their expressions on one another. This mirroring relationship is dependent upon the maintenance of this original gaze which binds the mother to her child. According to Tomkins, then, it is when this nurturing gaze is broken that the child experiences shame for the first time. The original experience of shame thus corresponds to a break in communication, to an *intersubjective failure*. In other words, "we learn what we said/did is shameful when another person refuses to respond to us" (Moffat 2012: 5).

According to Tomkins, as one cannot expect to live shame-free, shame becomes foundational in personal identity formation (Morrison 2015: 19). Indeed, shame is central to the development of identity and self-reflectivity. It consists of a sense of turmoil and defeat and is activated and felt through the self. He further emphasizes that in experiencing shame, the emotional self does not only act in response to an external stimulus, but also produces the internal gaze making it feel exposed to its own eyes. The subject feels conscious of her defects, so she wishes to withdraw from others, by lowering her gaze, turning away, protecting herself. "Shame is thus [...] stretchy and sticky. It constitutes a persistent but ambivalent identification to the object that ties both the positive affect (*i.e.* love-identification) and the negative affect (*i.e.*, shame-humiliation) to the self, who is unwilling to abandon either of them. Shame, in its essence is the refusal to split and the desire for oneness" (Weiss 2018: 51).

Gershen Kaufman (1989)

Gershen Kaufman is a contemporary pioneer of psychological studies on shame. Indeed, before Kaufman's research on shame, shame was commonly understood in terms of the individuals' cognitive

dynamics. During the 1980s, the paradigm shifted following Kaufman's work: shame is increasingly understood in terms of relationships between people and what *otherfies* some (Rohleder 2020: 44). In the chapter intitled "Internalization of Shame", from his 1989 book *The Psychology of Shame: Theory and Treatment of Shame-Based Syndrome*, Kaufman develops both a phenomenological and a psychological perspective to explore how shame can be internalized through three important structures of the self, namely the affect, the drive and the interpersonal needs.

For Kaufman, indeed, internalization is a process by which images, filled with experiences and affect, are imprinted on the self to form what he calls 'governing scenes' (Kaufman, 1989: 57). Such governing scenes are foundational for the self and comprise three elements: affect, imagery and language. The affect amplifies and inscribes these governing scenes within the self. Then, through imagery, or imagination, these scenes are magnified (or exaggerated) during their repetition by the self. Language, finally, continually recreates and reformulates these images and scenes for the self. Through discourses the scenes can evolve into fundamental 'scripts' which play an important role in the development of the personality (Kaufman 1989: 59). These governing scenes, whether positive or negative (*i.e.* shameful), are the very foundations of personality.

Shame becomes internalized when it is coupled with another emotion and repeated to form an "affect shame sequence". In such a sequence the experience of an emotion, say anger, is coupled with shame and engenders "binds", through which shame is internalized within the self. If the bind is sufficiently integrated (*i.e.* if the shame is 'adequately' internalized), whenever a person would feel anger, they would also experience shame (Kaufman 1989: 60). Similarly, shame can be linked with (and internalized) basic drives, such as sexuality or hunger. This would mean that one would feel shame, say, whenever one must eat (Kaufman 1989: 63). While both Kaufman and Freud agree that shame can be tied to bodily urges, Kaufman rather situates shame within repetitive sequences which causes it to be internalized in the self.

For Kaufman, the scenes through which shame is internalized bear three distinguishing features. First, the scenes include an 'affect-belief': the self retains within itself the entire experience contained in the internalized sequence of shame and repeats it to itself as if it were a truth about its own worth. "A girl hearing herself called 'stupid' by her mother will internalize the entire scene: mother's disgust look, angry voice, and the verbal message. She will grow up hearing a voice inside of her calling her 'stupid' [...]. That voice belongs to a face, but the visual scene gradually disappears, typically leaving the individual conscious of the shaming voice." (Kaufman 1989: 82) Second, they contain images of social interaction patterns, such as blaming someone. While not solely associated with cognitive processes of self-appraisal, these images of social interaction patterns contain "the basis of the self's evolving inner relationship" (Kaufman 1989: 82-83). Three, the scenes involve the emergence of an 'internalized Other', which form a phenomenological point of view, consists of the subject's inner voice representing the audible linguistic component of the scene thus internalized (Kaufman 1989: 83).

Summary

Let me here summarize what I have so far discussed. If, for Freud, shame has mainly to do with a *painful affect arising from the exhibition of corporeal and sexual behaviours* which others find reprehensible, Tomkins downplays the importance of the body in his conception of shame as an affect. In fact, for Tomkins, *shame is foundational to an individual's personal identity conception* and is closely associated with a *break in intersubjective relations*. As for Kaufman, he analysed closely how *shame can become internalized through the repetition of governing scenes which in turn create the internalized notion of a witness judging the subject*. Let us now consider important philosophical contributions to the study of shame.

1.2. Philosophy

In philosophy, some eminent authors have conceptualized shame: in phenomenology, in social and political theories, and in ethics. This section concerns the works of Jean-Paul Sartre (1943), Bernard Williams (1993) and Martha C. Nussbaum (2004) on shame.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1943)

In his 1943 *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre elaborates one of the most influential philosophical and phenomenological analyses of shame to date. His work specifically on shame is often cited by queer theorists and feminist philosophers and has been taken up by authors such as Gail Weiss (2018) and Sara Ahmed (2004, 2006). Above all, Sartre breaks from other influential conceptions of shame, in that he stresses the intersubjective intention of shame.

For Sartre, one's existence with others under the modes of intersubjectivity is the reason why one can experience shame. Shame corresponds to an intentional form of consciousness: it is in fact apprehension of the self as it is objectified by the gaze of others. Shame, therefore, exemplifies a *relationship to oneself and to others*. According to this point of view, shame is fixed, as deposited on the subject insofar as she lives with others. "[Shame] presupposes the intervention of the other, not merely because the other is the one before whom I feel ashamed, but also and more significantly because that of which I am ashamed is only constituted in and through my encounter with the other." (Zahavi 2014: 213)

Others thereby mediate the subject's relation to her self and shame thus testifies to one's *being-for-others*. To feel shame, according to Sartre, implies recognizing *the power of others to judg*e; the subject identifies her self as the object of the recognition of others (Sartre 2003: 246, 287, 290). In Sartre's conceptualisation of shame, what is most important is *the objectification*:

> La honte pure n'est pas sentiment d'être tel ou tel objet répréhensible; mais, en général, d'être *un* objet, c'est-à-dire de me *reconnaître* dans cet être dégradé, dépendant et figé que je suis pour autrui. La honte est sentiment de *chute originelle* [...] du fait que je suis « tombé » dans le monde, au milieu des choses, et que j'ai besoin de la médiation d'autrui pour être ce que je suis. (Sartre 1943: 349; his emphasis)

The subject, however, cannot understand this objectification, for the other's point of view is not hers to adopt.

Shame is embodied in Sartre's classic example of the voyeur, which is strong because it incites empathy both for the voyeur and for his shame. The example is simple: A voyeur peeps into a room through the keyhole of the door lock. Sartre stages this example so brilliantly and with such accuracy that one can measure its success by the identification one develops with the voyeur (and his shame) when the scene is interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps. This interruption reverses the dynamics. The voyeur is now the shameful spectacle to be contemplated. Hence, he becomes an other for himself. In this way he realizes the capacity others have to catch him in the act. "Yet by my very shame I claim as mine that freedom of another. I affirm a profound unity of consciousnesses, 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." (Weiss 2018: 262)

But what if the voyeur felt no shame at all at the thought of being surprised? In a recent article, phenomenologist Gail Weiss suggests that a *refusal to feel shame* in the example of the voyeur may even be the most appropriate response in the Sartrean paradigm. "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*." (Weiss 2018: 541) Thus, Sartre's conception of shame is equivocal: on the one hand, the experience of shame in front of another seems to be self-evident and a

logical consequence of interacting with others, on the other hand, it also seems that Sartre does not allow the possibility of real shame when he claims that one can only truly feel shame when one's freedom becomes veiled through objectification (Sartre 2003: 261). Because the subject's freedom cannot escape her, the experience of shame seems likely to be an act of bad faith.

Bernard Williams (1993)

Philosopher Bernard Williams, in his book *Shame and Necessity*, first published in 1993, makes a controversial and interesting point which underlines the relevance of his addition to this chapter. He questions the progressive paradigm of contemporary philosophy, often understood as superior to that of ancient Greek philosophy, which bases its superiority on a mature conception of morality that the Greeks supposedly lacked (Williams 1997: 13). In fact, he proposes that "[...] la meilleure façon de [...] comprendre [...] [les Grecs] n'est pas de parler d'une évolution des conceptions éthiques [...], [mais] en saisissant mieux ces conceptions et en mesurant mieux jusqu'à quel point nous les partageons avec [eux]" (Williams 1997: 14). Williams seeks to understand the "necessity" of moral action outside of so-called progressive conceptions of ethics. In particular, he distances himself from a Kantian conception of ethics, which, in his view, "occulte" "[...] des voies conduisant à la pensée et à l'expérience éthique" (Williams 1997: 108). These considerations lead him to focus on the ethical potential of shame, which occupied a fundamental place in Homeric society.

Generally, he sees shame as "le fait d'être vu, au mauvais moment, par qui ne devrait pas nous voir, dans une situation où on ne le voudrait pas" (Williams 1997: 109). Thus, according to Williams' account, shame involves the internalizing of a witness's point of view, not unlike Kaufman's or Sartre's contributions. Indeed, for him, the essence of shame lies in the exposure of the subject's disadvantaged position. For Williams, in fact, shame is tied to feelings of power and occurs when the subject realizes she has lost it, and hence seeks self-protection to regain it.

Shame is also crucial in acting ethically, because it allows for social cohesion. Shame, then, is a *necessity* in that it binds humans together (Williams, 1997: 81). What is more, *it is "anticipatory": when behaving, a subject adopts Others' gazes and anticipates their reaction* (Williams, 1997: 79 & 84). Moreover, feeling shame testifies to the subject's membership to a community and her caring for it. This idea is central to Williams' conception of morality, which develop within communities where social bonds are tight enough to allow high levels of empathy. This allows for members to care for one another and permits them to judge actions and influence behaviours (Williams 1997: 84).

Bonnie Mann criticizes Williams' ethical conception of shame. She argues that shame rather has the effect of destroying subjects' moral agency, because it consolidates them too tightly within restrictive social expectations. She also points out, following empirical research, "that shame is bad for taking responsibility for one's own actions and is negatively correlated with empathy" (Mann, 2014: 113). However, she does not discard shame, as she admits that it possesses some of *necessity*. However, she argues that "[the] specific urgent necessities produced in dominant shame-based structures [...] are not the necessities we should affirm or hope for [...]" (Mann, 2014: 114). In sum, while it may be true that shame is a form of internalization of others' gazes, highlighting such a structure, Mann reckons, adds nothing relevant about the content and scope of such ethics (Mann, 2014: 114).

Martha C. Nussbaum (2004)

In the chapter entitled 'Inscribing the Face: Shame and Stigma' from her 2004 book *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, Martha C. Nussbaum[9] argues for a 'social' stance on shame with

[9] Martha C. Nussbaum is Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at the Department of Philosophy and Law School of the University of Chicago. She has degrees from New York University, from Harvard and from Oxford and has held more than 20 teaching positions since the beginning of her career in the early 1970s. She has written some 28 books, 490 articles and 69 reviews, and has edited 27 books in her career, making her one of the most prolific contemporary philosophers. It should be noted also that many of her writings and thoughts are taught in colleges and universities across the world. *Citadels of Pride: Sexual Abuse, Accountability, and Reconciliation* counts as one of her upcoming books.

regards to the law. She holds that legislations should be enacted to ensure that certain minority groups are not shamed. She believes, however, that such a position ought to be accompanied by a firm grasp of what shame is and how it develops in people. She believes that to understand this development can (1) provide insight into why some people are shamed and (2) may allow for a better comprehension of the contexts in which shame may be positive.

According to Nussbaum, shame implies (1) a sense of one's own being and (2) a sense of one's own *helplessness*. She suggests that "shame emerges gradually over the course of the first year of life, perhaps becoming the full-fledged emotions only after a sense of one's own separateness is achieved" (Nussbaum 2004: 184). *Thus, according to her, shame is a painful emotion that emerges when one feels that one has not achieved an internalized ideal.* This shame, deeply associated with latent narcissism, is what she calls 'primitive' shame, and corresponds, in other words, to an awareness of the self as *inadequate* (Nussbaum 2004: 185). She distinguishes shame from humiliation, embarrassment, disgust, and guilt.

Humiliation is related to shame in such a way that it is the public face of shame, *i.e.*, it is through humiliation that a person becomes socially exposed. Feeling humiliated is very similar to feeling ashamed, except that humiliation, contrary to shame, requires prior action. Humiliating someone, she suggests, is tantamount to degrading their dignity (Nussbaum 2004: 204). Being embarrassed, unlike shame, can be momentary, temporary and inconsequential. Shame refers to aspirations that are rooted in the self, while embarrassment occurs (1) in a more isolated manner, (2) is dependent upon certain contexts, (3) does not last as long and (4) does not necessarily appeal to socially constructed values or norms (Nussbaum 2004: 204). Embarrassment, unlike shame, often comes as a surprise, since, were it premeditated, it would be humiliation (Nussbaum 2004: 205-206). Disgust consists of a potentially more productive or creative emotion, because it creates distance between the real self and the projected self (Nussbaum 2004: 206). It is "an inherently self-deceptive emotion, whose function, for better or worse, is above all to conceal

from us, on a daily basis, facts about ourselves that are difficult to face" (Nussbaum 2004: 206). Finally, while shame has to do with the self and corresponds to a feeling of *imperfection*, guilt is rather associated with an action itself, in so far as, contrary to shame, it does not reflect a judgment of the total character of the person (Nussbaum 2004: 207). Guilt points to a breakdown in the integrity of the person. In small doses, guilt can potentially be positive, for instance, if it aims to expiate vices. In too great doses, however, it can fuel personal turmoil and be harmful to the self (Nussbaum 2004: 208). Shame is like guilt in these senses. It can be morally damaging for a person to feel excessive amounts of shame, but a moderate amount, Nussbaum argues, can be constructive and fuel relevant social ideals (Nussbaum 2004: 208).

Nussbaum argues that *if one were to consider the possibility of constructive shame, a distinction must be made between 'primitive' shame and 'social' shame*. She reckons that social shame would be more likely to incite in people an awareness of others' vulnerability. This would mean, following Ehrenreich, (1) that shame should be oriented towards morally desirable (valuable) social norms and (2) that it should serve to reinforce a common (social) sense of human vulnerability (Nussbaum 2004: 213). "[...] [Shame] can indeed be constructive. The person who is utterly shame-free is not a good friend, lover, or citizen, and there are instances in which the invitation to feel shame is a good thing—most often when the invitation is issued by the self, but at least sometimes when another person issues it" (Nussbaum 2004: 216). She remains cautious in considering the constructive potential of shame and questions what is at stake in society's shaming and stigmatizing of certain minority groups. In what ways are these stigmatizations consistent with the dynamics of shame previously expressed? "Normality" is at the core of social stigma. Normal can either mean 'statistically common', in which case its opposite would be the uncommon. Normal can also mean 'proper', where its opposite is inappropriate. When social stigmatization is based on an ideal of normality, however, both definitions are often truncated, and

abnormal people are then those who do not do what others do and are seen as inappropriate or even perverse (Nussbaum 2004: 218).

She acknowledges, correspondingly with the works of Michael Warner, that 'true normal' is only an ideal that no one can really embody. Someone who is (statistically) normal in all facets of her life is "a person who is rare indeed, and highly temporary" (Nussbaum 2004: 218). Why then does society attach so much importance to normality? *Nussbaum suggest that normality is reassuring and comfortable*: by surrounding themselves with people like themselves and instilling the illusion of their normality, normals feel safe. However, such an illusion implies the stigmatizing of *others*. Nussbaum argues that "by casting shame outwards, by branding the faces and the bodies of others, normals achieve a type of surrogate bliss; they satisfy their infantile wish for control and invulnerability" (Nussbaum 2004: 219).

Summary

Before going on, I must outline the main ideas that pertain to shame in philosophy. For Jean-Paul Sartre, shame mostly testifies to the subject's intersubjective relation with others and to her powerlessness *vis-à-vis* the objectification of others. Williams stresses the moral potential of shame to socially pressure people through empathy. Nussbaum, in distinguishing shame from other emotions, remains cautious of the social potential of shame. While she agrees shame can make people aware of each other's vulnerabilities, she reckons shame can also tragically emphasize the differences of some and thus stigmatize them.

1.3. Feminisms

Some significant feminists have discussed gendered shame. Such a conception of shame is found in Sandra Lee Bartky's seminal 1990 work and is also taken up by Jennifer C. Manion (2003) and Bonnie Mann (2018). Additionally, Gail Weiss (2018) discusses second-degree shame arising when one witnesses

shameless behaviours.

Sandra Lee Bartky (1990)

In *Feminity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (1990), Sandra Lee Bartky addresses how women experience shame as a pervasive and pernicious feeling of inadequacy emerging because of their existence within sexist societies (Bartky 1990: 85). She argues that since (1) women are socially situated differently than men and (2) because men are part of a system that actively keeps women in subordinate positions, understanding the gendered ways in which women experience shame can contribute to the development of a richer phenomenology of oppression (Bartky 1990: 84).

For Bartky, women's shame is *pervasive* and *invisible*. It has a paradoxical effect on women's emotional life and their socialization. On the one hand, the shame women experience as omnipresent feelings of being imperfect is part of their subordination to men. On the other hand, however, shame is never understood as such, as it is rather part of women's broader experiences of invisibility (Bartky 1990: 97).

While Bartky focuses mostly on women's shame arising in education, her understanding obviously applies more broadly to other contexts. Women, in fact, experience shame differently from men, she notes. It is an emotion which has "a different meaning in relation to their total psychic situation and general social location" (Bartky 1990: 84). In fact, where men tend to experience shame as an episodic emotion, arising in a context where they exist and evolve in a world conceived by and belonging to them, the shame women feel is rather part of a particular and penetrating type of suffering (Bartky 1990: 88).

Finally, Bartky stresses that shame is distinct from belief, contrary to how Rawls, for instance conceives of it. For Rawls, shame is an emotion associated with a lack of self-esteem. A person's self-esteem comes from their believing in goals and in their ability to achieve them. Shame thus arises when a

person feels that their goals are unworthy or that they do not believe in their ability to achieve them. Bartky does not concur with such a conception, which cannot possibly account for all the experiences of shame. It certainly does not help to understand how it can be so pervasive and penetrating for women. According to Barky in fact, it is perfectly possible to believe in one's competence regarding this or that goal and still feel like a failure. Belief has nothing to do with shame, but contributes to how shame is "profoundly disempowering": "what they [women] take away from the situation is not so much a belief as a *feeling* of inferiority or a *sense* of inadequacy" (Bartky 1990: 94, her emphasis).

Jennifer C. Manion (2003)

In an oftentimes cited 2003 article entitled "Girls Blush Sometimes: Gender, Moral Agency, and the Problem of Shame", Jennifer C. Manion[10] analyses the relationship between shame and gender. She argues, in contrast to Gabriele Taylor's (1985) conception of shame, that the value of shame lies precisely in its ability to *upset the "normal" balance*.

Manion conceives broadly of shame as an emotion of the self which involves an overall negative self-appreciation, which points to a person's vulnerability and powerlessness in relation to others (Manion 2003: 22-23). From Aristotle to the present day, she notes, shame has often been more associated with women, and she thus wishes to understand how shame is experienced based on gender. The work of Helen Block Lewis (1971) has established that women are more likely to feel shame as a sense of disappointment in their inability to meet given ideals, which is further exacerbated when facing others' judgements.

[10] Jennifer C. Manion received her Ph.D. in Philosophy, with a specialization in feminist ethics, from John Hopkins University. Very little biographical information exists on the web about this person. She published four papers (including her thesis), prior to 2003 (and nothing after). However, I was able to find out that in the fall of 2009, she published poetry on Wicked Alice (Manion 2009). No more recent information about this person has come to my attention, and so she remains deeply shrouded in mystery. Nevertheless, the quality of her work can still be appreciated.

Following Bartky's work, Manion suggests the existence of a dual emotional world that differentiates men and women, particularly with respect to their lived experiences of shame (Manion 2003: 24). For men, the object of shame is often the performance of an important task or sexual impotence, while for women it usually more concerns physical appearance or the ability to maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships (Manion 2003: 25). She also notes that while many authors have been interested in the ethical and political potential of shame, some argue that it is always preferable to feel shame, as it is warning-signal emotion which indicates when one's behaviour falls outside of commonly accepted social norms (Manion 2003: 21-22).

This is what Gabriele Taylor defends in her 1985 book. For Taylor, shame is always positive, since it acts as an injunction to maintain a given social equilibrium. The, shame is an emotion which serves to protect oneself and points to the self's corruptibility (Manion 2003: 26). Shame therefore has to do with self-respect, because to stop feeling shame would mean losing one's sense of self-worth (Manion 2003: 27). Shame makes it possible to discern when the self is threatened, and it enjoins people to cultivate self-respect and concern for personal integrity (Manion 2003: 27).

In addition, Taylor believes that a person feels real shame when they fail to meet their ideals, goals or act on their values or commitments. False shame, then, occurs when people judge themselves according to values which are not theirs. This kind of shame is dangerous because it undermines a person's real self (Manion 2003: 27). When a person allows themselves to be driven by the values of others, her self is no longer real and balanced. "Thus, for Taylor one is always better off having the capacity to feel shame even though this means risking feeling false shame, because feeling shame on any particular occasion indicates that an agent possesses some set of values to which she is committed." (Manion 2003: 28)

Manion criticises Taylor's thinking because she believes that a proper analysis of the social relevance of shame must consider its gendered side, which Taylor neglects. Manion thinks that Taylor focuses too

much on negative shame: "The more often a person suffers from false shame, the more serious the threat to her integrity, or the more indicative, perhaps, of confusion or uncertainty about her values ... she is no longer sure ... how she ought to behave or be treated..." (Taylor 1985: 176, cited in Manion 2003: 34) She identifies four problems with Taylor's conception of shame. First, Taylor's conception of shame seems to value a stable self-concept only because it is stable. Moreover, her conception seems to imply that true values are only those that one obtains for oneself. Manion reveals that this seems to exclude the possibility of changing one's values and to imply that a subject necessarily gives herself good values. Additionally, it does not seem possible to assess the relevance one's shame when it arises from socialization, say when others judge the subject. Finally, Taylor seems to assume that feeling uncertainty about one's self-conception is inherently destructive and indicates a lack of personal integrity (Manion 2003: 34-35). Manion rather argues that Taylor's understanding of self-conception and personal integrity is too narrow: "[Taylor's] conception of integrity is too thin; that her division between false and genuine shame is spurious; and that her insistence that shame that challenges a person's normative beliefs is necessarily harmful is empirically false" (Manion 2003: 35). Manion further believes that the value of shame lies in its ability to disrupt self-imposed personal categories. "Taylor's analysis implies that it is always a sign of moral integrity to dismiss shame that one feels in response to falling short of an ideal (culturally enforced or not) that one holds. This discussion suggests that only when a person reviews her values from a perspective of self-concern can she maintain her integrity" (Manion 2003: 37).

Bonnie Mann (2018)

In her 2018 article entitled 'Femininity, Shame, and Redemption', philosopher Bonnie Mann[11] takes up the shame Bartky discusses, names it "*ubiquitous* shame" and analyses it in relation to the development

[11] Bonnie Mann holds a doctorate in philosophy from SUNY at Stony Brook. In addition, she has been Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oregon since 2015, where she teaches, among other things, feminist and continental philosophy. Since 2019, she serves as co-editor-in-chief of *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*. She has published two books, including *Sovereign Masculinity: Gender Lessons from the War on Terror*, in 2014, published by Oxford

of women's sexuality. She distinguishes between ubiquitous shame and unbounded shame. Ubiquitous shame has to do with the status of women and to their very existence within male supremacist societies, within which "act like a girl" can be mandatory for some and used to insult others (Mann 2018: 403). Unbounded shame is more demanding, more ruthless and more inexorable that ubiquitous shame and is often set into motion around a specific event (which the ultimate downfall is suicide or suicidal ideation) (Mann 2018: 403). According to this author, both forms of shame contribute to the supremacy of men.

She explains this through her reading of Simone de Beauvoir. For de Beauvoir, in fact, who criticized Freud's writings (see section 1.1.1), if young girls do indeed envy boys' penises, it is only to the extent that young girls realize how privileged they are. Mann agrees with Freud that the body is the primary site of shame for women, but for different reasons. The shame young girls feel at a very early age is what makes them feel small and make them want to shrink their bodies in the presence of men. The supremacy of men keeps women in a perpetual need to justify their existence. In line with Simone de Beauvoir's words, Mann brilliantly illustrates how women often justify themselves through gender performance: "Gender and gendering are ways that we establish our relative worth or worthlessness in the eyes of others" (Mann 2018: 405).

Then, drawing on Bartky's work, she suggests that the ubiquitous shame women experience can be understood through "the imperatives of feminine body display" (Bartky 1990: 85) and by looking at the promise of redemption that lies at the heart of shame. In legitimizing themselves to others through their gender performances, young girls cling to images that they embody: "How she inhabits, enacts, and embodies gender, how she appears as gendered to others, how her gendered aspirations cohere or diverge from the aspirations others hold for her are keys to her social worth or worthlessness in a

University Press. She has also edited some 4 books, published more than 10 articles, and has delivered some 50 academic papers since 2000.

community of others" (Mann 2018: 411). And it is particularly through play that girls understand that men hold power: they understand the role they have to perform in relation to that of men (Mann 2018: 412). Shame develops in girls even more strongly at puberty, which in turn gives them a paradoxical promise of redemption: "[...] she will be a prestigious object–she will be allowed perfect passivity, and through that passivity perfect power–in other words, she is promised that her present abjection will be converted into admiration, desire, adulation, the power of allure"(Mann 2018: 412). If, for Freud, women hope to be successfully *heterosexualised* so that she may be *given* a penis (and thus have a child), Mann rather sees in the promise of power that the supremacy of men offers women a way for them to endure ubiquitous shame: the subject sees herself entirely objectified and condemned to passivity, but clings to the promise of power and the possibility of being worshipped (Mann 2018: 413).

Gail Weiss (2018)

It appears from what has been so far discussed that understanding shame also partly means questioning whether the people who feel it, should. In a 2018 article entitled "The Shame of Shamelessness", Gail Weiss[12] examines the extent to which a person's 'shameless' behaviour can influence the people who witness it to absorb shame. This is what she calls *second-degree shame*. She believes this second-degree shame has a particular moral character that needs to be investigated. Analyzing the famous example of Sartre's voyeur (discussed earlier in section 1.1.2.), whose shameful behaviour remains manifest even in the absence of witnesses, she highlights the limits of this classical phenomenological

[12] Gail Weiss has a Ph.D. from Yale University and is Professor of Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy at the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences of the George Washington University, where she specialises and teaches in areas pertaining to phenomenology, feminist theory, critical race theory and existentialism. She is also the Executive Co-Director for the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP) and the General Secretary for the International Merleau-Ponty Circle. Since 1999, she has written, co-authored and edited some ten books. Since 2016, she has also authored some fourteen articles, book chapters and encyclopedia entries. Her most recent book, entitled 50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology, which she co-edited with Ann Murphy and Gayle Salamon, is a collection of "fresh readings of classic phenomenological topics and [an introduction to] newer concepts developed by feminist theorists, critical race theorists, disability theorists, and queer and trans theorists that capture aspects of lived experience that have traditionally been neglected (Northwestern University Press 2020).

framework of shame-before-others by looking at the contributions of Franz Fanon (1952) and Sandra Bartky (1990). In fact, she stresses how both Fanon and Bartky offer shining examples of how the shaming gaze which shows how one can become an-other-for-others. One has very little control over her body, over how it is perceived and stigmatized. Most especially, one has very control over how society reacts to and exercise power over it. Stereotypes and stigmas are internalized and borne through shame. Following Fanon[13] and Bartky, Weiss suggests that women and racialized people may be shamed even if their behaviour are not properly shameful. Which is in part why she considers the importance of shamelessness (Weiss 2018: 545).

If shame corresponds in part to an urge to keep to oneself and to reject others, while feeling inferior, being shameless, by contrast, has to do with projecting oneself towards others, rejecting the internalization of shame and refusing to recognize its pathologizing effects. While on the face of it, it seems preferable to choose shamelessness over shame, especially because it seems to allow freedom from the gaze of others, Weiss suggests that the shame experienced by a subject following reprehensible behaviour (that of the voyeur, therefore) can have a *beneficial social effect*. "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." (Weiss 2018: 545)

This is true above all when a subject, behaving in a shameless way, *communicates* shame to others. Because shame is contagious, others come to feel the weight and effects of the shame the shameless refuses to acknowledge. Such second-degree shame has problematic consequences. First, taking upon oneself the effect someone else's shameless behaviour seems to tacitly signify one's acceptance of it.

[13] Fanon's conception of racialized shame will be further developed in chapter 2.

Second, such acceptance risks multiplying the effects of this shame exponentially. "Moreover, I may end up assuming the shame of other witnesses who actually enjoy the degrading spectacle they see, instead of being ashamed of it" (p. 545), and this consequence of second-degree shame often remains invisible. Finally, she believes that the positive, transformative value of shame is most adequately actualized when it motivates collective resistance to (1) shameful and to (2) shameless conducts.

Summary

I wish to highlight here the central ideas discussed in feminist thoughts concerning shame. For Barky, the shame women experience is different from that of men because women tend to feel it *as a persistent sense of inadequacy*. Manion expands on Bartky's conception of *gendered shame* to criticize Taylor's *belief*-oriented understanding of shame and hints that the potential of shame may lie in its flexible tendency to disrupt rigid (self) imposed categories. Mann also expands on Bartky's conception when she names the shame Barky discusses "ubiquitous shame", which she proposes is most prominent in young women when they discover their sexuality as a (false) promise of redemption. Finally, Gail Weiss's discussion of shame emphasizes the importance of second-degree shame, which occurs when one takes as one's own the shameless behaviour of another. Because second-degree shame often remains invisible, Weiss contends that the real, transformative role of shame, if any, must be to resist both shameful and shameless behaviours.

1.4. Reconstructing a Definition of Shame

Inasmuch as this dissertation aims to discuss queer shame, as it is intimately intertwined with a heterosexist system which fuels queer people's oppressions, I wish to propose a general and practical definition of shame which would somewhat draw on what has been thus far discussed. Before I do that, though, I must comment and qualify some of the perspectives previously put forward. Regarding Freud, since much of his work drew from a non-representative and non-transferable (*cf.* Kihlstrom 1994; Myers

& DeWall 2018) data sample, I retain little of his work, except for an encompassing understanding shame as emotionally experienced and bodily transpiring (*i.e.* visible). The contributions of Tomkins and Kaufman seem to me more relevant to include in an understanding of shame which accounts for the oppressions experienced by queer people: on the one hand, Tomkins recognizes the importance of intersubjectivity between people when feeling shame, and, on the other hand, Kaufman contributed to the understanding of internalized shame. Further, I recognize the importance of Sartre's and Williams' works in philosophically conceptualizing shame. However, regarding Sartre, as there are now contemporary philosophical works that incorporate mixed perspectives, namely from biology or cognitive sciences, I prefer to focus on people who are less frequently cited, whose new approaches and perspectives are likely to bring a renewal to the study of shame, while at the same time drawing inspiration from classical works, as is the case of Martha Nussbaum. As for the work of Bernard Williams, although he proposes an interesting conception which connects shame and empathy, insofar as Nussbaum takes up, develops, and criticizes such an approach, I will also prioritize her over Williams. In addition, regarding the feminisms I discussed, the works of Manion, Mann and Weiss were pertinent in eloquently articulating how shame unfolds within concrete realities and contexts. However, as some are more responses or developments based on Bartky's ideas (Manion and Mann), and as others are essentially detailed discussions of a specific type of shame (Weiss), I will prioritize the ideas developed by Bartky. Thus, in the end, I follow closely (and mainly) the works of Nussbaum (2004), Bartky (1990), and Ahmed (2004) (whom I will discuss in greater lengths further on), to propose the following definition: Shame is a painful emotion that an individual feels when one of her flaws (real or imagined) is highlighted in front of others (real or imagined). In turn, shame is often experienced as an inability to achieve a personal (or internalized) ideal.

Before concluding this chapter, I wish to explain why I use this definition. This definition, and its main components, seems easily "workable" for addressing the experiences of queer people. First,

understanding shame as a painful emotion resonates directly with the lives and experiences of queer people, who, because of their marginalization (among other things), have to endure sufferings that (many) others do not. In addition, the fact that a person experiences shame as the *emphasizing of one's flaw in front of others* is also eloquently telling of queer experiences. Indeed, many queer people are socially marginalized because they are *considered "flawed"*. Further, that one feels shame in front of others, be they real or imagined (*i.e.*, internalized) is also closely related to the experiences of queer people. On the one hand, queer people may be discriminated against because of their sexual or gender identity (in which case others may be real). On the other hand, queer people may come to feel "flawed" (in which case others may be internalized). Finally, shamed people will (painfully) come to feel flawed in front of others because of their (actual or perceived) *inability to achieve an ideal.* That, too, is particularly telling of queer experiences, since many experience shame because they do not clearly and properly meet heteronormative standards. (I will expand this last point in fuller details in the next chapter.) Without claiming that this definition echoes exclusively the experiences of queer people, as it may be relevant to highlight a diversity of experiences, I retain it in the context of the experience of shame as it is lived by queer people.

1.5. Conclusion

To reiterate, the aim of this chapter was to conceptually engage with the works of some prominent authors who have worked on shame to better translate its relevance and complexity. In psychology, Freud identified that shame is a painful affect occurring when one's bodily urges are judged reprehensible by others. For Tomkins, however, the body is not so central in understanding shame as an affect. Rather, he sees shame as foundational to one's identity. Also, he concurs that shame comes with a break in intersubjective relations between people. More recently, Kaufman analysed the internalization of shame through the repetition of what he calls «*governing* scenes». In philosophy, Sartre saw shame as evidence

of subjects' intersubjective relations through the objectification of others. As for Williams, he thought shame had the moral potential of creating social cohesion through empathy. Nussbaum, for her part, while she agreed that shame can make people aware of each other's vulnerabilities and foster empathy towards them, argued that it can also tragically bring about unnecessary stigmatizations. Finally, when considering feminist conceptions of shame, Bartky was truly relevant, as she proposed that women experience shame differently than men as pervasive feeling of inadequacy. Both Manion and Mann drew inspiration from Bartky's work. Manion suggested that shame may be most useful because it tends to disrupt rigid gender categories. Mann employed Bartky's "ubiquitous shame" to propose that young women experience it most in discovering their sexuality as a (false) promise of redemption. Finally, in discussing second-degree shame, Gail Weiss believes that shame can truly be transformative when it resists both shameful and shameless behaviours. Those conceptualizations of shame enabled me to reconstruct a workable definition of shame: Shame is a painful emotion that an individual feels when one of her flaws (real or imagined) is highlighted in front of others (real or imagined).

While this first chapter was primarily descriptive to allow for a broad and comprehensive exploration of how shame is generally conceptualized in psychology, philosophy and feminist thoughts, the next chapter shall expand upon the above-mentioned general definition of shame in order to discuss its transformational potential.

"Chaque matin je me renie. J'ouvre les yeux, je me rappelle que je suis homosexuel. J'ai beau avoir fait tout un travail pour m'accepter, me laver des insultes, j'ai beau me répéter depuis des années que j'ai le droit de vivre libre, vivre digne, vivre vivre, rien n'y fait : cette peau d'homosexuel que le monde m'a imposée est plus forte que moi, plus dure, plus tenace. Cette peau, c'est ma vérité au-delà de moi. Je ne l'accepte pas complètement mais je sais que je n'existe que par elle, malgré mes multiples tentatives d'évasion, d'émancipation."
(Abdellah Taïa, *Celui qui est digne d'être aimé*, 2017)

"To me, 'queerness' is an alienation from a heteronormative code that governs bodies, genders, and their processes — sexuality, birth, death, and inheritance — in order to preserve social, economic, and political power for those who have it [and] to continue it into future generations."
(Christopher Hennessy, "*An Interview with* Kazim Ali", 2013).

2. Queer Shame and its Transformational Potential

The previous chapter was informative in capturing the relevance and depth of the concept of shame, as it has been embedded in influential thoughts over the past century. The proper portrayal of shame in this master's thesis will need to identify what *queer shame is* and how it fits into social, cultural and sexual politics. In this chapter, I will look more closely at *queer shame* (both at the shame of queer people and how shame can be properly queer), as I wish to illustrate that it ought to be understood as an emotion stemming from heteronormative social structures. In this chapter, in fact, I discuss the works of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for whom shame can potentially be transformative (Sedgwick 1993). I believe such an account to be insufficient, since it lacks a clear recognition of queer shame as primarily painful. Thus, I turn to the works of Ahmed (2004), Foucault (1978), and Fanon (1952) in order to posit that queer people experience shame because they live in heteronormative structures which marginalize them. In the end, I will argue that shame, even though it is a painful emotion, may serve as a political lever meant to challenge heteronormativity. I contend that such an understanding is extremely relevant if we are to get closer to a richer and more adequate understanding of the oppressions faced by queer people.

In a first part, I will sketch out the main contours of queer shame as it has been conceptualized by

many prominent figures of the Gay Shame Movement[14], so as to highlight a tendency, from some of the movement's prominent figures, to propose that shame is particularly queer, since (1) it resists normalization and (2) it can potentially be productive. This serves as a *segway* towards a second part on the works of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who brilliantly captured the idea that shame, as a queer *performance*, has a significant transformational potential. While I agree (to some extent) that shame can have positive aspects, I suggest, in a third part, drawing on a Foucauldian understanding of power structures and on the works of Sara Ahmed, that shame should rather be understood as a painful emotion queer people experience because they are seen as *deviant*. In a fourth section, I argue that queer shame may serve as a *political lever*, because it exposes and, at the same time, challenges the heteronormative apparatus that oppresses queer people.

2.1. The Shame in Gay Shame

That pride, today, is considered an emblem of "gay culture" or of the advancements of the 2SLGBTQIA+ movements would hardly surprise anyone. In popular culture, in fact gay pride is mostly associated with colorful parades around the world, whose participants, dressed in grandiose outfits and dancing to rhythmic music, call for the inclusion and recognition of sexual and gender diversity. In the gay and lesbian movements of the 1970s (onward), pride, brandished under catchy slogans such as "Gay Is Good[15]", was meant to destigmatize same-sex desires and to rid it of shame. To put it differently, the aim

[14] I wish to provide some conceptual clarity here, if only to distinguish between the different iterations of Gay Shame that will surface throughout this text. Through this chapter, whenever I use Gay Shame, I mean to refer both to the activist movement (Gay Shame Movement) and its ideas, and to the ideas and arguments which have emerged in queer theory and at the Gay Shame Conference. If I want to refer specifically to one of them, precisions will be provided. *Gay Shame* (with italics) is used to refer specifically to the 2009 book edited by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub. If I need to refer to the emotion of shame, as experienced by queer people, I will use (with some exceptions) the expression "queer shame".

[15] "Gay is Good" was coined in the 1970s by gay activist Frank Kameny, who found inspiration for it in the *Black is Beautiful* movement (and its slogan), namely while listening to one of (then) Stokely Carmichael's speeches at the end of the 1960s. As for "Black is Beautiful", it originates in the 1960s, amidst the Black Panthers' activisms, and as part of the growing *Black Power* rhetoric for which people like Kwame Turé, Angela Y. Davis or Steve Biko are known. (*cf.* Carmichael & Hamilton 1969; Farmer 2017; Joseph 2006, 2007).

was "the complete *destigmatization* of homosexuality [...] [and] the elimination of both the personal and the social shame attached to same-sex eroticism" (Halperin & Traub 2009: 4; my emphasis). The pride rhetoric and discourses have accomplished much in the last decades for the advancement of queer people's civic rights. Consider, for instance, and perhaps most importantly, the fact that same-sex desire is no longer criminalized in Canada and the U.S., and in most (Western) countries[16]. But the rhetoric of pride would be meaningless without the implicit (sexual) shame which it tries to overcome (Halperin 2009: 44). In fact, the entire pride discourse reflects (in part) a desire to overcome what the dominant heteronormative society has deemed to be deviant, perverse, or abnormal sexual practices and desires. This contributed, as I previously discussed in the introduction, to the reinforcement of what could be called a "cult of normality", whereby gay and lesbian movements (wishing to be seen as "normal", and thus striving for mainstream recognition) promote the most beautiful aspects of gay culture. Such promotion emphasizes values of respectability and inclusiveness, while seeking to hide and silence its most subversive aspects.

So, Gay Shame originated from those subversive voices for whom shame provided a different perspective from which to engage in a counter-discourse in opposition to the assimilationist hegemony of mainstream gay culture. At least, that's what Professor David M. Halperin asserts[17]. Indeed, in his 2012

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[16] For instance, in Canada, the 1969 House of Commons decriminalized homosexuality following the adoption of Pierre Elliott Trudeau's omnibus bill (S.C. 1968-69, c. 38). Then Canada's Minister of Justice, Pierre Elliott Trudeau aroused much controversy in proposing amendments to the Criminal Code sections on homosexuality, as well as abortion, lottery and arms bearing (*Le Devoir*, May 15, 1969: 1-2). Back then, the *crime* of homosexuality comprised acts of sodomy, bestiality, and was mostly considered gross indecency. One *accused* of homosexuality could spend 5 to 14 years in prison (*Le Devoir*, December 22, 1967: 1–2). As for same-sex marriage, it was gradually introduced in Canada, with additions to the legislations and statuses of its provinces aiming to regulate the rights of homosexual persons, culminating in the adoption of the *Civil Marriage Act* on June 20, 2005 (Eichler, 2019).

[17] David Halperin is W. H. Auden Distinguished University Professor of the History and Theory of Sexuality, Professor of English Language and Literature, Women's and Gender Studies, and Classical Studies at the University of Michigan at Ann Harbor. Throughout his career he has written some 10 books and 74 articles on the history of sexuality and in gender studies. In 1993, he co-founded, with Carolyn Dinshaw (NYU), GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, an academic journal published by Duke University Press, the aim of which to offer queer perspectives on all issues touching on sex and sexuality (*cf.* Duke University Press 2021). Undoubtedly, Halperin has a place amongst the great

book *How to Be Gay*, he eloquently reiterates some of the ideas championed by Gay Shame, and argues that the Pride rhetoric has the perverse effect, amongst other things, of concealing and silencing "our distinctive subjectivities, our unique pleasures, and our characteristic culture", so that these "subversive" aspects do not offend (Halperin 2012: 74). For him, in fact, even the use of the word "gay" reveals these politics of respectability and assimilation, because this word only serves to "politely" round off the contours of and make presentable a sexuality too often judged "abnormal", without having to refer to the (*perverse*) sexual acts themselves (Halperin 2012: 75).

Thus, Halperin and Traub, in the introduction to *Gay Shame*, explain that Gay Shame provided an opportunity to envision queer sociality differently, to question how experiences of shame, which are still prevalent for queer people despite many affirmations of pride, can be collective and unifying places (Halperin & Traub 2009: 4). More specifically, shame is intimately connected to queer experiences and identities, as, on the one hand, it participates in a counter-discourse aimed at tarnishing the glossy politics of respectability imposed by the "gay mainstream", seeking *normalization* (*cf.* Perez 2015). This idea is eloquently expressed by Wen Liu, who, in her 2017 article entitled "Toward a Queer Psychology of Affect: Restarting from Shameful Places", provides an overview of how Gay Shame came to be. According to Liu, shame and queer go together as she believes shame can expand the possibilities for the development of queer subjectivities and personal identities. This entails recognizing that the normalization of the respectable gay "lifestyle", rooted in the rhetoric of pride, carries with it the *invisibilisation* of some individuals and their stories. Because of this desire for normalization, "[...] the image of the happy and healthy queer is idealized in the context of widespread queer vulnerability to poor mental health and suicidal ideation, [amongst other things]" (Liu 2017:47). Gay Shame meant seeking a new angle to question

figures who shaped the place of queer theory within the academy.

pride:

> [Gay Shame] [gives] us to explore experiences of shame that have not totally disappeared from the lives of queer people with the allegedly new-found possibility of gay pride. Gay shame confers potential legitimacy and acceptability on the discussion of issues that don't make gay people feel proud that even proud gay people aren't always proud of. In this sense, gay shame is continuous with gay pride, insofar as the successes of gay pride now makes it possible to address realities that may not present a 'positive image' of gay people. Because of gay pride, we have become proud enough that we don't need to stand on our pride. (Halperin & Traub 2009: 10)

Hence, for Halperin and Traub (and many of those present at the Conference), Gay Shame was about questioning the normalizing and assimilationist tendencies of Pride. But, as the quote illustrates, it also means acknowledging and recognizing the gains and advancements Pride made possible for Gay Shame to oppose it. It is true, as we have seen, that the pride rhetoric has helped to bring about many important and good changes for queer people over the years. However, Halperin and Traub would rather make *evident* some of things that the normalizing desires of pride have contributed to and which remain mostly unknown. They would rather see the ailments that many marginalized queer people must still endure, and which are caused by the normalizing tendencies fostered by pride discourses, be known to all, before congratulating pride for making Gay Shame possible.

Liu Wen, for instance, points out that normalization, embodied in gays-are-just-like-straights discourses, has not really been able to "resolve" shame. Shame, rather, appears to have only been displaced in multiple *Others*, whose marginalization it accentuates in a manner similar to that of pride discourses. In other words, some authors believe that Gay Shame, rather than opposing Pride's normalization, has developed its own rhetoric around the same exclusionary tactics which it sought to

overcome[18].

If much more could (and perhaps ought to) be said about Gay Shame's (actual) stance on normalization or with regard to its opposition to it, it remains important to note, as Halperin and Traub did, that Gay Shame, on the other hand, also sought out to comprehend how affirmations of shame can be *productive*. In effect, Halperin & Traub point out that Gay Shame inquired as to "[what] affirmative uses can be made of shame and related affects, now that not all queers are condemned to live in shame" (Halperin & Traub 2009: 4). The authors remain uncertain whether Gay Shame provided new and relevant understandings of shame as productive. However, they point at that "[disagreement] and conflict among the participants at the conference *enacted the contagious communicability* of shame and tested the ability of shame to generate, in actual practice, a workable r*edefinition of queer sociality*" (Halperin & Traub 2009: 15). Such an idea is echoed by Liu, who believes that queer shame ought to be conceptualized in terms of its ability to disrupt dominant social norms (normalization) and to communicate pleasures and discomforts in (and to) bodies and minds, which are (socially) connected through their intersubjectivities. Rethinking the queer nature of shame, *i.e.* its continuous motion and *un*fixedness, is what would allow for a better understanding of its relationship with the lived experiences of many queer people, even today (Liu 2017: 50).

However, it is also important to understand that not all see the potentially productive nature of shame. Some, such as Michael Warner, whom I will discuss in greater length below, remain vigilant about shame and its implications. Warner draws on Sartre's views on shame and suggests that it occurs when a subject's shortcomings are exposed to others' gaze. The gaze of others matters precisely because the

[18] More specifically, Hiram Pérez, during the Conference, "protested the unacknowledged centering of white gay male experience that pervaded conceptualizations of gay shame [...] to consolidate [a] community of whiteness" (Perez 2015: 97), which, ultimately, makes racialized bodies "the spectacle that homonormative culture appropriates to externalize its shame, while retaining its whiteness, class privileges, and urban mobility, simultaneously resistant to and in an exotic relationship with liberal humanism" (Liu 2017: 57).

subject has an interest in others, or, to put it another way, insofar as the opinion of others matters to the (thus exposed) subject (this point will be explained further below when discussing Ahmed). Hence, for Warner, shame is mainly expressed "as an affect of defeated interest, but also as an affect of self repudiation" (Warner 2009: 293). He warns against the possible consequences of shame, and doubts that shame can be productive, because he considers that this emotion, especially with regards to queer people, tends to isolate and reinforce stigmatization. "Persons shamed by *the nature of their desires*, in what they take to be their innermost privacy, are not drawn into commonality by the witnessing of each other's shame; quite the contrary" (Warner 2009: 294; my emphasis).

Through the previous discussion, I have emphasized that Gay Shame considers shame to be particularly queer because, on the one hand, queer shame offers a resistance to the normalizing tendencies of the gay mainstream culture, and because, on the other hand, it considers its productive potential. In fact, perhaps nowhere has the relationship between shame and queer experiences been better articulated than in the works of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, to whom I turn in the next section.

2.2. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: Transformational Queer Shame Performances

The late Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick[19] is commonly known as one of the founding mothers of queer theory[20]. Her book *Epistemology of the Closet* ([1990] 2008), along with Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*

[19] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has had an academic career spanning some 30 years (namely as Distinguished Professor of English at CUNY from 1998 to 2009), during which she contributed, through her research, writing and professorship, to the then-burgeoning field of queer theory. She was also an artist, a poet and a literary critic. For instance, her art (which comprises textile paintings, collages and book alterations/creations) has been a part of seven exhibitions since 1999, and some of her poems have been published in journals. She also completed the manuscript for *Traceable, Salient, Thirsty*, a book of her poetry, but it remained unpublished. Amongst some of her most important academic publications, one can count *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* ([1985] 2016) and *Epistemology of the Closet* ([1990] 2008).

[20]It should be recognized that the term "queer theory" was coined by the distinguished professor emerita Teresa de Lauretis, of the University of California Santa Cruz, in her 1991 introduction to *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*. She used the term as a way to rethink the way sexuality is understood: 'to recast or reinvent the terms of our sexualities, to construct another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual' (de Lauretis 1991: *iv*). I recognize the importance of de Lauretis' work and would in no way wish to minimize it. However, Sedgwick's work is

(1990), contributed to a renewed questioning of gender and sexuality and helped create a space for those questions to be raised within the academy. Sedgwick, in some of her most influential works, like her 1993 article "Queer Performativity: Henry James's The Art of the Novel", contends that queer shame is a *performance which can be transformational*. The importance of her work is made evident through her innovative and foundational writings on shame, *vis-à-vis* which new theorists, wishing to contribute meaningfully to such discussions, ought to position themselves (or offer a response). Greatly inspired by Silvan Tomkins, she stresses how his theory, while (it can be said that) it proposes anti-heterosexist foundational grounds, breaks from prior Freudian or post-Freudian psychoanalytic frameworks which tend to consider sexual shame dichotomously (see chapter 1 both for Tomkins's and Freud's account of shame).

J. L. Austin: Speech Acts and Performatives

Before detailing the specifics of Sedgwick's ideas regarding the notion of shame, it is useful to provide important elements to understand the notions of performance and of performativity. In philosophy, "performatives" are mostly associated with the works of J. L. Austin. He developed a theory of *speech acts* in the 1950s-60s, first in courses he taught at Harvard in 1955, then in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) (probably his best-known work), and refined it throughout his career. In this famous theory, Austin first used the word "performativity" to suggest that language can be used to perform actions, or *to act*. Austin is amongst the philosophers of language who consider that meaning is *usage*, and, in this sense, he believes that performative utterances create something in the world. He suggests that speech acts have three functions: locution, illocution and perlocution. Locution corresponds to sounds, formed into words, used in order to "say something" (Austin 1962: 94). The illocution consists of the *effect intended* at the moment of the locution, *i.e.* what one wishes to accomplish by means of the utterance thus spoken (Austin 1962: 101). Perlocution, finally, is what is "actually" understood or acted at

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much more eloquent on the issue of queer shame and are therefore truly valuable to me in writing this text.

the time of the utterance (Austin 1962: 101). One should understand, however, that even though all utterances are performed (*i.e.* uttered and "thrown" into the world), not all utterances are performatives (*i.e.* not all utterances create what was intended, as some, for instance, do not create anything at all). Austin's paradigmatic example of a speech act, which has gone down in history and which he uses most often, is probably the phrase "I do". "I do" becomes a speech act (a performative) when uttered in the context of a wedding ceremony by one of the partners[21]. In this example, the locution corresponds to "I do", insofar as the "I" refers to the subject pronouncing the sentence "I do", and "do" means do (*cf.* Austin 1962: 101). The illocution would thus be "I wish (*i.e.* my intention is) to be married to that person", and the perlocution would be the consecration of the marriage (*i.e.* the transformation of both spouses' matrimonial status) the matrimonial status of both spouses), when pronounced within the context of the appropriate ceremony and using the proper gestures and tools.

Judith Butler: Gender Performances

Austin's "performatives" has been taken up extensively, especially in queer theory, most notably to question commonly held ideas about gender and sexuality. Perhaps the most famous example of this can be found in the works of Judith Butler. While Butler does not subscribe to the Austinian speech act theory *per se*, she has developed truly influential ideas on performance and performativity which are worth considering in order to gain better insights into those concepts, and because her understanding closely relates to that of Sedgwick. More specifically, she is interested in *gender performances*. She conceives of gender as "an identity tenuously constituted in time –an identity instituted through a *stylized*

[21] While Sedgwick uses Austin's speech act paradigm to address queer performativity, and while she acknowledges its influence and relevance, she is critical of the way in which his theory has contributed, at least in philosophy, to "installing monogamous heterosexual dyadic church- and state-sanctioned marriage at the definitional center of an entire philosophical edifice, it yet posits as the first heuristic device of that philosophy the class of things [...] that can preclude or vitiate marriage; and it constructs the philosopher himself, the modern Socrates, as a man presented as highly comic-whose relation to the marriage vow will be one of compulsive, apparently apotropaic repetition and yet of ultimate exemption" (Sedgwick 1993: 3; her emphasis).

repetition of acts" (*i.e.* of performances) (Butler 1988: 519; her emphasis). In other words, gender, for this author, is instilled into people's identities through their repetitious performances of certain social norms and expectations. Butler's approach "combines speech act theory with a phenomenological theory of 'acts', Lacanian psychoanalysis, as well as a heavy dose of Foucault's notions of subject formation to explain how social agents *constitute* and *reconstitute* reality through their performance of language, gesture and sign" (Young 2016; my emphasis). The emphasis on *constitute* and *reconstitute* is truly relevant here, since there is a kind of vicious circle in Butler's conception of gender performance: dominant social norms *dictate* the appropriate acts that a subject must perform in order to be considered "gender normal", and in turn, these performances feed into and reinforce those norms. Also of prime importance is the close connection between the concepts of performance and performativity. Let us take an example. When a newborn child is declared "boy" or "girl" by healthcare professionals, this has both to do with performance and performativity, because the utterance performs a function that goes beyond reality description: it constructs and reinforces a certain reality for those involved (Young 2016). Thus, for Butler, if performance is more about *theatricality*, *i.e.* about acting in certain ways, performativity implies the regulation of these performances so that they obey and bring out certain meanings and norms. According to Butler, subjects are not limited to being passive entities, blindly and aimlessly obeying norms, and upon whose bodies certain meanings are inscribed. Rather, she contends that subjects have some agency. However, she specifies that the "embodied selves" cannot exist outside of the social norms and conventions that permeate the "meanings" that the subjects take on. In this regard, she draws an eloquent parallel with stage acting:

> Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance. Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives. (Butler 1988: 526, *cf.* Butler 2015)

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: Queer Shame and Performativity

Sedgwick's conception of performativity is very similar to Butler's. In fact, she appears to have incorporated many of Butler's ideas within her own understanding, as she recognizes how Butler made evident, through her theorizing of performativity, "that identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes[22]" (*i.e.*, following Butler, through the repetitions of acts (*performances*) from which one's (gender and sexual) identity is formed and maintained) (Parker & Sedgwick 1995: 2). In the introduction of their collaboratively edited book *Performativity and Performance* (1995), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Andrew Parker ask, "when [and how] is saying something *doing* something?" (Parker & Sedgwick 1995: 1; my emphasis), a question even more important, they suggest, with regards to *queer performances*. Historically and legally, for example, multiple ideas have been raised to understand and circumscribe exactly just "what kind of statement can constitute 'homosexual conduct', as opposed to orientation" (Parker & Sedgwick 1995: 5), with the aims of disciplining (as Foucault would say) subversive people and behaviors. In the case of queerness, saying something becomes doing something in the simplest utterances, as when one "confesses" one's sexuality publicly (*i.e.* one's coming out of the closet). When I utter "I'm gay", say during an academic presentation, it is not an empty statement, nor is it solely a description of a certain reality. It is not empty because one does not simply utter "I'm gay" and expect nothing to happen. (At the very least, something will happen within me because of the mere utterance, which too often still sounds like a confession.) Saying "I'm gay" publicly comes with a certain "baggage", and it inscribes reality with meaning: perhaps people's perceptions of me will change, perhaps I will feel less comfortable (or as if I were exposed), etc. Also truly important to understand Sedgwick's conception

[22] Quite literally, within philosophy of language and speech act theories, "citationality" refers to "the ability to re-present an event of discourse while reflexively marking that representation as not(-quite) that which the citational act presences" (Nakassis 2013: 54, *cf.* Derrida 1988).

of (queer) performativity is the fact that in order for "saying something to be doing something", one does not necessarily need to *say* anything at all. As a man, if I were to enter a room in high-heels and painted nails, my doing something (*i.e.* my gender performance) would infer certain meanings to the witnessing people. Even if I were not gay, the fact that my gender performances, in this example, do not transpire heteronormative norms of masculinity, will most likely have people *read* me as gay, or at least, as effeminate (which is often pejorative). Hence, that one's *queer* acts (performances) can make one a (social) subject that must be dealt with (*i.e.* that society ought to react to) speaks volumes about the relationship between *act* (performance) and *identity formation*, and points eloquently to the notion of *performativity* which Butler discusses.

Moreover, this is what brings Sedgwick to question Austin's paradigmatic "I do" utterance. For Sedgwick, indeed, "I do", thus uttered as a first-person indicative sentence in the context of a marriage ceremony has, for a long time, been a "*speech-act space*" reserved for heterosexuals (or for *non-queer* people). The "I" in "I do" obtains a certain social identity in the social institution of marriage, "through state authority, through the calm interpellation of others present as 'witnesses', and through the logic of the (heterosexual) supplement whereby individual subjective agency is guaranteed by the welding into a cross-gender dyad" (Parker & Parker 1995: 10, citing Sedgwick 1993: 3-4). Sedgwick explains that Austin's example would not necessarily constitute a place for queer people to easily (*i.e.* evidently) recognize their agentivity and performativity, particularly because their personal identities are more likely to reject (or be rejected by) heteronormativity, to lack a strong attachment to state authority, and to engage in "activities" which the prevailing social norms might not endorse. Thus, it appears for Sedgwick that "[the] emergence of the first person, of the singular, of the active, and of the indicative *are all questions rather than presumptions*, for queer performativity" (Parker & Parker 1995: 10, citing Sedgwick 1993: 3-4; my emphasis).

This is where shame becomes important for Sedgwick. In fact, she considers that taking an interest in shame, and emphasizing how marginalized people are stigmatized through (and because of) it, is similarly situated with efforts to reappropriate the word *queer*. Queer, despite attempts at extracting it form its derogatory sense, still retains a pejorative ring and has profound ties both with shame and "with [the] terrifying powerlessness of [a] gender-dissonant or otherwise stigmatized childhood" (Sedgwick 1993: 4). For Sedgwick "queer" is a politically effective term precisely because of its inability to completely rid itself of shame. And this shame, as a *"performance of queer performativity"*, may in turn illicit innovative social transformations. More ought to be said about Sedgwick's understanding of shame before it becomes plain to discern the transformational potential of queer performativity.

Through her reading of Tomkins, Sedgwick views shame as profoundly tied with interest: "without positive affect, there can be no shame [because] only a scene that offers you enjoyment or engages your *interest* can make you blush" (Stockton 2010: 16, citing Sedgwick 1993: 16). In other words, one feels shame at a given time partly because of some emotional involvement with the shameful event or situation. This points to an important *communicative* dimension of shame. Indeed, for Sedgwick, shame occurs as a break in communication (between two humans or with oneself) that intensely disrupts one's sense of self. She draws on Tomkins' understanding to propose that shame develops early in infants when they lose their parents' *comforting smile*. (This is to say that a child, at some point, will not be able to clearly discern a parent's reaction and will experience shame.) Adults seem to tap into this early disruptive experience when feeling shame as abandonment, isolation, or even as incapacity (to perceive the other's reaction). "In fact, shame and identity remain in very dynamic relation to one another, at once deconstituting and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly *contagious* and peculiarly *individuating*" (Sedgwick 1993: 5; my emphasis).

Further, shame is closely related to socialization, as it affects the way people come across and

engage one another in at least two ways. First, shame is profoundly *contagious*, in that it invades and conquers the affective states and minds of people who encounter it. (For instance, if someone giving a presentation is called out for being unprepared, one would tend to empathize with their humiliation [unless, namely, if one feels the calling out is deserved[23]].) Second, shame is *individuating*, and isolating, in that makes one to disappear and to hide from the gaze of others. Thus, what is important to remember about Sedgwick's conceptualization of shame is that "shame both derives from and aims toward sociability" and is foundational for identity formation[24] (Sedgwick 1993: 5).

According to Sedgwick, then, *shame then has the potential of being transformative and political*, not because of its purported ability to reform or discipline behavior (as many theorists, such as Bernard Williams for instance, would think), but because of its *performative relationship with queerness*. Just like Gay Shame, Sedgwick believes that "queer" and "shame" share a special bond, since queer escapes being fixed into rigid and static categories, just as shame tends to disrupt (stable) identity formation. Queer shame is politically interesting to Sedgwick because it situates and legitimizes self-identity in terms of performance, *i.e.*, as an action that establishes and reinforces a reality through its creation and perpetuation. And the very essence of queer performances is set against the grain of monolithic, dominant, heteronormative social norms and binarisms. To put it differently, shame, as queer performativity, disrupts the commonly held ideas about sexual and gender identity.

This explains why Sedgwick considers the expression "Shame on you!", as an Austinian-like

[23] What is even more fascinating with the *contagiousness* of shame is that it does not always require the shamed one's awareness. For example, let us say the same person gives a presentation, but instead of being called out for being unprepared, they wear a shirt which, unbeknownst to them, has a stain that everyone in the audience can notice. In such a scenario, I believe that most would empathize with the speaker and feel an emotion somewhat related to shame, even though the person who "should" be shamed is unaware of the stain. In other words, most would be *ashamed for* them (see Gail Weiss's account of shame in chapter 1).

[24] These two aspects of shame are also reminiscent of Sartre (see in Chapter 1).

performative, far more telling than regular first-person indicative utterances. Sedgwick's "Shame on you!", like Austin's "I do", has illocutionary force, that of shaming an Other, precisely because it names its intent. It also similarly requires the "interpellation" of witnesses, since, as I have proposed earlier (see chapter 1), shame accentuates one's perceived shortcomings in front of other people's gaze (be it real or imagined). Additionally, just like Austin's examples, "Shame on you!" employs pronouns. However, unlike "I-do" types of performatives, the pronoun is "you", which serve to designate and shame an *Other*, while the "I" conceals itself beneath a cloak of implicity.

> So the very grammatical truncation of 'Shame on you' marks it as the product of a history out of which an I, now withdrawn, is projecting shame-toward another I, an I deferred, that has yet and with difficulty to come into being, if at all, in the place of the shamed second person. (Sedgwick 1993: 4)

Hence, queer performativity names "a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect of shame and to the later and related fact of stigma" (Sedgwick 1993: 11). That is, according to Sedgwick, it is through their (queer) performances and their being socially shamed that *queer people develop creative ways to give meaning to their existence, to appropriate their own personal identity*, and to claim a place in society, despite the marginalization they may suffer. It is thus precisely in those terms that shame has deep ties with personal identity:

> The place of identity, the structure 'identity,' marked by shame's threshold between sociability and introversion, may be established and naturalized in the first instance *through shame* [...]. Shame motivates queer expressiveness unique to lesbians and gays [...] and [it] "generate[s]" a space for identity connected to the [...] [queer] performative. (Morrison 2015: 19, citing Sedgwick 2003: 61)

Sedgwick's account, however relevant and compelling it is to seek new positive possibilities and avenues for queer people to *use* their shame, seems quickly dismissive of the structural processes which shame, silence, and invisibilize queer people. What are the social, political, cultural (etc.) (*i.e.* structural) dynamics

which have some people experiencing shame because of their queerness? Perhaps most importantly, exactly just what the content of the creative transformations, which queer shame is supposedly aiming towards, might be? These gaps and implicits in Sedgwick's approach prompt me to explore alternative perspectives, which will provide a more structural and systemic conception of shame within heteronormativity. In the next section, then, I use Sara Ahmed's account to argue that shame should foremost be understood as an emotion queer people experience because they are perceived as deviant. I will suggest (1) that Sedgwick's account, however important, is insufficient to understand the political and social scope of shame, while (2) Ahmed proposes a relevant account to do just that.

2.3. Queer Shame Within Heteronormative Structures

2.3.1. Sara Ahmed: A Phenomenological Lens on Shame and Idealization

If I am to argue that shame must above all be understood as an emotion that queer people experience because of the heteronormative conditions of the societies they inhabit (societies which identify them as deviant), I must arrive at a conception of shame as embedded in structural processes. With this in mind, I begin by examining the work of Sara Ahmed[25], who develops a conception of shame as a failure to achieve social ideals. In effect, in the chapter "Shame Before Others", from her 2004 book *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, discusses shame by drawing on instances of National apologies. More specifically, she reflects "on the collective politics of shame by examining the role of shame within [...] [National] discourse[s] of reconciliation [...] [around the World]" (Ahmed [2004] 2014: 102), most of which

[25] Sara Ahmed holds a PhD from the Center for Critical and Cultural Theory at Cardiff University and has been Professor of Race and Cultural Studies Goldsmiths, University of London until the year 2016, when she resigned from her position in response to the University's executives' inability to properly take actions to deal with sexual harassment. Her work areas include phenomenology, feminist philosophy, critical race theory and queer theory. She is interested in "how bodies and worlds take shape; and how power is secured and challenged in everyday life worlds as well as institutional cultures" (Ahmed, 2021). Throughout her career, she has published or edited some twelve books and forty-seven journal articles. Her most recent book, entitled *Living a Feminist Life*, "shows how feminist theory is generated from everyday life and the ordinary experiences of being a feminist at home and at work" and provides the most polished version for the figure of the feminist 'killjoy' (Ahmed 2017).

prompted to apologize, namely, for slavery, colonialism and the genocides of indigenous populations. In this chapter, she questions how a Nation can, through a national "we" that is experiencing shame, make a sense of itself. While her considerations on national shame and its occurrences in official speech acts of regrets and apologies are interesting, I draw here more specifically on her well-developed conceptualization of shame as *a phenomenological experience of encountering others*.

A Phenomenological Lens to Understand Shame

Ahmed defines shame generally as an emotion stemming from primary negative affects, which one experiences as an "intense and painful sensation that is bound up with how the self feels about itself, a self-feeling that is felt by and on the body" (Ahmed [2004] 2014: 103). Additionally, she stresses that shame is an emotion which often involves an intense heat in the body or on the surface of the skin. This heat can be accompanied by skin coloring (but not always) and bears witness to one's feeling like a failure in the face of others (or oneself). Shame thus exposes personal faults (be they real or imagined).

In addition, Ahmed emphasizes two body movements in the experience of shame. Shame acts to *de*-form and to *re*-form the self and, in this sense, the body tends to conceal itself from others who witness its shame, and seeks, through this flight, to preserve itself (Ahmed [2004] 2014: 103). But this flight places the subject in a kind of impossible position. If, by feeling shame, a person considers herself 'bad', she will try to escape the gaze of others, because they may remind her of her failure, or 'badness'. But running away really only brings her back to herself and her failure. She writes: "The subject, in turning away from another and back into itself, is consumed by a feeling of badness that cannot simply be given away or attributed to another" (Ahmed [2004] 2014: 104). Shame also implies a form of disgust, which the subject feels towards herself and others: "In shame, I feel myself to be bad, and hence to expel the badness, I have to expel myself from myself" (Ahmed [2004] 2014: 104). Shame thus creates an impossible situation for the subject: the desire to withdraw from others is met with a desire to flee from oneself. Moreover, the

impulse to camouflage oneself when feeling shame is paradoxical, notes Ahmed. The very fact of feeling shame indicates the failure to take refuge from the gaze of others, precisely because shame is self-exposure. "On the one hand, shame covers that which is exposed (we turn away, we lower our face, we avert our gaze), while on the other, shame exposes that which has been covered (it un-covers)" (Ahmed [2004] 2014: 104).

In this context, shame intensifies and amplifies the relationship one has with oneself. This experience of *being-itself* depends, as we have seen in Sartre, on the fact that a subject who is ashamed is mostly ashamed of her being *otherfied* in front of others (Ahmed [2004] 2014: 104). Further, Ahmed somewhat draws on Sedgwick in proposing that the individualizing effect of shame, through which one tends to distance oneself as much from others as from oneself, depends on the fact that *shame is primarily a social experience* which involves the relationship between two people (*i.e.* two subjectivities). In shame, in fact, and contrary to guilt, the bad character of a situation is transferred to the self, which integrates it and becomes its reflection.

Shame, Love and Social Ideals

Moreover, Ahmed suggests that a subject is only truly ashamed in front of others to the extent that their opinions matter to her. In a very significant way, this means that shame implies an emotional involvement with others. Equally important, it also means that shame is experienced only in front of a (real or internalized) witness. Expressed differently, this would mean that, even when alone, a person feels shame because of the other person's imagined gaze. In fact, Ahmed is rather Sartrean in suggesting that shame makes the subject an Other for herself: "My failure before this other hence is profoundly a failure of myself to myself. In shame, I expose to myself that I am a failure through the gaze of an *ideal* other [...]" (Ahmed [2004] 2014: 106).

From this *idealized Other* emerges the more social aspects of Ahmed's understanding of shame, and upon which I shall build my argument. How is oneself (or the others) idealized? Idealization occurs as the subject internalizes the image she most wishes to be. That image draws and depends on the values she gathers and appropriates through her interactions with others. Such interactions shape her conception of herself and of the others, and they constitute norms and values which she hopes to live up to. What is more, such an ideal requires love: "[...] through love, which involves the desire to be 'like' an other, as well as to be recognized by an other, an ideal self is produced as an approximation of the other's being" (Ahmed [2004] 2014: 106). In other words, the ideal self, combined with love, is what unites subjects with each other. It also fuels the desire to be like others and to be validated by others. The ideal self thus comes from a desire to get closer to others and from the idealized relationship that a subject has built up with them.

> If we feel shame, we feel shame because we have failed to approximate 'an ideal' that has been given to us through the practices of love. What is exposed in shame is *the failure of love*, as a failure that in turn exposes or shows our love. (Ahmed [2004] 2014: 106)

Let us make explicit the emergence of queer shame within heteronormative systems following Ahmed's approach. According to Ahmed, people, through their encounters and interactions with each other, develop a certain idealized image of themselves. In other words, people create a "social" version of themselves, in that they idealize and value a version of themselves based on what they take up from others. And that is based on a shared social bond found in love and interest for others. What that means, to put it simply, is that if, for example, most people consider that a man should not wear a dress, then my idealized self (which, again, reflects the norms most people value and that I have also taken up) will most likely not wish to wear a dress. What happens if my *actual* self wants to wear a dress? In current heteronormative societies, which are mostly characterized by (explain), people who do not conform to

gender and sexual expectations are sometimes gravely repressed. Following Ahmed, in fact, if I were to wear a dress in public, for instance, I would most likely experience a form of shame when meeting the gaze of others, because of my "failure" to achieve or to live up to the idealized version of myself. Because of my incapacity to live "properly", and according to the social norms people around me value. What is more, I could even experience forms of shame if I were to simply try dresses on while out of sight, alone at home, because my idealized self may well have internalized the gaze of others and the values and norms which society considers important still have a hold on me. Following Ahmed, I contend that the shame queer people experience (*qua* queer people) comes from society's heteronorms which dictate the rules and the norms to be valued in order to be "normal" with regard to gender expressions and sexual desires. These norms and ideals have been internalized by the people around us, who value them in return, and around whom we develop our own sense of self.

From Ahmed, then, I get an understanding of shame as an emotion that is painful in multiple ways, which one experiences in front of others (be they real or internalized), due to one's failure to live up to the social ideals one holds dear (or to which one is attached in spite of herself). Such a conception, in fact, eloquently illustrates that it is not enough to seek to understand the creative and transformative potential of shame, as Sedgwick suggests[26], but that it is also important to understand the heteronormative social forces that persist in shaming queer people. The relevance of Ahmed's approach is further enhanced when associated with a structural conception of power, such as that of Michel Foucault.

2.3.2. Michel Foucault: Shame and Discipline

Michel Foucault's influence in queer theory (and, more generally, in gender and sexuality studies)

[26] As for the question of the usefulness of shame, Ahmed believes that it can be valuable in limited doses. Indeed, shame can only be really useful temporarily, because: "Shame may be restorative only when the shamed other can 'show' that its failure to measure up to a social ideal is temporary" (Ahmed [2004] 2014: 107).

is considerable, and his work is still widely cited or taken up today[27]. In the introduction to the first volume of his books concerning the history of sexuality, Foucault criticizes the *repressive hypothesis* about sexuality. The repressive hypothesis is the idea that, at around the 17th century, most discourses about sex and sexuality became socially and politically repressed, as if, from that time on, no one could discuss them anymore. In other words, the repressive hypothesis maintained that, historically, sexuality has supposedly developed hand in hand with a certain prudishness, thus preventing its diffusion, knowledge and even pronunciation within society. Foucault wishes to stress its falseness, because, quite contrary to what the hypothesis would pretend, he contends that discourses on sexuality, with the leverage that power offered them, have proliferated muchly from that time on. To put it differently, Foucault challenges the true foundations of the repressive hypothesis to suggest that power not only did not silence any discourse on sexuality but that it rather allowed for new productions of meaning to emerge with regard to the way people classified, documented and analyzed sexuality.

For Foucault, then, *power is productive*. To understand what power is and how it functions in Foucault's works, *biopolitics* and *biopower* are two highly relevant concepts. They are both encompassed into Foucault's structural approach to power. Biopolitics has to do with "a political rationality which takes the administration of life and populations as it subjects: 'to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order' (Adams 2017, citing Foucault 1976: 138). To put it differently, biopolitics is a power which operates to regulate society and its people's lives. Following this, biopower corresponds the multiple ways biopolitics is exercised within society, and, thus, it is "[...] a power that exerts a positive influence on life,

[27] Michel Foucault is one of the most important figures of 20th century philosophy. With an important background in psychology and history as well as in philosophy, his method of analysis prioritizes archeological and genealogical approaches to understand and criticize the emergence of individual subjectivity (Gutting & Oksala 2019). His famous "repressive hypothesis" has been taken up extensively by queer theorists. Indeed, in *La volonté de savoir* (1976) (the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*), he questions the idea that sexuality was socially repressed at the turn of the 17th century and he seeks to understand "what people's motivations are for propounding the hypothesis. [...] 'Why do we say that we are repressed?'" (Dea 2016: 30).

that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations" (Foucault [1976] 1978: 137). Biopower works through what Foucault calls *dispositifs* of power, which consists of an

> heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions –in short, the said as much as the unsaid. (Foucault 1980: 194)

Which means that *biopower spreads*, through discourses, exactly what it is trying to regulate. That is, *dispositifs*, in Foucault's work, are a sort a multi-dimensional and multi-consequential *web* which power uses to exert control over life, at the "[...] 'level of life' itself" (Adams 2017, citing Foucault 1978: 137). In other words, biopower, through multiple discursive and communicative expressions, regulates what is "good" and what is "bad" for one to do and disciplines (*viz*. controls, polices) people (and their behaviors) who do not fit in.

Control and discipline are not alien to queer people. Queers have been legally and politically persecuted in multiple (and sometimes creative) ways for a long time. In fact, many queer people remain thusly persecuted in various contexts and for various reasons[28]. In fact, even the Stonewall rebellions, which is today celebrated as one of the greatest founding moments of the lesbians and gays sexual liberation movements in the 1970s, was originally motivated by queer people's desire not to be harassed and beaten by the police anymore. Stonewall brought together people, who were described by society as degenerates, perverts, and sexual deviants, to rise up against police control, violence and brutality, but also against the oppression that was their daily lives. In just a fortnight, the riots grew into a national

[28] For instance, there are places in the world where homosexuality is punishable by death (*cf*. Ilga World 2021).

movement and by 1970 queer people around the world had started mobilizing and creating organizations to promote their rights to exist and live in a society that would no longer oppress and shame them.

What is most important here is that shame worked for the queer people of Stonewall, and for many queer people still today, as a disciplining mechanism meant to deter queer people's claim to normalcy. In fact, for Foucault, shame is a complex emotion which points to one's *transgression*, *i.e.* it indicates a disagreement between the norm one acknowledges and who one *actually* is. Shame is comprised within societal body politics and acts as the omnipresent gaze of power which *spreads shame in order to assimilate people and smooth out their differences*. Politically, shame holds *relations with disciplinary institutions of power* and ensures that it *maximizes the value of some lives or renders others unlivable* (Filipovic 2017: 102, *cf.* Butler 1996). That is, shame, "[...]as a 'naturalized' social practice, is instrumental in what Foucault calls the '*anatomo-politics of the human body*' that disciplines and thus authors the subject by ensuring 'the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility [and] its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls' (Filipovic 2017: 102, citing Foucault 1978: 139; emphasis in the original). One is ashamed because of the political and social *dispositifs* of power, which are responsible for generating and managing standards of *normalcy*. In fact, Foucault suggests that shame points (*i.e.* makes visible) one's behaviors which are considered (socially) perverse, or deviant. This is part of disciplining *dispositifs* aimed at blaming individuals for not "fitting in" (Foucault 1978: 37).

Here, it becomes plain to see how Ahmed has taken up much of Foucault's work. For her shame is socially infused in people through their adherence and love for others and the norms they embody. For Foucault, *shame also involves the internalization of the social political and cultural norms emanating from the (dominant) disciplinary mechanisms in place*. The main difference to be noted here is that, on Ahmed's account, one would not perceive her shame as coming from *a dominant system* that aims to police her.

While the social norms which she feels she must follow may be interpreted as a means to assimilate her, she would most likely not perceive it as a threat. Yet, according to Foucault's account, one experiences shame because one adheres to social norms, even if those norms can be oppressive. "I am ashamed [because] I have *internalized the power structure that articulates me as its constitutive outside* [...]" (Filipovic 2017: 102; my emphasis).

In discussing Foucault's understanding of shame, I expanded upon the conception developed by Ahmed in order to show that shame, while it can be understood as a failure to meet social ideals (which one gets from her encountering others), it ought also to be comprised as the internalization of the power structures which, in turn, construct the shamed subjects as *Others*. Otherness in the face of others' gaze (and because of social oppressions) is a rich theme for Frantz Fanon. In fact, Fanon's discussion of racialized shame provides nuances to my discussion, as it illustrates that shame, far *from being foremost creative and transformational*, can create barriers within one's personal identity when it is interlinked with racial prejudice.

2.3.3. Frantz Fanon: Racialized Shame

In *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), psychiatrist, philosopher and essayist Frantz Fanon[29] develops one of the earliest critiques of Sartre's phenomenology of shame[30] by proposing an

[29] Frantz Fanon was a renowned Caribbean-born psychiatrist, philosopher, and essayist whose words and writings have influenced (and still influence) various liberation movements and civil rights activists, including the Black Panthers in the U.S. (In fact, 'young revolutionaries' such as Huey Newton, Bobby Seale and Amiri Baraka were imbued with the critical thinking of emancipation that Fanon offered them). "Integrating psychoanalysis, phenomenology, existentialism, and Negritude theory, Fanon articulated an expansive view of the psychosocial repercussions of colonialism on colonized people." (Peterson 2020).

[30] In Sartre famous voyeur example, let us recall, a voyeur spies on someone through the lock of a door. At one point, the voyeur is interrupted by the sound of footsteps approaching. This creates a break in the scene. If at first the voyeur spies on someone else's shame, the sound of footsteps now presents him as the shamed spectacle to be witnessed. For Sartre, this example is telling of the way shame works because the reader is likely to identify with the voyeur and to experience this break with him. In Franz Fanon's narration of his encounter with a young white boy who calls him an N-word, some sort of reversing occurs here in comparison to what the voyeur example illustrates. According to Gail Weiss, white people may here seem more prone to identify with the white boy than with Fanon. Two reason explain

autobiographical account of racialized shame[31]. His account is particularly relevant to my current argument about shame, as (1) it adds a delicate layer of nuance which serves to highlight how racism can complicate the lived experience of shame for racialized people[32], and (2) it eloquently points that shame, as I wish to show here, *is not foremost transformational*, but can rather be quite damaging to one's personal identity.

In a chapter entitled "*L'expérience vécue du Noir*", Fanon tells his readers about his encounter with a young white boy on a train who calls him an N-word and expresses fear at the sight of him. This episode is instructive for addressing shame, as Fanon speaks openly about his feelings and impressions, and he relates how he had to "*affronter le regard blanc*" as a "*lourdeur inaccoutumée*" working to oppress him (Fanon 1952: 89). The oppression which this author experiences when faced with the white gaze connects with Ahmed's discussion of shame: the gaze of the whites serves to shame and *otherfy* Fanon. More specifically, what strikes one as most significant from Fanon's account is what commentator David Mitchel (2020) calls the "cycle of shame", which consists of five standpoints or attitudes Fanon successively adopts in relation to his being *racially shamed*. Fanon describes his first impulse as the welcoming of his objectified Black man identity, in the face of whites' gazes, as a way of "re-establish[ing] and reclaim[ing] one's own objectivity" (Mitchell 2020: 361). "*Je décidai, puisqu'il m'était impossible de partir d'un* complexe inné, de *m'affirmer en tant que* NOIR" (Fanon 1952: 112; his emphasis). However, as Mitchell notes, this first

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this. First, because of stereotyping and what Collins has termed 'controlling images' (*cf.* Hills Collins), Black men are stereotypically depicted as violent sexual predators, with whom white people are unlikely to identify. Second, the experience of being is seen as a source of terror is alien to most white people, especially white women. The first person telling of this encounter questions and shakes the historically racist roots of oppression upon which this experience of shame is built. What is more, this encounter, Fanon reminds us, does not require any particular action on his part, solely his visual appearance (Weiss 2018: 543-544).

[31] Since then, other authors have sought to discuss racialized shame, some by discussing internalized racism (e.g. Johnson 2020; Mason 2015; David *et al.* 2019), others, more broadly, by discussing how race and shame may be interlinked (*cf.* Lebron 2013; Leverenz 2012).

[32] I wish to make plain and evident from the outset the fact that I in no way desire to appropriate the words and experiences of racialized people to make them fit my own research. While I wish to present how Fanon's account of shame highlights deeper political intricacies of shame, I am also aware that many other things could (and ought to) be said about such an account, namely concerning the ignorance of the white gaze and the blindness to differences (*cf.* Medina 2013; Mills 2007).

impulse fails because it lacks positive content to which to relate: the universal (stereotypical and stigmatizing) figure of the Black person circulating in Fanon's time is not the one he aspires to (Mitchell 2020 : 361). He therefore opts for *transcendence*. In other words, Fanon's second impulse, in the face of his objectification, is a desire to become invisible and not to escape the objectification that whites' gazes make him endure. This strategy also fails because it is impossible to make oneself perfectly invisible or to become impervious to others. A third strategy then corresponds to Fanon's attempt to combine the two previous ones: to avoid being shamed by making oneself equal to whites. The bulk of this third strategy consists in going beyond the stereotypical and oppressive gaze of whites in order to make oneself at least equal to them, and to expose (to them) their mistake. "En bon tacticien, je voulus rationaliser le monde, montrer au Blanc qu'il était dans l'erreur" (Fanon 1952: 115; he capitalizes). As Fanon explains, it is as though truncating the darkness of his skin meant being able to reach the universal reason that whites deny him (and that only them have access to) (Mitchell 2020: 362). But Mitchell points that this strategy is once again doomed to fail, for, on the one hand, it requires Fanon to dissociate himself from his own self in the hope of transcending his race, and, on the other hand, it seems obvious, in Fanon's words, that the (white) "gaze" of reason he intends to adopt (or incarnate) is not sufficient to undermine the harmful effects of racism, which ultimately persists unflinchingly (Mitchell 2020: 362). This brings him, in a fourth movement, and a bit like a visionary, to seek to transform his shame into pride, like many people (after him) within civil rights movements who came to truncate the shame society made them feel (by judging them to be deviant, perverse, imperfect, etc.) into pride and empowerment (*i.e.* "Gay is Good"). As Mitchell points out, Fanon's pride is embodied in his identification with his Blackness, but still carries the mark of stereotypes and oppression that relegate him to the reign of the irrational, the barbaric, or the primitive. "Puisque sur le plan de la raison, l'accord n'était pas possible, je me rejetais vers *l'irrationalité*. À charge au Blanc d'être plus irrationnel que moi" (Fanon 1952:120; my emphasis).

What's more, Fanon notes that the pride he displays romanticizes his Blackness and prevents him from being more than a lower stage of human development in the eyes of whites (Mitchell 2020: 362). The fifth movement (and the only one possible) for Fanon then, in such a context, is *violence*. As Mitchell points out, violence is inevitable: faced with his oppression, the Black man explodes and wants to subject whites to the same treatment that they have reserved for him. "Le [N-word] est un jouet entre les mains du Blanc; alors, pour rompre ce cercle infernal, il explose" (Fanon 1952 :136; *N-word* used as replacement). But Fanon suggests that violence only is the ultimate step in sealing a vicious circle of objectification in which the Black man is trapped, since violent responses to oppression only reinforces the stereotype of the Black man as someone to be feared. And his "causing" a young boy to be frightened (at the sight of him) is what makes Fanon feel *ashamed* in the first place, since "social rejection", for people "who do not conform to social norms" risks bringing about "frequent and enduring experiences of shame" (Harris-Perry 2011: 106).

Fanon skillfully traces *a dialectic of racial shame* to illustrate the ever-present shame Black men may come to experience through insidious (and not so insidious) forms of racism. Through this dialectic, one can appreciate the relevant distinctions between his interpretation of illegitimate racial shame (which arises because of illegitimate prejudices against Black people living in racist societies) and that of Sartre's voyeur example (in which the voyeur's shame seems legitimate, as it serves as social function [to show disapproval over his behavior]) (see chapter 1). What is more, some sort of interesting reversing occurs in comparison to what the voyeur example illustrates: in Fanon's narrative white people seem more disposed to identify with the white boy than with Fanon. Two reasons may explain this. First, because of what Collins has termed '*controlling images*', Black men are stereotypically depicted as violent sexual predators with whom white people are unlikely to identify (Hill Collins 1990). Second, the experience of being seen as a source of terror is alien to most white people, especially white women. The first person telling of Fanon's

encounter questions and shakes the historically racist roots of oppression upon which such experiences of shame are built. For such an encounter to unfurl, Fanon reminds us, he does not need to perform any action other than making himself visible to others, who in turn make him feel alien (Weiss 2018: 543–544). Fanon's account of racial shame is an integral part of the experience of racial discrimination he describes, because, just like with Foucault and Ahmed, shame obeys a political and social form of control.

To explain eloquently how shame can be complicated by stigmatizing racial prejudice and to further illustrate how shame can be painful, let me draw here on the (fictitious) life experiences of *How to Get Away with Murder*'s Annalise Keating[33], a dark-skinned, bisexual, Black women. During the last episode of the show, in a grandiose final statement, she *denounces* the "mask" she has had to wear all of her life in order to "fit in", to appear appropriate, or to *pass* (*cf.* Johnson 2019). She says:

> So, here's the truth about me. I've worn a mask every day of my life. In high school, it was a smile that I faked to get boys to like me. In law school, I changed my name to sound more "New England". At the law firm, I wore heels, makeup, and a wig. And when I got married, I threw myself into becoming a Keating. And it was all to create a version of myself that the world would accept. (Nowalk & Cragg 2020)

The fact that she felt she had to change her name (from Anna Mae to Annalise), in order for her to sound more "white", perhaps points to how she has been (socially) conditioned to feel ashamed of her origins. The "heels, makeup, and a wig" part is also significantly eloquent of all the stereotypes she had to overcome in order to move away from social shame and for her to "fit in". They were attires which she had to wear in order to overcome the degrading stereotypes that transmit the idea that dark-skinned women are not real women or are not feminine enough (Norwood 2015). At the same time, they were meant for her to overcome the stereotype of the "bad black woman", and, thus, to appear less dangerous

[33] *How to Get Away with Murder* is an American drama/thriller series created by Peter Nowalk which ran on ABC from September 2014 to May 2020. It follows criminal defense attorney Annalise Keating (played by Viola Davis) and her inner circle of students (the "Keating Five") as they get entangled into murder plots.

to whites (Hill Collins 1990). Moreover, the fact that she felt she had to wear a wig most of the time to appear "proper" is tragically telling, since many racialized people have to experience social rejections (in school, employment, housing, public spaces, etc.) because (white) people judge their hair (Mason 2015). When she says that she "threw herself into becoming a Keating", she refers to her marrying a white man (Sam) (who had a greater social status than she did, and who had some form of authority over her...), as an expression of her "desire" to correspond to white ideals. Many elements of Annalise's story are reminiscent of internalized racism (*cf.* David et al. 2019; Johnson 2020), since she was socially brought to hate her (Black) self and thus to feel ashamed for not trying to "overcome" it. Annalise's story reveals much about racialized shame and how it can create an *impasse*. The vicious circle that we can find in Fanon, and which leads him (in spite of himself) to feel ashamed of his personal identity, is also the one which drives Annalise to reject her origins and to want to seem "appropriate" in the eyes of whites.

In this section, I have argued, drawing on the work of Ahmed, Foucault, and Fanon, that shame can be far too complex and damaging for queer people to hurriedly contemplate its creative and productive potential. Following Ahmed, I retain that shame is a multifariously painful emotion that is experienced as an exposure (in front of others, real or imagined) of one's failure to live up to the social ideals. We have also pointed that this conception has deep ties with Foucault's understanding of power, since, for both of those authors, *shame also involves the internalization of the social, political and cultural norms emanating from the (dominant) disciplinary mechanisms in place*, which make queer people seem deviant or perverse. Finally, I have also suggested that shame can be an even more complicated and stigmatizing emotion when it pertains to racial prejudice. But is that all there is to say about shame? In what ways can queer shame, as a painful emotion generated by exclusionary heteronormative norms, be thought to be useful? Previously, I discussed Sedgwick's conception of transformational queer shame. I proposed that such a conception was insufficient without an adequate understanding of the shame queer

people experience within heteronormative societies. Building upon the conceptions I explored in discussing Ahmed's, Foucault's, and Fanon's works, I will, in the next section, explore in a more nuanced way the transformational potential of queer shame by suggesting that queer shame can be thought of as a political lever aimed at *identifying and denouncing oppressive heteronorms*.

2.4. Shame as a Political Lever

So far, I have proposed that queer people experience shame *qua* queer people because of the heteronorms which construct them as deviant. That was the first part of the vicious circle which I pointed to in the introduction of this chapter. This vicious circle, I suggest, implies that, on the one hand, queer people are shamed by heteronormative structures that considers them deviant, and, on the other hand, the shame they feel forces them to conform to heteronorms, which reinforces heteronormativity's domination. In this last section, I wish to see how to disrupt the vicious circle. I seek to do that by arguing that shame may serve as a *political lever* meant to expose and challenge heteronormative structures which oppress queer people.

First, let us discuss how the shaming of queer people (because they are viewed as deviant) results in a sort of *reinforcing of heteronormative oppressions*. To illustrate this idea, let me look at the telling example which the "*cult of masculinity*" displays, as it is present amongst many gay men. On the dating-app scene (*i.e.* the *Grindr* app), for instance, some gay men, who present themselves as highly masculine, appear on the lookout exclusively for other masculine men (García-Gómez 2020, *cf.* Conner 2018; Jaspal 2017). Their nicknames can be composed of things like "*mas4masc*" or "*Lookingformasc*", and their bios can comprise statements like "*no fems*" (*i.e.* no effeminate men). In these cases, the price, for a more feminine man, to chat with them usually is to be blocked, but can also entail rejection, humiliation, and *ghosting* (*i.e.* the other person will stop responding abruptly and for no "apparent" reason). Another *cliché* characteristic of such profiles who value masculinity above all else are statements like "I'm discreet" or

"*hors milieu*", which usually either means a closeted (sometimes coupled) straight (or *bi-curious*) man wishing for some "adventure", or a gay man who implies that the gay community is a bunch of dramatic, hysteric queens above which he positions himself. What the Grindr scene illustrates is that masculinity, for many gay men, is often constructed upon the rejection of femininity, that is on anti-effeminacy discourses and attitudes. Anti-effeminacy is "a sexist belief that oneself and other gay men should not appear or behave effeminately" (Murgo 2017: 107), because that would mean they are not "real" men. What lies at the heart of such a sentiment is *shame*. The shame one may experience as a result of appearing deviant. But, in this example, masculine gay men's shame actually causes them to reject their own emotion and to project it instead unto others, in this case the "effeminate" gay men, thus reinforcing heteronormative systems of oppressions which would have masculinity dominate femininity (Morris & Blume Oeur 2018). (It can also be argued, in fact, that hierarchically constructing masculinity as superior to femininity reinforces (internalized) forms of *misogyny* [Hale & Ojeda 2018]). In this example, then, effeminate queer men are deemed deviant, and, thus, are shamed, because their gender expressions fail to meet *dominant* standards among gay men.

This is similar to what queer theorist Michael Warner[34], in his 1999 book *The Trouble with Normal*, discusses about the sexual politics of queer shame. He believes that there is a need to address sexuality and shame politically precisely because of certain contexts where people are shamed for being (considered as) sexually deviant (or, as in the example above, as gender non-conforming). That is to say, queer people are shamed because they are not in sync with current (dominant) norms of gender and sexual performances. And for Warner, shame becomes political as soon as people (who are dominant and in

[34] Michael Warner holds a PhD from the Johns Hopkins University and is Seymour H. Knox Professor of English, and Professor of American Studies at Yale University. As a queer theorist, he has written the highly influential 1999 book *The Trouble with Normal* which has been taken up and discussed by many, and he is also credited for popularizing the word "heteronormativity" (Warner 1991) (but the concept has deeper roots, for instance in Rich's [1980] or in Rubin's [1984] works.)

positions of power) refuse to feel it for themselves (when sometimes they ought to) and shift it instead onto marginalized people, who are thus socially registered as *Others* (queer people, according to him, become therein perceived as perverse, deviant or abnormal). Moreover, Martha C. Nussbaum (whom I discussed in chapter 1) comments on Warner's discussion of sexual shame and highlights how shame may in fact contribute to reinforcing heterosexist prejudice: "Having a lot of shame about our own bodies [...] we seek to render our bodies less disturbing; and this frequently involves *projecting* our own emotions outward, onto vulnerable people and groups who come to embody a shamefulness and a disgustingness that we then conveniently deny in our own person" (Nussbaum 2012: 225; her emphasis). In a way then, sexual shame, according to Warner, aims to silence (those seen as) subversive people, even amongst the marginalized. That is, people who are labeled as *Others*, because of their gender expressions and sexual desires, are pushed out of the public space, on the one hand, because they do not (or no longer) have access to public resources to express themselves, to be seen or to be heard, and, on the other hand, because their voices and experiences are discredited and considered deviant (Tarnopolsky 2004 : 470).

However, Warner does not consider the repudiation of shame to be constructive. For him, society ought to oppose constructing shame as sexual stigma, because it humiliates and marginalizes certain groups, and because it hierarchically prioritizes some sexualities over others. In fact, according to Warner, the socially transformative potential of shame could be realized if shame were no longer associated with sexuality. Put differently, that would require for the primary seat of shame to no longer be located in sexuality.

> Instead of finding sources of stigmatization in shame, he argues, we must try to find a kind of dignity in shame that will draw humanity together in a recognition of our "indignities" or 'contingencies'. (Tarnopolsky 2004: 473, citing Warner 1999: 36)

His claim rests upon two arguments. First, it rests on a principle of basic human liberties (following John

Stuart Mill) which basically contends that people's autonomous sexual liberties should not be socially restricted if no harm comes from them. Second, he argues that permitting (even encouraging) such sexual liberties may be beneficial for everyone: "When we allow different groups more liberty to construct their own modes of sexual life, moreover, we are all likely to learn from these 'experiments in living" (Nussbaum 2012: 225-226).

Warner's ideas are certainly relevant and make me optimistic that the current stigmatizations and marginalization queer people experience may "get better" at some point. However, I contend that he may in fact be putting the cart in front of the horses in that he appears to *assume* that shame can simply be dislodged from sexuality (*i.e.* while he wishes for it, he does not really seem to argue for it). What is more, the position he claims puts queer people's gender expressions and sexual desires beyond the scope of shame. As if shame can be overcome. This is not a position I wish to defend here. Rather, I think it is far more feasible to consider a world in which shame, while it most likely will continue to exist, can be dealt with. In fact, since queer people can be thought of as a marginalized group, partly because of the shame which heteronormative structures make them feel, I wish to suggest that their shame can work as a *political lever* in order to identify, name and address situations of heteronormative oppression. I argue this idea based on the fact that (1) oppressed people, following Medina (2013), occupy particular positions which allows them to (epistemically) understand *uniquely* their experiences, and that (2) these positions, in turn, may enable for queer people to create "*safe-spaces*" meant to discuss and address their shame and their marginalization.

According to philosopher José Medina, marginalized people, unlike dominant or powerful people, are better able to develop a posture of epistemic humility, which is understood as one's ability to remain attentive and accountable to one's epistemic judgments and attitudes (Medina 2013: 43). For marginalized people, moreover, such humility can imply a form of open-mindedness and a curiosity about others that

is not found in other people. It makes them question themselves and the attitudes of others. Indeed, Medina notes that oppressed people, in general, are intellectually and cognitively more curious than their oppressors, as they are more likely to find themselves in situations where increased knowledge of the oppressor can save them from harmful consequences. The eminent philosopher Charles W. Mills, for example, makes a similar point when he suggests that some black people ought to become "experts" on white people: « *for their very survival, blacks have been forced to become lay anthropologists* [...] *of the 'white tribe' that has such frightening power over them that in certain time periods whites can even determine their life or death on a whim*" (Mills 2007: 17-18). Thus, for Medina, the subordinate positions in which marginalized groups find themselves often imply that they have a surplus of intellectual curiosity where their oppressors can afford a form of epistemic *laziness*. Similarly, marginalized groups are often more sensitive to the perspectives and experiences of others. « *They have no option but to acknowledge, respect, and (to some extent) inhabit alternative perspectives, in particular the perspective of the dominant other(s)* » (Medina 2013: 44). Following this, it can be thought that queer people have to "inhabit" (at least) two particular positions: on the one hand, that of people marginalized and shamed by the heteronormative society, and, on the other hand, that of marginalized people who have to maintain a greater form of curiosity and vigilance towards the heteronormative society that, at any moment, might create harm to them.

Given the particular position that queer people inhabit, following Medina, I believe that it is important to question whether it is possible to create "safe spaces" that would allow for the formation of a vocabulary through which queer people would be better able to understand and speak out against the oppressions that they experience as a result of marginalization and stigmatization. Such spaces may consist of places where queer people can speak freely about their experiences without the fear of retribution. According to Moira Rachel Kenney, in fact, such spaces may foster the emergence of unconfined and

inclusive discussions and projects meant to resist oppression through shared efforts (Kenney 2001). Only in such a similar context, then, do I believe that shame, even though it is a painful emotion, as Ahmed suggests, may be creative and transformational in the way Sedgwick proposed.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter consisted of a close examination of queer shame. On the one hand, this examination aimed to show that shame is a painful emotion stemming from heteronormative social structures. On the other hand, it sought to argue that shame serve as a political lever in order to challenge heteronormativity. I attained those goals by juxtaposing four interconnected sections. In a first section, I explored the works and ideas of Gay Shame, which connects shame and queer in that both resist the normalizing tendencies of gay mainstream culture and both have productive potential. The productive potential of shame which Gay Shame discussed brought me to explore the works of Sedgwick, for whom queer shame corresponds to (following Butler) a series of performances through which queers develop creative and transformational possibilities of being. While Sedgwick's account appeared highly relevant, I felt it lacked something like a structural understanding of the conditions for which queer people experience shame in the first place. For this reason, I turned, in a third section, to the works of Ahmed, Foucault, and Fanon to propose that shame can be far too complex and damaging for queer people to hurriedly contemplate its creative and productive potential. Finally, in the last section, I contended that shame, however painful an emotion, may be useful as means to expose and contest heteronormative structures.

In the end, perhaps some could criticize this rationale on the same grounds that I criticized Sedgwick or Warner, *viz*. by pointing out that I do not really offer a "practical guide" which would assure that shame may create the "safe-space" I aim for. While that may be true, I console myself with the belief that I do not unrealistically claim that we could ever get rid of shame, as it is a human emotion which exists. Amongst the things that are left to do, in the perspective I developed, then, is to stay humble

towards others' input and to stay optimistic that such discussions may bring us closer to a shared understanding capable of unsettling heteronorms.

Conclusion

It was in high school that I my awareness of homophobia grew. Of course, I knew before that I wasn't really supposed to feel the way I did, but I had never realized that hating and discriminating against queer and gender nonconforming people had a name. In high school, as I was coming to terms with my own sexuality, I remember having clear moments of realizations. Of realizing that life was going to be different. That for some queers, it is not only radically different, but also extremely cruel and demanding. While I was starting to embrace my difference and my uniqueness, I became all too aware as well of the traumas some queer people (have to) face because of their differences. In high school, I remember that posters were put up and pamphlets were distributed to inform us about homosexuality, homophobia, or related "issues". One of the posters that most struck provided information about the *International Day Against Homophobia* (which is now called *International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia*). While that day is formerly observed since around 2005, I remember that I first acknowledged its existence through this poster in my second high school year (because that same summer I came out to my parents), which was 2008-09. That poster struck me because it was one of the first "hard evidence" that I came across where people like me not only were discriminated against but could also get together and fight it. I remember asking for a poster to put on my bedroom wall, and I even hand-made myself a t-shirt to "promote" that day. When my parents and sibling questioned me about it, I felt utterly *silly* and *ashamed*.

For a long time, I could not clearly discern exactly why I felt ashamed in that instance. While writing this dissertation, this story came back to me. I lacked the wit and insight to explain to my family what I was going through. Besides, I do not imagine that I would have had an adequate place where I would have felt comfortable to have this conversation with them at that moment. My shame was too great and my words too small. That is probably, at least in part, why I wrote this dissertation in the way I did. To propose the basis for thinking about the shame that queer people feel, and to try to see if we could not create places

for them to talk and communicate their experiences of shame without fear. Without having to keep it to themselves. Without these experiences becoming traumatic. To see if from these experiences and moments of shame a discussion could be had that would help us grow.

In short, the point of this dissertation was to discuss shame and its transformative potential for queer people. Some authors believe that queer shame foremost is positive and potentially transformative for queer people's sense of self. I rather proposed, following both a thorough conceptualization of shame and an illustration of its place within heteronormative structures, that queer shame may only ever be said transformative insofar as we adequately comprehend this emotion as painful for queer people, whose lives in heteronormative societies are particularly marked by "non-conformity". Chapter one was meant as an exploration of the different conceptualizations of shame that authors in psychology, philosophy and feminisms have elaborated. From them, I concocted my own interpretation to propose that *shame can be understood as a painful emotion that an individual feels when one of her flaws (real or imagined) is highlighted in front of others (real or imagined).* I further drew on this understanding in chapter two, which aim it was to examine closely queer shame. I suggested that shame, while it is a painful emotion stemming from heteronormative social structures, may politically challenge this heteronormative societies.

I believe that this dissertation makes a valuable theoretical contribution by offering a detailed and nuanced understanding of the shame that queer people experience as a result of living within heteronormative societies. Furthermore, I have explored my topic by studying women, racialized people, and (otherwise) marginalized people. This is consistent with and puts into practice the underlying premise of this dissertation, which is that a better understanding of the experiences of queer people is more likely to bring us closer to a more inclusive and life-affirming society. However, perhaps a limitation of my project is that I have studied such an important emotion as shame without great reference to psychology. Additionally, in this essay, I have used the word "queer" for ethical and political purposes in a way that

encompasses many diverse experiences. I would readily acknowledge the limitation of my project if I were blamed for not addressing the experiences of queer people in a way that captured their richness and diversity. I stand by my political use of "queer" and regret my (potential) lack of diversity.

While I have addressed, and proposed an argument for, the transformational potential of queer shame in this dissertation, I believe much more ought to be developed with regards to queer shame. For instance, meaningful work could be developed to address important and pressing issues that lie at the intersection of sexual orientation and race. In effect, while some authors have discussed racialized shame (*cf.* Johnson 2020; Mason 2015; David et al. 2019; Lebron 2013; Leverenz 2012) or queerness and racialization (*cf.* Johnson 2016; Johnson & Henderson 2005; Johnson & Rivera-Servera 2016), perhaps the question of queer racialized shame ought to receive more attention.

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