

## Violence, Shame, and Moral Agency – An Exploration of Krista K. Thomason’s Position

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*Krista Thomason’s account of shame explains the link between shame and violence as something that arises out of a tension between our identity and our self-conception: those things about which we feel shame are part of our identities, but they are not part of our self-conception. She sees violence as an attempt to regain agency and control and overcome shame. Although this is an important trait in shame, to explain violence as a response to the loss of agency is not sufficient. Furthermore, it cannot explain serious self-harm as the result of shame, since such reactions undermined the agency she holds that violence attempts to reclaim. Hence, these features need to be incorporated into a wider account of shame that sees it as a response to the interruption of intentional projects and attempts for coherent agency.*

Violence is among the more problematic moral topics humans face. However, the phenomenon of violence also contributes to making problematic some of the prevalent definitions of shame, such as those advocated by, e.g., Deonna et al.,<sup>1</sup> Manion,<sup>2</sup> and Kekes,<sup>3</sup> all of whom, along different lines, argue for shame as a valuable device for human improvement, albeit not without important qualifications. These contributions all take their point of departure in an understanding of shame as a reaction to the failure to live up to standards, norms, or ideals that we have.<sup>4</sup> The problem with this approach to shame is that it does not seem to be able to take into account the empirical observation that agents may respond to shame with violence, aggression, or self-aggression. Krista Thomason, therefore, argues that this definition, especially in its moral form, is flawed.<sup>5</sup> There are many valuable elements in her analysis and her proposal for an alternative. However, her own proposal also raises some issues that require further discussion. The following discussion is nevertheless not an attempt to vindicate the moral definition but is an attempt

<sup>1</sup> Julien A. Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno, and Fabrice Teroni, *In Defense of Shame: The Faces of an Emotion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Manion, 'The Moral Relevance of Shame', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 39:1 (2002) pp. 73–90.

<sup>3</sup> John Kekes, 'Shame and Moral Progress', *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 13:1 (1988) pp. 282–296.

<sup>4</sup> John Deigh, 'Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique', *Ethics* 93:2 (1983), p. 225 traces this moral definition back to Rawls, in John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1972), pp. 440–446. He also argues that similar definitions are pervasive in the literature. It should be noted, though, that Rawls sees shame as more than a moral phenomenon, as he distinguishes between natural and moral shame. Hence, Rawls can say that “Shame is sometimes a moral feeling” (ibid, 443).

<sup>5</sup> See Krista K. Thomason, 'Shame, Violence, and Morality', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 91:1 (2015), pp. 1–24. Thomason’s argues her position in a more expanded context in Krista K. Thomason, *Naked : The Dark Side of Shame and Moral Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

to develop a broader and more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of shame – which is an enterprise to which Thomason has offered valuable insights.

### **Thomason's Critique and Her Proposal for an Alternative Position**

To act violently is not an obvious or immediately intelligible response to the painful feeling of failing to live up to an ideal. If such ideals or norms are of relevance to the one experiencing shame, then such a reaction seems to contradict or obliterate the previous presuppositions for agency. In other words: the moral definition of shame (which is mainly based on categories that must be considered moral, cf. standards, norms, ideals) cannot explain why such reactions take place. Thomason, therefore, argues that we need a definition of shame that is not based on moral concepts alone, but which nevertheless allows us to address the morally problematic feature of violence as a reaction to failure. Her main claim is that “shame arises out of a tension between our identity and our self-conception: those things about which we feel shame are part of our identities, but they are not part of our self-conception.”<sup>6</sup> Let us consider her position more in detail.

According to Thomason, a philosophical account of moral emotions, among which shame is often included, faces two challenges. The first challenge has to do with explaining how emotion has moral value and what role it plays in the moral life. The other challenge is to provide a good conceptual analysis of shame that also can account how we actually experience it.<sup>7</sup> The second challenge is accordingly not only philosophical but also empirical: a definition is called for that must make sense of the empirical data we have on shame and the experiences of it. This point is where the moral definition of shame fails.

Thomason concludes this line of reasoning with a statement about the empirical falsification of the moral definition of shame:

If shame is the painful feeling of not living up to one's values, it does not make sense that agents would respond to that feeling by doing something morally bad. What is more, doing something violent alleviates feelings of shame. If the traditional view is right, this experience is impossible: doing something morally wrong should make agents feel more shame rather than less.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, Thomason refers to several examples in the literature where people respond to shame by doing something that is violent to themselves or others. Thus, they do something morally wrong in response to shame. Now, since the moral definition sees shame as a painful response to a failure to embody the values we care about, the definition is challenged. According to it, shame should cause us to act with restraint. Alternatively, as we can see in the cases that argue for shame as instigating self-improvement: the moral definition implies the expectation that one attempts to overcome shame by living up to one's ideals and values (or those of others) in the future.<sup>9</sup> However, in the cases Thomason describes, shame inspires the opposite of such self-improvement. The moral definition of shame cannot explain why people act in such a manner. Furthermore, and even more

<sup>6</sup> Thomason, 'Shame, Violence, and Morality', p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Manion, 'The Moral Relevance of Shame', p. 84.

serious, it fails to address the fact that immoral acts can make those who experience shame feel better. In other words: immorality sometimes alleviates shame.<sup>10</sup>

There are different approaches to such instances of alleviating shame by acts of immorality that present us with possible strategies for explaining them without having to give up the moral definition. First, one can claim that shame is sometimes irrational, and accordingly, in exceptional cases, irrationality serves as an explanation. Second, one can also argue that shame, in some cases, is not properly focused. It is properly focused when “(1) we hold ourselves responsible for our failure and (2) when the norm to which we respond is a legitimate one.”<sup>11</sup> Third, irrational shame, defined as shame that leads to acts that are incomprehensible, can also be explained by Gabriele Taylor’s notion of “false shame,” which occurs when we have standards or norms imposed upon us for a brief period, and which are opposed to genuine shame, the latter being the moral kind that occurs when we fail to live up to our ideals.<sup>12</sup> And finally, one can classify cases of reactive and immoral shame in shame-prone individuals with a maladaptive self-image, because “shame-prone individuals are more apt to respond with aggression than those who are not, but this is an issue with shame-proneness and not with shame.”<sup>13</sup> Thomason nevertheless finds no reason for comprehending violent responses to feelings of shame as irrational.<sup>14</sup> That some shame-prone individuals respond to shame with aggression does not mean that anyone who responds to shame with aggression is shame-prone. No empirical data suggest that this may be the case.<sup>15</sup>

Accordingly, Thomason rejects attempts to explain the link between shame and violent responses within the frames of the moral definition. Accounts of shame based on this definition cannot explain why agents are tempted to respond to shame by doing something wrong.<sup>16</sup> She suggests an alternative account or explanation of the relationship between shame and violence that widens the scope and does not see shame as based on ideals and values. Her suggestion is especially fruitful since it therefore also points to the wider conditions for agency and to how shame may be a response to the intentions, orientations, and desires that lie behind the agency that is *interrupted* when it occurs. As we shall see in the following, this interruption is a central element in the alternative into which we try to integrate Thomason’s analysis of shame.

According to Thomason, shame “arises when we feel some aspect of our identities defines us.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, it is the globalization of one aspect of us that comes to dominate our inner realm of self-experience. In order to make this definition work, she has to make a distinction between identity and self-conception: “Those things about which we feel shame

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Thomason, ‘Shame, Violence, and Morality’, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 7. Cf. Gabriele Taylor, ‘Shame, Integrity, and Self-Respect’, *Dignity, Character, and Self-Respect* edited by Robin Dillon (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ibid. p. 7-8. She also points to how these approaches can in fact contribute further to shame, and to people feeling shame about feeling shame: These explanatory approaches “encourage us to find fault with ashamed people. Because the traditional way of understanding shame is about failing to live up to values, we are forced to claim that agents who experience shame about their faces have misguided values and false beliefs. A different account of shame could explain them in a way that does not require attributing mistaken values to agents who feel this way.” Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

are part of our identities, but they are not part of our self-conception."<sup>18</sup> In other words, she contributes further to nuancing the role of shame in the complex architecture of the self. She offers the following example as an illustration:

... an agent feels shame when some aspect of her identity becomes prominent or revealed in the shameful moment and that she feels that this thing defines her as a whole. That is, in episodes of shame she feels defined by, reduced to, or totalized by some feature of herself. I take this defining feature of shame to be necessary rather than sufficient. In other words, someone may find herself in these circumstances and feel something other than shame. My contention is that when an agent reports feeling shame, this feature will be present in the experience. Similarly, if an agent does not yet feel shame, but fears it, it is because she fears that some aspect of herself will define her.<sup>19</sup>

Accordingly, shame is the result of experiences of feeling defined, reduced to, or totalized by some feature of ourselves.<sup>20</sup> This is the reason why she sees experiences of shame as something that involves a tension between our identity and our self-conception. A self-conception is the "self-image," i.e., "how we represent to ourselves the person we take ourselves to be." On the other hand, "our identities extend beyond what we represent to ourselves. An agent's identity is constituted by who she is in a broader sense and can include things that fall outside of her self-conception."<sup>21</sup> In her definition of shame, Thomason thereby sheds light on John Deigh's distinction between authorship and ownership,<sup>22</sup> because shame makes it impossible to disown the feature in question:

Shame is the result of our *inability to disavow* that aspect of ourselves by which we feel defined explains why shame makes us feel so powerless. The thing that causes me shame both overshadows me and yet is me.<sup>23</sup>

The metaphor "overshadow" can be linked to the previously used notion of *interruption*. Thomason uses it in the characterization of shame as experiencing one's lack of agential control over the feature that causes shame: "Shame arises in response to those aspects of ourselves over which we have very limited control."<sup>24</sup> It can be features related to our bodies, our intelligence, our grace (or lack thereof), our families, and our socioeconomic status, all of which are things over which we have little influence:

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Cf. Thomason, *Naked : The Dark Side of Shame and Moral Life*, pp. 101f., where she distinguishes between being defined and feeling defined by one aspect of one's identity.

<sup>19</sup> Thomason, 'Shame, Violence, and Morality', p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 12. On her use of the notion self-conception, see especially Thomason, *Naked : The Dark Side of Shame and Moral Life*, pp. 92ff. Thomason seems to build on G. Taylor, when she speaks of the agent experiencing shame as "becoming aware of the discrepancy between her own assumption about her state or action and a possible detached observer-description of this state or action, and of her further being aware that she ought not to be in a position where she could be so seen, where such a description at least appears to fit." See Gabriele Taylor, *Pride, Shame and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 66.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Deigh.

<sup>23</sup> Thomason, 'Shame, Violence, and Morality', p.13. My italics.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 14

The shame that we feel about these aspects of our identities does not stem from the fact that we falsely believe we are responsible for them and thus failing to live up to ideals. It stems from the fact that they compete with our self-conception in comprising who we are.<sup>25</sup>

Thomason's conception also provides a means for understanding how shame can be correlated to issues like race and gender, which, similarly, is beyond one's ability to control.<sup>26</sup> Such shame may not be due to the person's feeling of failure, but because of their sex or skin color, as they feel overshadowed by this aspect of themselves:

Women and people of color are often thought of as a group rather than as individuals and others attribute thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to them in light of their sex or their skin color. Feeling as though one's identity can be "read off" of one's skin color or sex understandably makes one feel totalized by one's skin color or sex.<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, Thomason presents us with a phenomenology of shame that can account for feelings of being made small: "The feeling of smallness is the feeling of our self-conception being dwarfed by the aspect of our identities that inspires our shame."<sup>28</sup> That which causes shame thus overshadows us, or, as we would say, interrupts us and our self-conception in the way it is articulating itself in agency.

Thomason argues that her model makes it unnecessary to divide shame into kinds: All shame is the result of the lack of coherence between self-conception and identity.<sup>29</sup> She can explain cases of moral shame without reference to a failure to live up to ideals. Shame emerges because someone, despite how she represented her moral character to herself, clearly was capable of doing something she thought she would never do. Shame interrupts or disturbs one's self-conception.<sup>30</sup>

How can this understanding of shame offer a better account of the relationship between shame and violence than the moral definition? Thomason argues that "we respond to shame with violence because it allows us to feel once again defined by our self-conception rather than those aspects of ourselves that fall outside of it." Thus, violent acts should be seen as a protest reaction – I am more than my face, my arms, my failure. It is, in her view, not the destructive element in the violent act that is its main aim, but the attempt to regain control: "Violence is the attempt to regain control, which shame itself has caused one to feel that is lost."<sup>31</sup> She elaborates:

Our bodies, our sexuality, and our socioeconomic statuses are all rich targets for shame that are a part of our identity even though we do not choose them. Shame makes us feel that we are not in control of who we are: parts of my identity define me independently of how I want to define myself. One of the ways of alleviating shame is to do something that regains a sense of control. We try to hide, cover ourselves, or get away from the situation, and these actions can help us regain feelings of control

<sup>25</sup> Thomason, 'Shame, Violence, and Morality', p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* pp. 14f.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* p. 16. Cf. Thomason, *Naked : The Dark Side of Shame and Moral Life*, pp. 87f. On her use of the notion self-conception, see especially pp. 92ff.

<sup>30</sup> Thomason, 'Shame, Violence, and Morality', p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* p. 17.

because we remove from sight the thing we experience as shameful. Violence, anger, and aggression can accomplish the same goal. At first, this looks puzzling because it seems that we might be equally reduced to or totalized by our acts of violence or aggression as much as our faces or bodies.<sup>32</sup>

Even though she sees the violence in question primarily as an act of self-assertion, it is warranted to ask why one cannot regain control and assert oneself in other and less destructive ways? An obvious example of this is how acts of violence may affect or even be directed against those who are weak or not able to protect themselves. Thomason seems to downplay the severe content of acts of shame-caused violence.<sup>33</sup> At least, one would think that violence was performed against the one who made one feel ashamed. However, that is not always the case.

Against this backdrop, shame that results in violence becomes possible to understand as rational. It restores a sense of agency:

My sense of myself as an agent is closely connected to my self-conception. That is, one of the primary ways I think of myself is as an agent: one who chooses acts and makes decisions. Since my sense of my own agency is a large part of my self-conception, when I am seen as an agent, I feel as though my self-conception (not the parts of my identity that fall outside of it) is determining who I am.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, shame's violence is also a protest against becoming "reduced to some feature of our identity that we experience as fixed." The act of violence instigates the one who performs it as something else and more than what he is in his shame. That is the rationale for performing the act. The response from others – even a negative one, implies that the person to whom they are responding is more than the possessor of some shameful feature.<sup>35</sup> Moreover:

becoming the object of resentment by doing something violent helps us to regain the feeling of control we lose in shame because we once again feel that our self-conception determines who we are. Others surely respond negatively to me as the violent agent, but they are no longer seeing me as an object of amusement or fascination. What we seek in shame is not approval, but recognition [...]: Violence gains us that recognition because in asserting our agency, we assert our self-conception.<sup>36</sup>

### **Discussion and an alternative proposal**

People might respond to shame with acts that are violent – against themselves or others. Examples of self-aggression are perhaps most obvious in cases where individuals commit suicide because of shame – as in cases where politicians have been outed for sexual abuse, or Japanese workers have been exposed for doing a bad job resulting in disgrace for their company. Examples of aggression against others I will return to below. There are several

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 17.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. on Breivik below.

<sup>34</sup> Thomason, 'Shame, Violence, and Morality', p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 19.

elements to point to and discuss in Thomason's analysis of the causes of shame. First, we need to ask why violence stands forth as a reasonable way of assuring one's agency? Violence is not only destructive, but is often a mode of acting that is almost guaranteed to diminish the agent in the eyes of others, and thereby, it may cause even more shame. One could easily think of other ways of responding to shame that was not (so) destructive, be it other types of protest, laughing, or simply doing something that shows that you were not accepting being defined only by this or that trait – as in the running for public office if you are a woman or a person of color. Furthermore, since not everyone responds to shame by acting violently, the variation in responses may also suggest that this mode of response is not considered a good solution for everyone. Hence, one should distinguish between what makes acts of violence possible to understand as the least rational response for some candidates, whereas for others it may be the most reasonable choice, i.e., what appears to be founded on good reasons or warrants.

This leads us to a related, second, comment, namely that it is possible to see a moral interest in the struggle for recognition that the violent act implies, according to Thomason. However, a *negative* recognition like the one achieved by a violent act (which is mostly morally condemned by others) is, in the end, most likely going to end up in a new rejection and more shame, due to how the agent is then again defined by the violent act. The most obvious recent example of this is the Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik, whose acts can be understood as the result of narcissistic shame and rage.<sup>37</sup> After his deeds, however, hardly anyone can relate to him without thinking of the shameful acts he performed. It was nevertheless a long discussion about his sanity and to what extent he could be considered as a responsible agent. Thus, it does not seem obvious that violence is a rational response to shame – simply because it is likely to engender more shame, and not overcome it. However, it is still possible to see shame as causing different strategies that articulate struggles for recognition, among which violence can be one.<sup>38</sup>

Thirdly, in the description of self-asserting violence referred above, Thomason seems to emphasize the response of others to these acts as crucial for the experience of overcoming the shame-defining features in the agent. It may explain some instances of violence, but do they also explain self-inflicting violence like suicide? Is it not more plausible to see violence as one painful act that is done in order to numb an experience of another pain, without ascribing too much rationality to it?

Thomason's conception of shame does not lead her to argue for the elimination of shame altogether, still she sees shamelessness (which for her is the alternative) as something that: "reveals an agent's failure to recognize the limitations of her own self-conception".<sup>39</sup> In a more positive assessment, she sees shame as valuable because it can open us up to the perspectives of others: "it means that we do not take our own points of view as the only important ones."<sup>40</sup> It is a way of allowing us to overcome the limitations of our self-conceptions, by disturbing them: "The more authoritative I think my self-

<sup>37</sup> For a careful analysis of different aspects of Breivik's actions, see Arne Johan Vetlesen, *Studier I Ondskap* (Oslo: Universitetsforl., 2014). (Eng.: *Studies in Evil*). As Thomason herself points to, there is much empirical evidence for the connection between narcissism, shame and violence. However, "It is still not clear why shame-prone individuals would be more disposed to violence than others." Thomason, *Naked : The Dark Side of Shame and Moral Life*, p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition : The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 177.

<sup>39</sup> Thomason, 'Shame, Violence, and Morality', p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

conception is, the more prone I am to overlook things that do not fit with it.”<sup>41</sup> She continues:

A liability to shame prevents us from taking the way we see ourselves to be the primary authority in our self-estimation. Feelings of shame arise when we feel defined by some aspect of our identity that is not part of how we see ourselves. Even though that part of our identity is not part of our self-conception, we feel shame because we still acknowledge it as ours.<sup>42</sup>

We can phrase Thomason’s intention here more negatively: We need shame when we are too high on ourselves. Our all-too-prevalent tendency to evaluate ourselves positively is the reason why we need shame to prevent self-inflation: “not because it is morally good to judge ourselves lowly or poorly, but because a liability to it requires that we recognize that we are not always the people we take ourselves to be.”<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, she takes issue with conceptions of shame that sees it as an emotion of self-protection, although she does so without offering any discussion of the positions that argue thus.<sup>44</sup>

Thomason’s proposal nevertheless contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of shame, which the following description tries to summarize: Shame is rooted in the specific relational mode of being in the world that humans exist as since they are intentional beings. Shame is a *composite* phenomenon that involves various combinations of psychological, social, and embodied experiences of self. This point speaks in favor of seeing shame as more than an emotional reaction to *one* set of conditions. Shame is the result of a diversity of types of interplay between different realms of experience in which an agent participates, be it internal psychological, be it socio-cultural, or be it conditions that have to do with one’s body. Let us try to elaborate this from a phenomenological point of view: Because human beings are constituted by their relations and are intentional at the same time, they are directed towards others, towards the world, and involved in different kinds of projects. The notion “projects” is important here, since it captures the intentional character of the self as someone who projects herself into the world and towards different objects or aims that she wants to achieve or accomplish. Intentionality is here understood as an orientation towards something and has to do with how the self manifests an interest that is directed and shaped by the relation to this something.<sup>45</sup> This intentional and projective character of being (which Heidegger calls *Da-sein*, being-towards), is not based only on intellectual deliberations: it may also be rooted in instinctual elements (as in the infant seeking the breast for food) or in desires that emerge as the result of interactions with others (as in Girard’s mimetic desire, which

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p. 21-22.

<sup>45</sup> Another way to express this intentionality is by means of the notion “interest”. In her book on shame Probyn comes close to the description I develop here, especially with regard to relationality and interruption: “Interest constitutes lines of connection between people and ideas. It describes a kind of affective investment we have in others. When, for different reasons, that investment is questioned, and interest interrupted, we feel deprived. Crucially, that’s when we feel shame. That little moment of disappointment— ‘oh, but I was interested’ —is amplified into shame or a deep disappointment in ourselves. Shame marks the break in connection. We have to care about something or someone to feel ashamed when that care and connection— our interest—is not reciprocated.” Probyn, Elspeth. *Blush: Faces of Shame*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005, p. 13.



implies, e.g., that an infant wants to have what another has, simply because the other has it).<sup>46</sup> There is a personal *investment* in these projects, and I hold that this personal investment is a necessary component for shame to appear. I therefore also hold that the instinctual and/or desire-based intentions not only are an expression of the embodied self but that the embodied mode of intentionality that is articulated in the self's projects and projections are of crucial importance for understanding shame. This would imply that to see shame as manifesting a tension between our self-conception and our identity, or as the result of feeling defined or overshadowed by one aspect of one's identity, as Thomason's account suggests, is not sufficient. The intentional projective mode of being implies that the self understands herself in relation to something that is of importance or value to her, something she wants to achieve. What she seeks to achieve is not simply external to her or of instrumental value but is linked to one's sense of self. Thus, she invests herself in these projects, and the projects become expressions of her intentions: she may want to be fed, sexually satisfied, recognized as the bearer of a specific status, admired, considered as skilled, worthy of recognition, etc. Often, such projects turn out to be successful. Then shame is not an option. The self-image or self-conception is maintained and confirmed in agency.

Shame occurs when there is a rupture in, or interruption of, these intentions and desires and the projects they engender – in a way that makes it impossible to enact agency in a way that appears as unproblematic to the agent. Thereby, shame manifests itself in the lack of ability to fulfill the intended project or achieve the desired aim in a coherent manner.<sup>47</sup> Part of this implies a temporary loss of the capacities for agency. Coherence means here that there is an undisturbed consonance between intentions and desires, actions, values, and the projected result of these. The rupture implies that the intended project is blocked or impeded. This can happen in a wide variety of ways, spanning from moral rebuke to ridicule because of hair color. The problematization of the intentional project and the investment therein is not necessarily mediated by the intervention of others: it may be that the person in question realizes that she is not competent to fulfill the intentions or come to see that the project implies a way of appearing that is not desirable

<sup>46</sup> When Merleau-Ponty understands consciousness as a kind of bodily understanding, it can be related to the idea about intentionality's relation to shame that I sketch here. He argues that our exploratory and goal-directed movement itself constitutes a way of being conscious of things and a form of understanding of what is perceived that is not derived from activities of conceptual categorization and inference. In other words: intentionality does not require intellectual deliberation. Siewert, Charles, "Consciousness and Intentionality", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: Spring 2017 Edition, Edited by Edward N. Zalta. Online at <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/consciousness-intentionality/> (accessed Jan. 21, 2020).

<sup>47</sup> On the basis of his affect theory, Silvan Tomkins describes shame as "inevitable for any human being insofar as desire outruns fulfillment sufficiently to attenuate interest without destroying it. The most general sources of shame are the varieties of barriers to the varieties of objects of excitement or enjoyment, which reduce positive affect sufficiently to activate shame, but not so completely that the original object is renounced: "I want, but—" is one essential condition for the activation of shame. Clearly not all barriers suspend the individual between longing and despair. Many barriers either completely reduce interest so that the object is renounced, or heighten interest so that the barrier is removed or overcome. Indeed, shame itself may eventually also prompt either renunciation or counteraction inasmuch as successful renunciation or counteraction will reduce the feeling of shame. We are saying only that whatever the eventual outcome of the arousal of shame may be, shame is activated by the incomplete reduction of interest—excitement or enjoyment—joy, rather than by the heightening of interest or joy or by the complete reduction of interest or joy." See Silvan S. Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness [Electronic Resource] : The Complete Edition, Ebook Central* (New York: Springer Pub., 2008). Book 2, Vol. 1, p. 388.

after all. However, it may also be that others react to the project in ways that engender shame, as when the infant is rejected in her intention to be fed, or when one realizes that the project one is investing in is considered by others to be morally repugnant.

The interruption of the intentional project that engenders shame is, therefore, more than an experience of failure to achieve the desired good. Accordingly, shame is not connected exclusively to the experience of being unable to reach the desired good. It may also be constituted by other things than the split between self-conception and identity. It may comprise an experience of failure or lack of ability to act in ways that can lead to the desired result, or it may be an experience of the desire or intention itself as failed, or as considered by others as objectionable. The *frustration* of the desire that leads to the intentional projects is among the elements that allow us to see shame as an embodied phenomenon: shame could not occur if there was not an agent that had intentions fueled by a desire denied for the assumed good. It can be argued that such frustration is the cause of violent responses and what results in aggression against a (perceived or imagined) interrupter of the coherent agency.

Thomason's understanding of shame can nevertheless be incorporated into this sketch because she so clearly underscores the loss of control and the need for overcoming a mere moral definition of shame. She also underscores the role of the self-conception or self-image. Against the backdrop of the sketch above, it is also possible to account for violent reactions engendered by shame, without having to declare them as rational or assess them from a moral point of view. Shame is experienced as an interruption in which the experience of failure is globalized when it takes over the self. The interruption manifests the distinction between intention/project and realization, in a way that may, but need not, be manifested in the split between self-conception and identity (Thomason). The concomitant lack of control furthermore manifests itself in the lack of coherent agency. As a result, the self withdraws from the project because it experiences the vulnerable character of its own investment – and this is something that scholars may see as the self-protective feature of shame, but we do better in assuming that such protective moves are results of shame and not a feature that belongs to shame itself.

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