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## Shame, a landmark of education or a sign of its weaknesses? Case study

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### Abstract

Any social relationship has a moral substrate. Among the moral feelings that maintain and protect interpersonal relationships there is also shame. In reasonable amounts, shame contributes to the establishment, persistence and operation of a healthy secure social environment of mutual respect and self-respect. The study analyses the attitude of high school teachers (from Prahova County) towards the feeling of shame and its place and role in shaping the new generation. In school shame can be learned and instilled indirectly by the civilized behaviour of the teacher.

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### 1. Introduction

The depth and beauty of human relationship dwells, firstly, on its moral scaffolding. This gives it humanizing strength. As we know, one of the main functions of school/ education is to develop, cultivate and protect the moral basis of inter-human relationship. Among the feelings with a strong moral content is also shame. It cannot be avoided or denied by psychologists, sociologists or pedagogues.

Thus, for Andreas & Andreas (2008), shame is “an answer to the breach of standards of another person” (p. 197). Therefore, in their vision, “when we feel shame usually we fear being rejected or abandoned for these

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breaches of external standards, be they real or imaginary” (Andreas & Andreas, 2008, p.197). As we can see, the two specialists in Neuro-Linguistic Programming insist on two aspects: first, on the fact that shame determines us to subordinate (our behaviour) to *a certain person*; then, on the fact that the feeling of shame involves comparison to *external* standards. Therefore, it is as if shame would depend on the requirements and norms of an individual (to which the ashamed relates) and, also it is as if eternal standards are decisive. Andreas & Andreas (2008) come to the conclusion that by shame we remain dependent on someone else and – this way – we “depend on this someone for a feeling of identity”. It emerges that, in the opinion of the two North-American researchers, shame is eroding our autonomy, freedom and individuality.

In his turn, Cyrulnik (2012) states that the feeling of shame is a proof of morality that enlivens us (p. 12). He notes that “the ashamed on is an anti-Narcissus, his weapon being altruism (Cyrulnik, 2012, p. 24). The subject suffering from this uncomfortable feeling (that provokes “a conscious indisposition”, (p. 75) „stops his/ her own narcissist bleeding. Altruism and moral unite to kill the pervert Narcissus” (p. 24). The psychoanalyst remarks that “the minor shames or daily life prove that, in certain inter-subjective conditions, self-esteem can receive some blows. These short alterations reveal the development of empathy, of respect towards the representations of another, the point of departure for moral: «what will he/she think of me?»” (p. 76) and the emergence of an amiable cohabitation. In short, we cannot afford (simply) anything when we are forced to live together.

By contrast, the unashamed have too weak a moral structure (even non-existent), are careless, have little (or no) scruples; they are not aware of actions that are wrong, offensive, disturbing, defiant, stupid and rude. The unashamed person – warns the famous British philosopher and publicist Scruton (2011) – is he/she who lives beyond judgment and only within the present moment – „cannot love or be loved. That person lives in a solipsistic void where there is neither meaning nor joy, but, at best, only pleasure” (p. 100). After all, „without shame and culpability our relationships would be only pure violence”, declares Cyrulnik (2012) ( p. 76).

As in the case of the other previously analysed authors, for Lazarus (2011) shame has at its basis social relations. More precisely, it is about the behaviour manifested in relation to another „that disagrees, whether that individual exists in reality, is suspected or is just an imaginary, fantastic presence” (p. 321). Irrespective of the state – be it real or imagined – of another, shame helps the individual „succeed in complying with the standard imposed by the Ideal Self in the future” (p. 322).

As we can see, there emerges that the North American psychologist stresses more the comparison of the ashamed individual to the idealized (and internalized) image of self than on the representation of others regarding him/her. This leads to the conclusion that – in reasonable amounts – the feeling of guilt does not directly and automatically trigger dependence on another (even if the risk stays high). The feeling of shame puts the individual firstly in an exigent relation with him/ herself and, secondly, in a harmonious relation with the demands and requests (both fluctuant and egocentric) of others. Different from other researchers preoccupied by the feeling of shame, Lazarus (2011) highlights that (along with sadness, anger, envy and fear) this feeling is specific to the adaptive effort of the human being. As guilt, shame „encourages the pro-social behaviour corresponding to high social standards” (p. 326). It is highly important for „the intra-psychoic and social functioning” (p. 261).

As for the sociologist Scheff (2000, *apud* Jderu, 2012), he notices the importance of the feeling of shame „in maintaining and keeping social connections” (pp. 71-72). This is deemed essential for the engagement and stability of interpersonal relationships.

Summarizing, we can say that, within reasonable limits, shame is a feeling that forces us to be attentive to our thoughts, words, attitudes and behaviours. It shows us what our measure is in a certain professional, institutional and social context. It encourages us to have a decent language and behavior; it is the feeling that tells us when to stop, where we can no longer afford a certain behavior. Shame (always) draws our attention that we are not alone in the world. Without the necessary dose of shame, our social life would be invaded by nerve, cheekiness, vulgarity, opportunism, upstartism, shamelessness and imposture.

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