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ARTICLE

White Femininity and Conspicuous Shame

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Abstract

As Elizabeth Spelman insists, "the history of woman's inhumanity to woman is shameful" (Spelman 1991). If experiences of shame often function as a moral hinge between past and future, integrating the past in ways that motivate creative self and social revisioning, then this affective acknowledgment is crucial for social justice in feminist futures. As I argue, it is also made fraught by the specific ways that women experience the intersections of privilege and oppression in relation to shame. This paper provides a close reading of Elizabeth Spelman's 1991 essay on shame "The feeling of virtue and the virtue of feeling" as a vehicle for outlining a moral and social problem: how displays of racial shame by white women, while ostensibly a mode of moral attentiveness and responsibility, sometimes function to deflect moral responsibility and assert moral privilege. Engaging with scholarship in feminist philosophy and affect theory, this article examines how white women learn to convert shame into displays of power in the form of racial innocence, masochism, and vulnerability. Drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt, I argue that public displays of shame strip its political potential and risk further entrenching this form of unearned moral privilege.

1. Introduction

In their 2021 article, Jennifer Nash and Samantha Pinto memorably describe contemporary feminism as an erotic "racial bondage" in which "Black women act as racial dominatrixes who inflict a kind of racial wounding on white women, reminding them again and again of their bad politics—and how their 'job' is to take it, to confess it, to revel in their abjection and abdication of intellectual power" (Nash and Pinto 2021, 892). The authors explore how Black feminist rage, which they understand as a primary mode of Black feminist theorizing today, relates to and, perhaps problematically, depends on white women as the monolithic object of this rage. Indeed, while white women have long been the "bad object" of feminism, they note that exactly *how* this "bad object" status has been performed and taken up in feminist theorizing has shifted in the past several decades. While feminists of the 1970s–1990s were often engaged in what the authors call "scholarly self-work," contemporary feminism is more concerned with "*emotional* self-work" (my emphasis) which takes increasingly public-facing forms, shaped by social

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media and "call-out culture." Reflecting on "white women's tears" as a "shaming meme" eagerly consumed by white feminists, Nash and Pinto write that, "[The] performance of contemporary feminist politics as racial bondage constitutes an understudied site of pleasurable performance for Black women and the flip side of pleasurable experiences of racial masochism for white women" (Nash and Pinto 2021, 892–93).

In what follows, I examine the "flip side" of "intelligent rage" that Nash and Pinto draw attention to, using this as a jumping-off point to inquire further into "racial masochism," its connection to the history and contemporary performance of white femininity, and the specific emotional dynamics at work there, especially in public-facing enactments. While I do not attempt to reach any conclusions about how the performance of racial masochism relates back to, and perhaps perpetuates, the relationship of "racial bondage" that Nash and Pinto describe, or what this might mean for feminist theory and activism moving forward, I do hope to shed additional light on the affective terrain on which it unfolds. A preliminary question: If rage becomes the primary instrument of pleasurable "racial wounding," then what name should we give the "pleasurable experiences of racial masochism" that such rage evokes in white women? I suggest *shame* as the obvious, yet problematic, answer to this question and examine the implications of white feminist shame for our highly mediatized present.[1]

How does an unambiguously painful experience like shame, which one typically goes to great lengths to avoid, become pleasurable? What is the source of this pleasure, what does it mean, and how does it function? I am not the first to notice a linkage between shame and sado-masochism. In Jean-Paul Sartre's well-known account of shame, for instance, the self–Other dynamic is explicitly posed as sado-masochistic (see Guenther 2011, 26–28). But where Sartre's account of shame imagines a generic, disembodied, and ahistorical subject (Woodward 2000, 213), the aim of this article is to describe white, feminine embodiments of racialized shame in order to shed additional light on a moral and political problem: how *displays of racial shame by white women, while ostensibly a mode of moral attentiveness and responsibility, sometimes function to deflect moral responsibility and assert moral privilege*. Like in other forms of sado-masochism, the racial masochist derives both pleasure and power through her subjection. As I will argue, this pleasure-power stems from the cultivation of an unearned moral privilege via performances of moral shame.

First, a few notes on my approach. I emphasize the "performance" of shame deliberately throughout, not to imply that white shame is somehow inauthentic or consciously studied (in general, I leave the question of "authenticity" aside), but rather to call on a performative theory that helps make sense of the ways that white women are engaged in citing, repeating, and thereby reproducing, particular norms of white femininity, often unconsciously, when they "wield emotion to secure ideas of their own innocence" (Nash and Pinto 2021, 890).[2] This involves the cultivation of a complex gendered and racialized form of virtue with its own erotic charge related to notions of

[1]While Nash and Pinto's genealogy of intelligent rage (2021), quite fittingly, "chart[s] a course through Black feminist thought" (885), my examination of white feminist shame primarily engages the work of white feminist thinkers and their critics.

[2]For my understanding of the relationship between shame and performativity, as well as the distinct lineages of theories of performativity (speech act theory and theater studies), I am particularly indebted to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work in *Touching feeling: Affect, pedagogy, performativity* (2003). Judith Butler's theory (1988) provides the notions of citation and repetition.

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purity and vulnerability, as well as innocence. I emphasize both the iterative notion of performativity and the contingent safety of masochism, understood as more or less benign,[3] to suggest one sense in which shame is a social, historically sedimented emotion. What we feel shame about, how we experience it, and how we express it depend on how we are socially situated. Exploring these questions requires a social theory as much as a psychological one. Since I am largely focused on experiences of *moral* shame, cognitive theories of emotion (described in section 2 below) that elucidate the role of judgment and evaluation central to moral shame are especially useful. Yet as I argue in section 3, the *performative dimensions* of shame—not excluding experiences of moral shame—cannot be understood outside relations of power that are socially, culturally, and historically sedimented. To get at these dynamics, as well as issues like motivation and habit, which frequently fly under our conscious radar, the work of affect theorists and critical phenomenologists is most helpful. Thus, my approach to shame brings together cognitive theories and affect theories of shame. While these different approaches contain different emphases, they are not incompatible.[4] Finally, while Nash and Pinto are specifically concerned with how dynamics of rage and shame/guilt play out in feminist scholarship and (to a lesser extent) activism, my scope is a bit wider. I am interested in the shame experiences of white women related to privilege and racial injustice, whether or not those experiences respond directly to expressions of Black feminist rage, in scholarship or otherwise.

There is a lively debate concerning what role white shame plays and *should* play in movements for racial justice. Is shame always harmful and regressive or could it be potentially transformative? For whom can shame be (positively) transformative? In the 2015 book *The future of whiteness,* Linda Martín Alcoff wonders, "what motivates whites, as whites, to reject white supremacy," and subsequently, what is the basis upon which "whites might join a coalition for social change for their own reasons" (Alcoff 2015, 175; see also Alcoff 1998)? Turning to shame, she tentatively explores a moral emotion which, on her view, may have the power to shake up and transform whiteness itself. Precisely because shame is a negative, painful emotion, she argues, it *might* serve as a motivator for whites to engage in the kind of self-work necessary to transform whiteness (for other endorsements of moral shame in white supremacist and settler-colonial societies see Fisher 1984; Vice 2010; Bailey 2011; Shotwell 2011).

While some philosophers and moral psychologists agree with Alcoff's suggestion that shame can be powerfully motivational and possibly transformational, there is also pessimism about *how* and in *which directions* shame is most likely to move us, as well as reasonable suspicion concerning the potentially narcissistic elements of shame (shame as "boomerang emotion" that recenters whiteness; Weiss 2018, 545). Shannon Sullivan's

[3]"Benign masochism" refers to enjoyment elicited from negative sensations and emotions that becomes possible when experienced from a position of safety, i.e., when one is assured that no real harm will come to them (Rozin et al. 2013).

[4]Kathleen Woodward's essay (2000) on traumatic shame suggests the limits of cognitive theories of emotion that emphasize shame's epistemic function by tracing how chronic forms of shame like racial shame (for instance in cases of racial humiliation and persistent discrimination) cannot be transformed into knowledge or transcended (228). In some cases, she argues, "affect blocks thought" (233). Woodward's work not only contributes to understanding different registers of shame (moral and non-moral) and different temporalities and trajectories (episodic and chronic), it suggests the limitations of a cognitive theory of emotion taken on its own. (On the other hand, an affect theory, on its own, would not elucidate the moral register concerned with judgment.)

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critical assessment of white shame (specifically the shame feelings of white, middle-class, liberals) in *Good white people* (2014) is representative of many of these concerns (see also Ahmed 2015; Milazzo 2017; Kizuk 2020). While acknowledging that shame can be motivational for whites, Sullivan worries that the contagious nature of negative affects like shame creates a toxic environment that applies additional pressures to nonwhites and further, is not conducive for white self- and social-transformation because it is too often experienced as devitalizing and isolating rather than motivating (Sullivan 2014, 121–23).

My own view sits somewhere between these two positions. In what follows, I explain how the logic of shame can indeed facilitate a deep self-knowing and ethical agency, a view that finds support in contemporary phenomenology and feminist philosophy (Kruks 2005; Probyn 2005; Shotwell 2007, 2011; Vice 2010; Guenther 2011; Steinbock 2014; Alcoff 2015; Weiss 2018). My contribution to this literature is to explore problems unique to feminine performances of white shame that complicate optimism about whether shame can contribute to positive social change on issues relating to race. In section 2, I perform a close reading of Elizabeth Spelman's 1991 essay "The virtue of feeling and the feeling of virtue" as a vehicle for providing a clearer outline of my account of shame, and for describing the problematic that white femininity presents for optimism about shame and racial justice. In section 3, I provide a preliminary analysis of the power dynamics that converge in experiences of shame in general, and in forms of white shame in particular. Section 4 returns to issues raised in Spelman's essay, asking how we might detach the "feeling of shame" from the "feeling of virtue," given our contemporary social media landscape, including concerns about "virtue signaling" and "performative allyship." Here, drawing on Hannah Arendt's insights regarding emotion and publicity, I conclude by offering a critique of public-facing shame—what I call "conspicuous shame"—arguing that shame requires a kind of privacy to retain its very nature and transformative potential.

2. Spelman on white women and shame

In her 1991 essay on shame, "The feeling of virtue and the virtue of feeling," Elizabeth Spelman argues that how women treat women is the most significant and most neglected issue that feminist ethics needs to confront. As she puts it, "[Feminist] interest in exploring an 'ethics of care' and in emphasizing the importance of emotions in our lives paradoxically has encouraged us to *ignore* the absence of care by women for other women, to *disregard* the presence of 'negative' emotional reactions by women to other women" (Spelman 1991, 219–20; emphasis original). One reason Spelman provides for this is the difficulty that white feminists have in recognizing our multiple social locations as both oppressor and oppressed, victim and victimizer (see also Kruks 2005). As I will argue, Spelman's account exposes these lacunae by posing shame as a logic and mode of responsibility that does not presuppose white femininity as morally innocent or "intact," instead attending to the moral and other injuries perpetrated by white women that harm women of color.

In the essay, Spelman argues that emotions reveal "who and what we care or don't care about" (Spelman 1991, 220). This claim relies on a *cognitive* theory of emotion. As Spelman explains, "Though cognitivists differ among each other on certain details, they share the conviction that emotions cannot simply be feelings, like churnings in our stomachs, flutterings of our hearts, chokings in our throats" (Spelman 1991, 221; see also Sullivan 2015, 30). According to "cognitive theories" of emotion, then, emotions involve

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a "kind of logic"—that is, a "cognitive" component—that makes it possible to discriminate between different emotions *and* between the objects of those emotions. Attributing a discernible logic to emotions allows us to ask: What does the presence of a particular emotion (rather than another) reveal about our tacit beliefs and values? And how do different emotions "imply different notions of responsibility and depth of concern" (Spelman 1991, 221)? If a man is caught abusing his wife and responds with *embarrassment,* this reveals that, as Spelman argues, "his concern is not about what he is doing to his wife but about the kind of impression he is making on others" (Spelman 1991, 223). This is because the *logic* of embarrassment involves a negative judgment of oneself as a result of being exposed before others. The negative judgment that embarrassment communicates is not tied to the behavior itself, which the embarrassed man may continue to believe is just fine, but only to being seen doing it.

Yet Spelman's explicit references to Aristotle in "Virtue of feeling" suggest that she believes emotions do more than merely reveal our implicit beliefs and values. For Aristotle, moral virtue not only involves doing the right thing, but feeling the right emotion "at the right times, with reference to the right objects, toward the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.6). The cognitivist view that emotions involve judgments clarifies, and even validates, how emotions can accurately describe and appraise real conditions—validates, for instance, the anger of subordinated groups by conceiving anger as a reasonable assessment of objective conditions as well as a reasonable response to those conditions (not merely a directionless, irrational urge or bodily sensation without broader moral significance). What Spelman's Aristotelianism adds is a normative, justice-oriented claim that extends to how one *ought* to feel in particular, context-dependent situations—for instance, that one not only has the *right* to feel anger in response to the unjust or harmful actions of another, but one *ought to* feel anger (see also Spelman 1989). For Spelman then, the ability to distinguish between related emotions is *morally* significant and feeling the right emotion in the right way is *virtuous*: not feeling the appropriate emotion in a given circumstance is a *moral failure* reflecting a lack of moral virtue and a form of ignorance. Returning to the embarrassed abuser, Spelman's account of emotion not only allows us to elucidate the specific contours of the abuser's moral relationships and beliefs, but to normatively *judge* those beliefs—that is, to regard embarrassment as inappropriate and reflective of bad moral character.

Clearly embarrassment is not the appropriate response to serious moral wrongdoing—indeed, it lacks moral content. Returning to the history of "woman's inhumanity to woman," the second half of Spelman's essay directly asks what kind of emotional expression appropriately responds to the harms inflicted by white racism, in particular the harms that white women have inflicted on women of color.

The best candidates, guilt and shame, share a close family resemblance but suggest different notions of responsibility, concern, and self-conception. While both can function as moral assessments of one's conduct, only shame relates this judgment about conduct to a deeper evaluation of the self. Here, Spelman agrees with much of the philosophical literature on these two emotions. While guilt acknowledges wrongdoing, this wrong is understood as an aberration: "[In] feeling guilt I am certainly judging myself adversely, but my situation is not hopeless—I am not less of a person than I thought I was. I simply did something I think I shouldn't have done." (Spelman 1991, 224). The guilty person is an individual agent whose responsibility remains local, tied to a particular deed. In guilt, I act to repair the harm done in order to redeem my sense of

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myself as a "morally intact person." That is, to return to a blot-free condition of moral purity and innocence.

Shame, on the other hand, bears not just on what I've *done*, but on *who I am*—how what I have done or failed to do reveals something deeper about my basic constitution (Spelman 1991, 225). Indeed, shame reveals that the self is not morally pure, and perhaps not even unitary. The shameful deed is not an aberration, as it is with guilt. Rather, it is revelatory of the person I am, "even though [I] had thought or hoped that [I] was someone else, someone better than [I] turned out to be" (Spelman 1991, 226). This suggests that shame opens up a split between two selves: who I thought I was and who I must now acknowledge myself to be. As the phenomenologist Anthony Steinbock suggests, this split (or "diremption") creates an opportunity for both agency and creativity that allows for transformative self-work (Steinbock 2014, 73). Although not always and not for certain, this is the sense in which shame *may* serve as a visceral interruption that opens a space for moral self-critique, revision, and reorientation (Shotwell 2011, 90).

How does this parsing of guilt and shame relate to Spelman's larger question of how white women ought to feel about racial privilege and injustice? Thinking with Spelman, we can see how expressions of "white guilt" imply that "it is possible for me to think of a part of myself as not living up to what the rest of me stands for" (Spelman 1991, 227). This encourages false assumptions about how whiteness, as a constitutive dimension of the embodied experience of white people, actually functions. While guilt is "local" and implies individual *accountability* for specific deeds, *shame* involves a more expansive *responsibility*.[5] As Alexis Shotwell writes: "If shame is in fact an always-relational, identificatory affect, white people's shame response to racism may mark and create a kind of responsible attention to racial formation as structural and systemic within the context of changing who and how we are in relation to race" (Shotwell 2011, 86; see also Kizuk 2020, 165). In shame, we are called to be responsible for more than an individual deed.[6] In *white* shame, white privilege is posited—accurately—as structural, historically sedimented, and as constitutive of the self. Consequently, there is no prospective return, as there is in guilt, to an innocent or blemish-free white self.

On Spelman's account, then, shame is a painful emotion of moral self-assessment that implicates the whole self, understood as socially and historically constituted. Judging ourselves to be thus flawed, she argues, can be powerfully motivational and even personally and politically transformational:

> I do not see how women who enjoy privileged status over other women ... can come to think it desirable to lose that privilege (by force or consent) unless they see it not only as producing harm to other women but also as being deeply disfiguring

[5]Judith Butler's reading of Nietzsche's "bad conscience" in *Giving an account of oneself* (2005) develops a distinction between "accountability" and "responsibility" as they relate to theories of the self, agency, and morality that I sense is deeply relevant here. Though I don't have space to engage with the distinction that Butler develops, it strikes me as eminently worthwhile to explore the relationship between shame and responsibility further.

[6]Several theorists argue that shame, rather than guilt, better captures the necessary moral attention and responsibility required in white supremacist and settler colonial contexts. Since guilt is tied to actions, it is not an appropriate way of acknowledging historical injustice, which frequently takes the form of unchosen (i.e., nonvoluntary) privileges and benefits in the present. As Samantha Vice (2010) writes, "Now, shame seems an appropriate response to the recognition of one's unavoidable privilege. For white privilege does not attach merely to what one does or how one benefits, but, more fundamentally, to who one is" (329).

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> to themselves. . . . Seeing myself as deeply disfigured by privilege and desiring to do something about it may be impossible without my feeling shame. The degree to which I am moved to undermine systems of privilege is closely tied to the degree to which I feel shame at the sort of person such privilege makes me or allows me to be. (Spelman 1991, 228)

It is unclear from what Spelman suggests here whether she believes the motivational drive exhibited in white women's shame about racial privilege arises from a desire for communion (i.e., to repair a valuable social bond), as psychologist Silvan Tomkins's well-known account of shame suggests (Tomkins 1995), or from a recognition of moral disfigurement and a desire to return to a position of positive self-regard. If the latter, does it follow that shame is ultimately a narcissistic or fundamentally egoistic emotion?[7]

I'll say more about the narcissistic elements of shame in section 4. For now, I will clarify that, while shame may be a subjective experience, it is a deeply social emotion, playing an important role in the development of self-regard and the process of self-formation. According to Sartre's influential theory, shame reveals the fundamental structure of subjectivity as *inter*subjective—we become conscious of ourselves as exposed to the gaze of others and evaluate ourselves from their perspective (Sartre 1984; for more on Sartre's theory of shame see Anderson 2021; Guenther 2011; La Caze 2013; Woodward 2000). Frequently, we find ourselves in the presence of the other by internalizing a set of social norms and values: when we transgress these, whether another person is around to witness the transgression or not, we might feel shame. In each case, experiences of shame confirm that others—and what others believe and value—matter to us and ultimately shape us. Importantly, then, the norms and standards that we fail to live up to are never just *our* norms and standards. They are shared and deeply contested norms underlying a social sense of self.[8] Our "self-assessments" are the work of this social sense and through them we stand to learn more about the interrelated structures that form and de-form us, including structures of injustice and inequality.

We are unlikely to get a full understanding of the effects of injustice and oppression, however, without attending to the non-conscious dimensions of shame. Not only do cognitive theories like Spelman's privilege belief and judgment, thereby deemphasizing the relevance of what Alexis Shotwell calls "implicit understanding," that is, forms of non-propositional knowledge, including affective experience, that contribute to how we move through the world (Shotwell 2011), they don't do a good job of explaining the kinds of unmerited shame prevalent in unequal societies, for instance chronic shame experienced by gender and racial minorities. Often, shame is not a judgment or belief,

[7]Certainly, this invites the valid critique that shame directs concern toward the self, obfuscating the material impacts of shameworthy conduct, privilege, and complicity within systems of racial injustice (which are precisely structural, not individual, and perhaps not primarily moral). Milazzo (2017) makes precisely this point when she critiques Samantha Vice's argument that white South Africans ought to feel shame in her viral essay "How do I live in this strange place?" (2010). Milazzo's critique provides an important corrective, recentering the material dimensions of racial hierarchy and injustice, and challenging Vice's focus on white emotional self-regard as the locus of attention and harm. Yet Milazzo and others who are skeptical of shame, its pro-social potential, and motivational basis, tend to conceive of shame as primarily egoistic. My account challenges this latter assumption.

[8]As Cheshire Calhoun argues, "In shame, we see ourselves through others' eyes and measure ourselves by standards that we may not share" (Calhoun 2004, 128). Morality is a social practice in which many participate, according to Calhoun, and our vulnerability to shame has to do with the fact that we share a moral practice with others whose views come to have a "practical weight" (as in cases of shame) (139–42).

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Sandra Bartky argues, but a "pervasive affective attunement to the social environment" (Bartky 1990, 85). Along with conscious judgments and beliefs, one must attend to the signals and messages that operate below the "level of explicit awareness" (Bartky 1990, 95). Doing so reveals *how shame takes on specific forms and functions as an effect of power*.

3. Shame and power

Shame is very often about power and oppression, not moral conduct (see Bartky 1990; Woodward 2000; Locke 2007; La Caze 2013; Willett 2017; Tobin and Moon 2019; Burke and Brown 2021). Indeed, as David Haekwon Kim writes, shame "might be a result of coming into a world in which one is in some sense a failed or diminished subject well before arriving in it, precisely like the situation faced by the racially stigmatized." This shame is felt, painfully, as "the inward resonance of a suppressive social order" (Kim 2014, 116). As Shannon Sullivan rightly points out, we need more work that explores how emotions function differently or tend toward different outcomes in relationship to social hierarchies (Sullivan 2014, 136). If shame is differentially distributed, marking members of some social groups as more prone to shame and its deleterious effects than others, then the flip side of this is that members of dominant groups experience far less shame than they ought to (La Caze 2013; Weiss 2018). In this section, I explore how shame relates to intersecting hierarchies of oppression and privilege. In particular, I develop an account of how background conditions of racial privilege shape the form and function of pervasive gendered shame for white women.

Examining the literature on shame and masculinity provides a good starting point for approaching these issues. The philosopher Bonnie Mann's work reveals that, while shame can have painful and violent consequences for people of all genders, it plays a specific role in the formation of dominant masculinity, pointing out that, especially in adolescence, boys are made masculine and patriarchal through the shaming inflicted by their peers, which is often deflected onto other targets, principally women and girls (Mann 2014, 109; see also Woodward 2000). Under patriarchal masculinity, Mann argues, men tend to convert shame into outward displays of power and aggression.[9] She calls these "shame-reactions": when the subject converts shame into some other emotion, in this case, rage, hostility, or contempt (Mann 2014, 116). "Shame-reaction" is a helpful concept because it provides a mechanism for understanding the various techniques and strategies for distancing, denial, and repression that subjects develop in relation to shame, while also clarifying the clear aim of these techniques, namely, the preservation or assertion of power. And yet this analysis of shame, I would argue, does not suggest that all shame produces socially toxic effects. Instead, it observes that shame *becomes* destructive when it is not properly taken up, understood, and worked through *as* shame, that is, when shame itself is by-passed and converted into so-called "shame-reactions" like rage. This psychosocial process of conversion not only avoids painful

[9]Unlike Sullivan (2014) and Mann (2014), I don't view related emotions like rage as forms of shame, per se, but as shame-motivated or inflected reactions. If we lose some distinction here, then it is difficult to see how converting or sublimating shame into (sometimes closely) related emotions constitute strategies for avoiding/*not* feeling shame. It is also more difficult to recognize the normative dimensions of those strategies. The conversion of shame into contempt or anger has a different moral valence depending on who is doing the converting.

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shame-feelings, but it preempts a critical analysis of the origins of the shame in question, its meaning and function, and ultimately its legitimacy.

When shame does not receive proper uptake—when it is converted, repressed, denied—we might avoid pain, but we will likely inflict harm. Kate Manne's work in *Down girl* further illustrates the logic of misogyny at work in masculinist forms of what she terms "entitled shame" (shame that emerges against background conditions of entitlement), pointing to examples of white, heterosexual, upper- and middle-class men who violently murder their families as a way of "dealing with" (i.e., retreating from) the shame of failure or vulnerability as defined by dominant scripts of Western masculinity (Manne 2018, 121). While vulnerability is a feature of all embodied existence, evidence of vulnerability is overwhelmingly viewed as a hated and *shameful* signifier of femininity in particular (which must be overcome, disavowed, or destroyed).[10] For the forms of masculinity that these authors describe, shame is at once inevitable and intolerable, necessitating the displacement-conversions discussed above.

How do these dynamics manifest in subjects who *lack* gender privilege? In a later project, "Femininity, shame, and redemption," Bonnie Mann shifts her focus to women and girls. Shame, Mann argues, is a "structural [component] of the material relations of domination and exploitation that continue to mark gendered existence in our world." Thus, shame has been and continues to be a significant feature of feminine subject formation. What's new, she argues, are the ways that this emotion (in form and function) has "undergone certain modifications" in the West's highly mediatized, late-capitalist present (Mann 2018, 403). Drawing on Sandra Bartky, Mann points out that to refer to shame as "gendered" is not just to acknowledge that women are generally more shame-prone than men, but to make a more substantive distinction about the experience and meaning of shame for women and girls "in relation to their total psychic situation and general social location" (Mann 2018, 410). "Shame," Mann writes, "enters the lives of men against a background assumption of male power in the form of singular shame-events. Shame in the lives of women is more like an atmosphere or environment that affectively shades the subject-world relation without reprieve" (409). While "shame-event" presupposes an otherwise shame-less condition and offers the possibility of moral redemption—the potential for an "ameliorative outcome"—the latter case, in which shame is a pervasive affective attunement to the world (Bartky's language), presents very different outlooks and possibilities. For oppressed groups, shame-motivated "self-revision" is not an opportunity for moral self-improvement, as it is for members of dominant groups, but a function and effect of oppression (see Kim 2014). Mann's article is concerned with how our present social media landscape has introduced new dynamics of shame and redemption, where women and girls engage in bodily self-display (e.g., "sending nudes") as an aspiration to power that interrupts the supposedly totalizing and pervasive nature of gendered shame (Mann 2018, 413). But what the wider scope of the problem suggests is that while girls exercise agency when they grasp at and negotiate power, this is still occurring within a context of male entitlement and supremacy and is thus a limited form of agency.

These power dynamics, then, not only bear on the social distribution of shame (i.e., that some individuals, because of their social position, are more *prone* to shame than others), they shape the form and function of shame for those same individuals.

[10]The conversion of shame into rage and violence seems to be a peculiarity of heteropatriarchal masculinities: hegemonic masculinity is constituted in opposition to vulnerability and weakness understood as feminine traits, gendering shame by constituting femininity itself as shameful.

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As we've seen, shame carries different meanings and enables different modes of response for entitled men than for women. Turning to power dynamics among women, we can ask: How might "entitled shame" manifest in racially privileged women? Sandra Bartky's work provides a clue. In "Shame and gender," Bartky describes women's "rituals of self-shaming" in classroom settings when handing over written work to herself, the instructor:

> It became clear to me that many women students were ashamed of their written work and ashamed to express their ideas in a straightforward and open manner. Indeed, it would not be unusual for a student just to say, "I'm really ashamed of this paper," while handing it to me. I have no doubt that these utterances were accurate reports of feeling. At the same time, I suspect that they were rituals of self-shaming undertaken in order to bear more easily a shaming they anticipated from me: An ordeal is often easier to endure if we are able to choose its time and place. These apologies served also to underscore the students' desire to do well in the course, hence, to get into my good books and, by arousing pity in me for such evident emotional distress, to soften my judgment of their work. (Bartky 1990, 89)

Notice that the point at issue is not whether the shame experienced is authentic ("I have no doubt that these utterances were accurate reports of feeling"), but rather, how shame is performed. I linger with Bartky's example to illuminate, in a preliminary way, that and how *white women develop strategies for leveraging gendered shame as power/control. This occurs in and through the performance of shame and the public responses it elicits, rather than through shame-reactions that convert shame into other emotions.*

I take it that the kind of preemptive-self-shaming-as-distancing described in Bartky's example is a common and mostly unconscious strategy among white women (Bartky refers to women in general) precisely because it involves performing emotional distress in order to arouse pity and soften judgment.[11] Emotional distress is only reliably met with pity if enacted by white women, because distress is a way of performatively citing and securing moral goods already associated with white femininity, such as innocence, vulnerability, purity. As Melissa Harris-Perry has shown, while Black women and girls are "structurally positioned to experience shame more frequently," since they inhabit multiple stigmatized identities and are more likely to be poor, they don't stand to accrue the same moral benefits sometimes associated with shame (Harris-Perry 2011, 107). This is because the racialization of feminine virtue has deep historical roots that shape how shame is recognized and understood. Harris-Perry comments that "Thomas Jefferson offered up the ability to blush, along with 'flowing hair' and 'a more elegant symmetry of form,' as evidence of the superior beauty of white women ... Jefferson assumed that because only white women could manifest the outward signs of shame, they alone possessed the virtue of modesty" (Harris-Perry 2011, 105). So, the idea that

[11]My sense, though I don't elaborate or defend it here, is that these "rituals" of self-shaming can best be understood as part of the domain of unconscious habit belonging to the larger repertoire of feminine "pattern[s] of feeling" (Bartky 1990, 84). As Berenice Fisher discusses, women are already socialized to self-recrimination (Fisher 1984, 197–98) and Bartky's example of her female students' preemptive self-shaming to "bear more easily a shaming they anticipated from me [i.e., the professor]" supports this. An intersectional analysis helps bring into focus how these feminine habits and patterns of feeling are distinctly racialized, drawing on value-laden notions of innocence, purity, and vulnerability associated with white femininity.

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expressions of shame may index desirable feminine modesty is a historically and racially sedimented idea that nevertheless continues to animate our moral imagination.

Harris-Perry's work makes the case that the "virtuous" shame of modesty has historically been denied Black women. It perhaps belongs then among those "outlaw emotions" that Alison Jaggar first theorized in her influential 1989 essay "Love and knowledge: Emotions in feminist epistemology." "Outlaw emotions," for Jaggar, are emotions that are not typically available to women or looked upon favorably when expressed by feminine subjects. While emotion and emotionality are associated with femininity, anger (Jaggar's primary example) is "outlawed" because the logic of anger confers a moral status and agency to women that would subvert existing gendered moral hierarchies.[12] Clearly then, the conversion of shame into anger/aggression—and thus power—that marks hetero-masculine "shame-reactions," is discouraged or disallowed, especially for white feminine subjects. Another possibility emerges, however: *white women learn to transform shame into power by performing shame (self-shaming), thereby animating a racialized moral hierarchy that produces moral benefits by valorizing so-called feminine virtues of masochism and vulnerability.* Rather than "by-passing" shame, this display of power works by making shame *conspicuous.* As we'll see, this produces a strange effect: the appearance of shame, ordinarily taken as a sign of moral failure, now signifies the presence of moral virtue.[13]

4. Against "conspicuous shame"

As Alexis Shotwell writes in *Knowing otherwise*, "white shame is an appropriate affective response to the degradations of current racist practice" (Shotwell 2011, 94). This seems right. It also seems right to say that shame may (but does not always) motivate a creative process of self-critique and revision, and even ground political transformation. That is, shame may present an opening for dominant groups, in this case whites, to recognize their position of privilege, including the unearned benefits corresponding to that privilege, as shame-worthy and in need of critical restructuring. And yet: given the complex gendered, racialized, and class-specific politics of shame, *how* this otherwise appropriate and potentially transformative moral emotion is taken up and lived is important. As Aristotle would say, virtue requires not only feeling the right emotion but feeling it *in the right way*.

In the previous section, I pointed to examples where shame is experienced through its disavowal in the form of "shame-reactions" that transform shame into power by converting it into related emotions like rage. Shame is by-passed, not undergone. I argued that white women transform shame into displays of power by performing shame, not rage, and in ways that cite feminine value-laden attributes that are socially constituted and solely available to white women.[14] In this case, the "shame-reaction" is

[12]Building on this work, Spelman has argued that women's anger thus constitutes a form of insubordination (Spelman 1989, 265–66).

[13]With respect to negative social values, white women experience gendered shame as simultaneously constraining *and* enabling: the very qualities that patriarchal masculinity attaches to white femininity as shameful—e.g., weakness, fragility, vulnerability, emotionality—are often leveraged for the purposes of "affective domination" (Nash and Pinto 2021; Applebaum 2017).

[14]Further, as Shannon Sullivan points out, displays of white shame are located in terms of class as well. She quotes John Preston, who argues that "[Displays of] guilt and shame about being white [do] not enable working-class white people to accrue symbolic capital in their communities in the way that [they] generally [do] for middle-class white people. Encouraging white people to feel ashamed of their whiteness as a

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not a conversion, but a conspicuous display of shame-feelings. So while shame *may* serve as a "visceral, affective call to responsibility," these latter are performances of shame that we might consider, following Gail Weiss, curiously shame*less*: a deflection of responsibility and "a refusal to internalize shame," even while shame is ostensibly performed (Weiss 2018, 544).

In this section, I develop a critique of "conspicuous shame": that is, performative enactments of shame that make use of publicity to secure a claim to moral goodness and social power. This mode of "virtue signaling" is interesting and insidious, I argue, when considered in the context of white femininity and traditional associations of white women with feeling, vulnerability, innocence, and moral purity. Returning to Nash and Pinto, we may now be able to understand how shame about racial privilege can become pleasurable "racial masochism." Certain forms of shame, I suggest, can be pleasurable for white women because the performance of this moral shame signals the presence of (laudatory) virtue. This pleasurable "feeling of virtue" is only possible because it cites a prior moral privilege that one may return to once the "bad" is somehow purged, that is, confessed or punished. The masochism available in punitive experiences of shame, whether other-inflicted (recall the dynamics of "racial bondage" that Nash and Pinto describe) or self-inflicted, curiously positions (re-centers) white women as the victims of their own bad racial politics.[15] This positioning is, of course, one of moral privilege that reproduces social power. Moreover, this masochism is usually *benign,* offering pleasure without serious harm or consequence (see n. 3). Nash and Pinto reference this dynamic when they describe "white lady tears" as an "affective [practice] of domination" (Nash and Pinto 2021, 890). The effect of this display of feeling ("white lady tears") is to simultaneously assert moral privilege and deflect moral responsibility. Tearful admissions of shame are peculiar, then, because it is the admission of culpability that ultimately exculpates.

As George Yancy argues, whites "[engage] in … public racist disavowals as [a way] of 'confirming' their own postracial and postracist subject-formations and liberal political sensibilities." These "public displays of 'white virtue,'" he continues, function as a "distancing strategy," a way to "avoid being implicated in forms of anti-Black racism" (Yancy 2014, 45). In an extended reflection on the oppressive power of the white feminine gaze vis-à-vis his Black body, Yancy imagines:

> [W]hat if I have indeed positioned her to feel shame? … What happens when this feeling gets quickly transformed into a *positive* sense of white self-regard? As Sara Ahmed writes, "The very claim to feel bad (about this or that) also involves a self-perception of 'being good.'" Perhaps she will now make a point of remaining with her shame, wallowing in it. As the "shamed-one," she may come to feel a sense of white pride precisely through her feelings of shame. Thus, the issue of Black pain and suffering gets set aside … It is *her* pain, *her* guilt, *her* need to feel good, pure, and ethical that gets foregrounded. What appeared to be a movement toward

response to racial injustice implicitly caters to the hegemonic and narcissistic interests of middle-class white people." (Sullivan 2014, 138).

[15]In her critique of Samantha Vice's essay on white shame in post-Apartheid South Africa (Vice 2010), Marzia Milazzo argues that Vice's emphasis on white shame obfuscates the structural, material dimensions of racism and reinforces an indulgent white self that "guilty and shamed, craves attention and care" (Milazzo 2017, 558).

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> challenging whiteness is reinscribed as a place for precisely preserving whiteness. (Yancy 2014, 60)

As Yancy describes, within the scene of moral attentiveness and responsibility hides an assertion of moral privilege, egoism, and even an evasion of that same responsibility.[16] It is shame itself which is suspect, because it facilitates the transformation from painful self-critique to positive self-regard—where positive self-regard is a possible, if not the principle, motivational drive.

Yancy draws on Sara Ahmed's work to suggest that the narcissistic desire for pride is crucial for understanding white shame and other bad feelings (see also Kizuk 2020). As Ahmed explains,

> Shame and pride have a similar affective role in judging the success or failure of subjects to live up to ideals, though they make different judgments. The possession of an ideal in feelings of pride or shame involves a performance, which gives the subject or group "value" and "character." We "show" ourselves to be this way or that, a showing which is always addressed to others. (Ahmed 2015, 109)

Expressing shame at one's failure to live up to an ideal *shows* that they in fact possess, even cherish, that ideal. This, according to Ahmed, "makes possible a return to pride": "In other words," she writes, "the transference of bad feeling to the subject in shame is only temporary, as the 'transference' can become evidence of the restoration of an identity of which we can be proud (the fact that we are shamed by this past 'shows' that we are now good and caring subjects)" (Ahmed 2015, 109–10). The "bad feeling" associated with shame is ultimately benign and temporary, merely a mode of performatively securing (or restoring) a "good" identity that one can be proud of (Ahmed 2015, 102).[17]

It is noteworthy that Ahmed emphasizes the "showy" quality of this process. An experience otherwise marked by hiddenness and retreat, shame is paradoxically highly visible. It *shows* and even broadcasts a positive attachment to the very ideal or virtue that one has failed to live up to. While shame may be an appropriate response, then, to what Spelman calls "woman's inhumanity to woman," it poses the very problem hinted at, but not elaborated, in the title of her essay "The virtue of feeling and the feeling of virtue": if shame is a "feeling of virtue"—that is, the morally virtuous mode of response to injustice—then it involves a moral accomplishment that risks reasserting power and privilege. Is there a way to detach the "feeling of shame" from the "feeling of virtue"?[18] To remain with shame, not as a merely temporary and ultimately praiseworthy moral

[16]This sense of evasion or "flight" from responsibility can be an effect of self-infantilization, a tenacious insistence on one's own moral innocence and ignorance, as María Lugones has argued (Lugones 2003, 48–49).

[17]In an earlier article Ahmed provides additional insight into this dynamic, addressing public admissions of racism or racist behavior (Ahmed 2006). She argues that public admissions of racism—such as the statement "I am a racist"—"signal" that I'm not really a racist or not racist in the same way; bad racists don't see, let alone admit to, their racism. This is how, as she puts it, admissions of racism can become declarations of a commitment to antiracism. Adapting Ahmed's argument to public declarations of shame clarifies that these performances of shame are really "nonperformatives" (or "unhappy" performatives; see Lockard 2016): it is not *shame* (vice) that is performed or brought about, but virtue.

[18]This is a tall order since, as Lisa Tessman (2002) argues, people who enjoy the benefits of an unjust social order "will have a structurally supported tendency to believe in their own virtue" (61).

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accomplishment, but as a necessary and ongoing moral work *without* accomplishment, and thus to refuse the "transference" of shame to pride, of shame to virtue, of shame to unearned moral privilege and power? As I'll argue, this possibility *requires thwarting the impulse to public self-display operative in conspicuous forms of shame*. On this view, it is not shame itself which is problematic—indeed, I maintain that shame is often appropriate, revelatory, and possibly transformative—but rather performances of shame that leverage the dynamic of exposure and hiddenness (Ahmed 2015, 103) to convert shame from an emotion of moral failure to one of moral triumph.

While Hannah Arendt could not be called a feminist philosopher nor a philosopher of emotion, her insights are unexpectedly valuable here. This is owing to the close attention she paid to the private and public realms, and her description of "the rise of the social."[19] What she traces in "the rise of the social" is finally the elimination of the private realm, not understood narrowly as the restricted space of the household, but more widely as a personal space of refuge from publicity, "from being seen and being heard" (Arendt 1998, 71). "A life spent entirely in public, in the presence of others, becomes, as we would say, shallow," writes Arendt, "While it retains its visibility, it loses the quality of rising into sight from some darker ground which must remain hidden if it is not to lose its depth in a very real, non-subjective sense" (Arendt 1998, 71). The private is precisely the shelter from that glaring light which, while it makes appearing possible, also compels a certain *kind* of appearance; a curated, individual self-display. Reminiscent of the dynamic of exposure and hiddenness that, for Ahmed, characterizes shame experiences, Arendt believes that the human condition consists in recurrent movement between private and public (and vice versa). The rise of the social, which blurs these domains, has interrupted this movement and destroyed the "depth" that it is possible to access in the private sphere.

This description is increasingly relevant considering the spread of social media today, a phenomenon that requires the dissolution of "privacy" while maintaining an aspiration to intimacy. The publicity that destroys privacy is simultaneously the production of a "social realm" that, Arendt would say, cultivates conformity and cliché rather than genuine modes of thinking, acting, and speaking. The "urge to appear" in this light involves a flight from solitude, the very space which, for Arendt, represents a mode of thoughtful being-with-oneself essential for morality (Arendt 2003). In the "rise of the social," then, Arendt sees a serious threat to the human condition as we know it—the liquidation of a specific mode of *thinking* that makes moral responsibility and judgment possible.

In this context, shame experiences take on a particular significance. If our modern absorption within the social has the effect of destroying those spaces of privacy that provide "a hiding place" (Arendt 1998, 71) for solitude, then perhaps shame can function as a mode of recovering those places (understood spatially and temporally). Phenomenological accounts like Ahmed's (2015) hint at how shame creates such a "place" of the self: a person who feels shame typically experiences a strong impulse to

[19]Arendt's private–public distinction has spawned an enormous literature, much of it critical and much of that critique feminist. (Though it should be noted that, on the whole, feminist readings of Arendt are mixed: some defend the private–public distinction and others lambast it.) I don't directly weigh in on these issues here, interesting and relevant though they are. Instead, I offer Arendt's remarks on shame (they hardly qualify as a "theory" or "account" of shame) not as conclusive, but as suggestive and potentially generative, since they provide a way of explaining some of what is at issue in public-facing displays of white shame. For more on shame in Arendt see Howard 2019.

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hide. The internal and external dynamics of the shame response suggest that in attempting to avoid the pain of vulnerability and exposure, the shamed person turns in and away from the gaze of others, using their body to create a physical barrier between themselves and the world. Indeed, shame necessitates, and thus establishes, a private realm of solitude in which the shamed subject is made to be entirely with herself, however fleetingly. While this private introspection does not guarantee good outcomes (self-work, revision, political transformation), without it, positive change might be impossible.

Despite Arendt's claims about the importance of solitude for moral reflection and judgment, there is an uncomfortable and unavoidable narcissistic element here. Concern for the self and one's moral status really does seem to be an important factor (though perhaps not the only one) motivating self-revision. Ultimately, this narcissism does not undermine other basic features of shame that make it fundamentally relational and other-oriented, however. Indeed, as we've said (see section 2), moral self-regard is only coherent within a broader social context in which norms of behavior are constituted and failures are exposed. It is the presence of the other, the thought of the other, that precipitates shame. Similarly, in Arendt, the private realm is not a retreat into egoism. Quite the contrary. Both thinking and moral judgment are, for Arendt, intersubjective activities; not egoistic, but pluralistic.[20]

As Arendt argues in *The human condition,* there are some things that require this space of solitude to exist at all:

> Although the distinction between private and public coincides with the opposition of necessity and freedom, of futility and permanence, and, finally, of shame and honor, it is by no means true that only the necessary, the futile, and the shameful have their proper place in the private realm. The most elementary meaning of the two realms indicates that there are things that need to be hidden and others that need to be displayed in public if they are to exist at all. (Arendt 1998, 73)

Seyla Benhabib terms this aspect of Arendt's work "phenomenological essentialism," or the "belief that each type of human activity has its proper 'place' in the world, and that this place is the only authentic space in which this kind of activity can truly unfold" (Benhabib 1993, 104). The example Arendt uses in *The human condition*, relevant to our discussion of virtue, is "goodness": "[The] moment a good work becomes known and public, it loses its specific character of goodness, of being done for nothing but goodness' sake. When goodness appears openly, it is no longer goodness, though it may still be useful as organized charity or an act of solidarity" (Arendt 1998, 74). Her point is that the very meaning of goodness stands "in certain opposition to the public realm." This seems intuitive and right: advertising good works reveals something about their motivation—for the doer to *feel* good, rather than merely *do* good.

[20]The intersubjective nature of thinking and judgment is discussed in several places throughout Arendt's corpus, for instance *The life of the mind* (1978, esp. section III of "Thinking") and in *Responsibility and judgment,* particularly Arendt's reading of Kant's *Critique of judgment* in the essay "Some questions of moral philosophy" (2003, 137–46). The latter text explains the importance of "common sense" on the one hand, which "fits us into a community with others" and whose validity "grows out of [our] intercourse with people," and the faculty of imagination on the other, which makes it possible to represent to myself the perspectives of others. These two faculties, common sense and imagination, make moral judgment possible.

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As Arendt indicates: *shame, like goodness, can only exist in the private realm*. Shame is no longer shame when it appears openly in public; it's transformed by publicness into something else entirely.[21] In some cases, this transformation is politically strategic. As I have written elsewhere, exposing shame to the light of the public can transform toxic, denigrating forms of gendered or racialized shame into positive self-affirmations, converting shame into pride (Howard 2019). Think of the Black is Beautiful and SlutWalk movements. In the latter case, for instance, slut shaming and street harassment are rejected through a public demonstration of resistance that exposes those behaviors (i.e., harassment) as themselves shameful (see Willett and Willett 2019). But in cases where shame is experienced against a background of racial, gender, or colonial entitlement, such positive affirmations of the self are much more suspect. In Sarah Kizuk's analysis of settler shame, for instance, performances of shame tend to remain "a mere optics of justice" that are more about *feeling better* than doing better (Kizuk 2020, 168).

As I've suggested, while shame contains a narcissistic element, it is not essentially narcissistic. And yet, this narcissistic element has perhaps become overlarge in our contemporary social and cultural landscape. Our mediatized culture not only exacerbates the impulse to self-display evident in public-facing performances of shame, it completely transforms the meaning and function of shame. The movement from the domain of private moral self-reflection to the public domain of moral self-aggrandizement seems to facilitate this transformation. While shame involves a painful feeling of being exposed—of having one's flaws and failures laid bare to the gaze of others—it is by all accounts marked by a powerful impulse to hide. Consider how "conspicuous shame" evinces, quite paradoxically, an even more powerful urge to appear. How should we understand this performance of shame? On my view, *conspicuous shame* is no longer shame at all, it is a technique of power. Perhaps it is mere embarrassment in the guise of shame (in which case, recalling the embarrassed abuser, it has no moral content whatsoever).[22] Or perhaps, following Ahmed, it is a non-performance of shame: a performance of virtue (e.g., pride) signaled by way of a vice. Such performances enact a benign masochism that risk nothing but produce the illusion of moral accomplishment that promises "public admiration" (Arendt 1998, 55).

[21]Jill Locke (2007) critiques Arendt's treatment of shame, especially the sense in which shame could be meaningful or transformative for members of socially stigmatized groups—in this case, focusing on Arendt's analysis of the harmful effects of antisemitism discussed in her 1957 book *Rahel Vernhagen,* a philosophical biography of the life of Rahel Levin (given name), a Jewish woman born in 1771 Berlin. Locke's critique sensitively attends to the important distinction between moral shame (which she refers to as "good" shame) and non-moral/unmerited shame ("bad" shame, in Locke's terms). However, I find Arendt's "taxonomy" of shame more complex and compelling than Locke makes it out to be (the relevant discussion appears on pp. 147 and 151–56 of Locke's text). In particular, Locke does not distinguish between shame associated with modesty and moral shame (though as La Caze 2013 points out, there are connections between these forms of shame). While some of Arendt's remarks about shame in *The human condition* can be read as registering a modesty concern having to do with "boundary transgression" (Locke 2007, 155), others, such as Arendt's reference to the opposition "shame and honor" and her discussion of "goodness," signal that Arendt *does* have moral shame in mind, at least some of the time, and that this moral shame bears some relationship to the public–private distinction. As I suggest in section 4, this relationship is a phenomenological one having to do with the exposure/hiding dynamic central to experiences of shame. There is more to unpack in Arendt's thinking on the relationship between emotion, morality, and politics that would be worthwhile on another occasion. For a discussion of Arendt's distinction between guilt and shame, the relationship between shame and collective responsibility, and the political perils of public emotional displays see La Caze 2013.

[22]Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

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To be sure, shame is often morally appropriate. To see this, imagine someone acknowledging their complicity or participation in racial injustice *without* experiencing shame. But by rejecting *conspicuous* forms of shame, I join thinkers like Sara Ahmed (2006), Shannon Sullivan (2014), Alexis Shotwell (2016), Marzia Milazzo (2017), and others, who reject aspirations to white virtue and the centering of white moral progress. The experience of moral shame, particularly for white women, is problematically oriented toward white conceptions of goodness which, as Sullivan notes, "currently tend to be saturated with white supremacy" (Sullivan 2014, 146). Sullivan's challenge to white people to be less "good" can be taken up as we rethink the meaning and function of shame in this context. This would mean resisting the impulse to by-pass, convert, or to perform shame—all ways of distancing ourselves from this painful emotion—and instead to undergo moral shame while challenging its ordinary teleology: that is, to permanently defer or decenter the pleasures of virtuous self-regard. Or to more radically rethink what shame does and what it is good for. As I've extrapolated from Arendt, shame may make available a space for deep moral self-reflection in a world that is increasingly "social" and superficial. Alternatively, as Marta Jimenez has argued in her study of Aristotle, we might consider shame as playing a primarily pedagogical role: it is through experiences of shame that we learn to be good (Jimenez 2021). On this view, shame offers lessons in goodness, not goodness itself.

My argument concludes, then, with an endorsement of moral shame that is highly qualified. It is often appropriate for people who benefit from systems of racial justice to experience shame. Doing so may be personally and politically transformative. But how those appropriate emotions are lived and expressed can amplify, rather than challenge, the very injustice that these emotions are a response to. In particular, I urge closer attention to those masochistic elements of white femininity that conceal ongoing racial oppression. Like Samantha Vice, who describes "a way of living with white shame that is nonetheless private," I too counsel a form of inconspicuousness (Vice 2010, 334–35). This is not primarily because, as Vice argues, white perspectives and feelings have been overrepresented in the public realm—though this is certainly true—but because the very nature of shame, as well as its transformative potential, requires the solitude and hiding place that privacy offers. With Arendt, I argue that *conspicuous shame* is neither shame nor responsibility. Yet, if we do not move too quickly to convert shame into virtue—to publicize, purge, and distance—perhaps a kind of moral responsibility felt as shame is both possible and, following Spelman, politically salient.

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