

LP² STUDY GROUP PROPOSAL FOR SPRING 2022

EXPLORING SHAME, GUILT AND HUMILIATION: PERSONAL, SOCIETAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Coordinator: Jan Adler

Guilt, shame, humiliation. We encounter these words every day and take for granted that we know what ideas and emotions we are referring to when we use them. In this study group we will explore the subtleties of their meaning within our own culture and how the meanings of these terms vary between cultures. We will read the work of theologians, political scientists, moral philosophers, sociologists and psychologists. We will look at how different societies think about using shame and guilt to shape the behavior of their citizens. Attempts to break cycles of humiliation and revenge that exist between groups within a society and between nation states will be studied.

Some other questions that will be addressed in the study group are: What does it mean to be shameless? How is shame used for political ends? How does shame impact on public health?

Jan has coordinated a wide variety of study groups at LP2.

Type of Study Group: Discussion

Readings and other Materials/Online Services:

Readings for each week will be sent out as a pdf.
Average readings will be 30 pages.

******* SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS *******

WEEK 1

TOPIC: What do we mean by shame, guilt, and humiliation?

READING: [week 1 pdf](#)

QUESTIONS:

Who writes about shame? What are the social, psychological and moral

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aspect to each of these terms? Are the distinctions independent of culture? What is the relationship between humiliation, dignity and self-respect?

WEEK 2

TOPIC: Evolution and biology of shame

READING: [week 2 pdf](#)

QUESTIONS:

What are the different theories about whether emotions are universal phenomena or are better understood as being grounded in cultures? Is shame a mixture of other more basic emotions? What does it mean that some emotions depend on cognition? How might guilt and shame have been evolutionarily adaptive?

WEEK 3

TOPIC: Shame and guilt cultures

READING: [week 3 pdf](#)

QUESTIONS:

What is the current thinking about shame and guilt cultures? Why are missionaries writing about this topic? Is shame used in some cultures in a positive way?

WEEK 4

TOPIC: Stigma and shame

READING: [week 4 pdf](#)

QUESTIONS:

What is the relationship of shame and stigma? Who gets stigmatized? What are the similarities and differences between the various groups that get stigmatized? What was Erving Goffman's interest in stigma? How do sociologists today think about his work in this area?

WEEK 5

TOPIC: Use of shame to shape citizen's behavior

READING: [week 5 pdf](#)

QUESTIONS:

What are some historical uses of shame? What are the arguments for and

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against the use of shame? Should we be shaming people for not thinking of the public good when they make economic decisions? Is the punishment of the parents and administrators involved in the college admissions scandal an effective use of shame as a warning to others?

WEEK 6

TOPIC: Shame and honor at work and school

READING: [week 6 pdf](#)

QUESTIONS:

Where is shaming in the classroom used? Is there a relationship between school shootings and bullying? Does shaming on social media play a part in school shootings or suicide? What is the impact on other employees of seeing someone humiliated at the workplace? What is the impact on soldiers of following orders they question?

WEEK 7

TOPIC: Shame and public health

READING: [week 7](#)

QUESTIONS:

What are the arguments around using shame to encourage vaccinations and mask wearing? How does the culture of a country impact on these decisions? How does the stigmatization of some physical illnesses impact on the health of people with these illnesses?

WEEK 8

TOPIC: Viewing politics through the lens of shame and humiliation.

READING: [week 8](#) and [optional](#)

Is using shame to achieve political goals a new phenomenon? What is a “degradation ceremony”? When does the term shameless get used? What are examples of political decisions that have been made in the name of avoiding shame?

WEEK 9

TOPIC: Collective guilt and humiliation

READING: [week 9](#)

QUESTIONS:

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What does collective guilt mean? What are the arguments for and against the concept of collective guilt? How are collective guilt and shame different?

WEEK 10

TOPIC: Kwame Anthony Appiah and changing codes of honor and moral revolutions

READING: TBA

QUESTIONS:

Why does the elite of a nation decide to suddenly scorn a morally questionable tradition that was honored internally for many years? Why does this change of attitude move through a society? What do codes of honor at institutions like West Point depend on?

WEEK 11

TOPIC: Shame in national ethnic tensions and international relations and attempts to break cycles of humiliation and revenge

READING: TBA

QUESTIONS:

What is restorative justice? How have Truth and Reconciliation commissions been experienced by the people involved? What role does forgiveness play in resolving tensions? What must precede forgiveness if it is to be effective?

What was Sesame Street trying to do in Bosnia after the conflict there?

WEEK 12: Unfinished topics and review