The social uses of shame in historical societies - a cross-cultural study on conflict, cooperation and emotion.

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• What is shame?
• Shame and cooperation in Evolutionary Anthropology
• Shaming punishments in Western Europe 1200-1650.
  – Do historical sources fit into recent theories on the importance of shame in cooperation in Evolutionary Anthropology?
• Discussion, reflections about semantics and further research
What is shame in humans?

– Behavior inappropriate in terms of in-group norms
– Internalized control over behavior.
  – Shame = failure in control of body and mind in the presence of others as trained in infancy and childhood => affecting a person’s identity.
  – Guilt = responsibility for a (negative) event or behavior.
– People often lower their faces, avert their gaze and slump their shoulders.
– Shame is a panhuman emotion and cross-culturally related to blushing (Casimir & Schnegg 2002).
– Little is known as to how the limbic system interacts with the orbitofrontal cortex to produce the “shame reaction” (Beer et. al. 2006, c.f. Jones 2004, Jones & Goldsmith 2005)
– But: there is nowadays a better understanding of the sympathetic nervous regulation of blushing (Mariauzouls 1996).
• Fessler (2007):

- Panprimate substrate of “protoshame” which operates in hierarchical social relationships
- Humans rely on “culture” + cooperation = motivational system of human shame
- Cooperation and trust between future partners is the core element of the social function of shame

Shame

Failure to live up to cultural standards of behavior (only humans)

Subordinate position to another individual (primates)

Fieldwork in a Sumatran fishing village (Fessler 1999)

= From appeasement to conformity
1. How far is cooperation linked to shame in historical societies?
   - Which misdemeanors were punished with shaming and humiliating chastisement in Western Europe between 1200 and 1650?

2. Which word(s) have been used in historical societies to express reverence (reverentia) and how are these words related to shame (pudor/verecundia)?
   - How does the semantic field of these words differ from modern languages?
   - Is there information about the use of the vocabulary denoting shame in the context of status-differences?
• Interdisciplinary study on the social functions of shame in historical societies with a focus on the purpose of punishment (deterrence or reformation).

• Analysis of historical source material (court-rolls, laws and “punishment registers”) of “lesser jurisdiction” in Western Europe (focus on German-speaking areas) from 1000 to 1850.

• Cross-cultural comparison of medieval and early modern Western Europe and East-Asia (China/Japan) = cooperation partner is needed!

• What follows are first results…
Shaming punishments

European shaming punishments include:
- pillory / iron collar
Shaming punishments

cucking-stool / ducking stool

This model is still in use at Soest in Westphalia, but today rather for fun.

„Bäckerwippe“

Soester „Nequambook“, ca. 1350
Shaming punishments

riding backwards / (parading) on a donkey / „skimmington“

Fig. 6. Yale University Library MS 229 fol. 104v (detail), northern France, ca. 1289. Courtesy of Yale University Library.
Shaming punishments

Shrew’s fiddle (from the 17th century onwards)
Shaming punishments

- Shaming masks / branks
Shaming punishments

The „stone of shame“ for quarrelsome women (heavy stones worn at the neck and had to be carried through the city)
Shaming punishments

Asian shaming punishments include:
- cangue 木枷 "mu jia"
Shaming punishments

public exposure

Man and woman undergoing public exposure for adultery in Japan, around 1860
Method

• For this talk:
  • sub-sample of 74 / 127 entries of punishments (including known delinquency and year): 1200-1650

• Source material is coded in an online-database for:
  • Offence
  • Punishment
  • Execution / executioner
  • Source type
  • Date / place / country / reference in literature
From an inquiry to the jury court of Dresden City (Saxony, 15th century):

“I am a burgher from Dresden and I have worked as a lawyer and I have a wife. Some time ago the eldermen of the town said that there was a rumor about me having a relation with another woman and that they would punish me if that was found to be true. One day when I was sitting with the said women at a fire in her house they came into the house, accusing me having committed adultery. And they brought me and the women to prison and after that to the pillory and so they shamed me. The women was banished from town and I could stay, but afterwards, when I wanted to go to work my colleagues refused to accept me at court as a lawyer and said that I had been shamed at the pillory and was touched by the executioner and therefore should not speak for other people at court anymore. But I insist that I had not been arrested in flagrante and asking the court to allow that I may continue to work…

Verdict: … permission not granted because he has been touched by the executioner and a stain (of infamy) clings on him.”

Results

Offences / misdemeanours entailing shaming punishments

- Perjury/oath breaking, fraud, fake, adultery and theft add up to approx. 50% of the offences
- failure in domains relevant for cooperative behavior!

Source: Database of shaming punishments on [www.shamestudies.de](http://www.shamestudies.de) / subsample of 74 / 127 entries of punishments (including known delinquency and year): 1200-1650 [December 2007].
Results

Types of shaming punishments

- Altogether, pillory and iron collar add up to 65% of the punishments.

Source: Database of shaming punishments on www.shamestudies.de / subsample of 74 / 127 entries of punishments (including known delinquency and year): 1200-1650 [December 2007].
- Medieval cities heavily relied on cooperative behavior. Loyalty to the community had to be promised by oath, and mutual trust was a core element of daily life.
- To an significant amount shaming punishments were used to punish defection and misdemeanour which were relevant for cooperation, especially for the time before 1500.
- Emphasis on perjury, fraud and fake is consistent with the literature (DeWin 1991, Schwerhoff 1996).
- The degree of infamy, which clings to a person subjected to a shaming punishment, varies according to local customs and time (see example from Dresden).
• There is interesting evidence from the classical Roman period for the development of the semantic fields of pudor, verecundia and reverentia. Pudor and verecundia can be both translated as shame and especially verecundia takes aspects of reverence (reverentia) in the works of Livy and Valerius Maximus (Vaubel 1970, cf. Thomas 2007).

• Meaning and Sense of words change constantly over time and there is strong evidence that verecundia had a similar semantic field in the period from Livy to Valerius Maximus (around 0 AD) as malu has today in the Sumatran fishing village …

• Nevertheless I think, the idea of “protoshame” is maybe fruitful and can help to think about the evolution of emotions in the primate lineage.
Further research

• In the past twenty years, shaming has regained importance in modern American and Australian society in order to punish minor offences. There is a vivid discussion about re-integrative shaming as an alternative to imprisonment (Braithwaite 1989).
• Cross-cultural analysis: shaming, shaming punishments and public humiliation can be found in a variety of cultures (Haid 2002; HRAF 1991: good results for Asian, African and indigenous North-American cultures), which will be integrated into future research.
Thank you for your attention!

vereucundia est custos omnium virtutum

Thank you for your attention!

More information at:

www.shamestudies.de

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