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## Shame as a Tool for Oppression

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## **John Cabot University**

Department of History and Humanities

Bachelor of Arts in Humanistic Studies  
Minor in Philosophy

Shame as a Tool for Oppression

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to explore the ways in which shame functions as a tool of oppression, constricting, ostracizing, and reducing the individual. This oppression is based on normative society and is often aimed at minority identities based on a perceived inferiority of gender, race, sexuality, and so on. Shame functions as a tool of oppression when implemented in order to reduce the individual to a vulnerability of their identity, making shame an irresolvable feeling once put onto the individual. In order to explore the relevance of shame as an oppressive experience, Krista K. Thomason, Jeffrie G. Murphy, and Thomas Nagel's arguments will be utilized in order to argue for the damaging nature of shame. In exploring the normative influence of society at large in relation to shame, Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Jean Paul Sartre, and others will be implemented in order to aid my arguments. Finally, I will propose a real-world example of shame as a tool of oppression, in the case of Israeli pinkwashing and the blackmailing of Queer Palestinians. Implementing the arguments from the thinkers mentioned, as well as my own, I will make a case about shame's oppressive nature.

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## Introduction

# Shame as a Tool for Oppression

*“The experience of shame may tend to lend legitimacy to the structure of authority that occasions it, for the majesty of judgement is affirmed in its very capacity to injure.”<sup>1</sup>*

We are highly social creatures. It thus comes as no surprise that we are highly susceptible and vulnerable to the emotions and opinions of those who surround us, both familiar and foe. Just as our social connections and interactions provide a great deal of love, comfort, and well-being to our lives, extreme vulnerability to our social relationships can be catastrophic. This is to say that when the opinions of those who surround us become a form of control over our lives, by way of influencing our autonomy and agency as individuals, society can be oppressive. In this thesis, I argue that shame is a powerful tool of oppression. I maintain that a society becomes oppressive when it is structured around norms that, in practice, systematically impose shame on individuals—shame that is both directed externally from others onto individuals and internally by individuals onto themselves.

Whereas shame exists as a commonly felt emotion, I argue that it manifests differently depending on how one’s identity is socially regarded. Moreover, I also argue that the power of shame is imbedded in the fact that individuals with minority identities—those who hold identities that are systematically marginalized, prejudiced against, and normatively looked down upon—are vulnerable due to the hierarchical relationship between those of the majority and those of the minority. I use the terms “majority” and “minority” not in a literal sense, but in a way that refers to the binaries of society. Those of the majority are not differentiated or prejudiced against based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on. Individuals with minority identities hold any of these

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<sup>1</sup> Bartky, Sandra Lee. *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. Routledge, 1990. Page 97.

“vulnerable” identity markers, meaning they hold identity markers that have been prejudiced against *in comparison* to those with majority identities.

Krista K. Thomason describes these identity markers as “nonvoluntary identities,” given that these are parts of ourselves that we do not choose and yet that are identities for which we nonetheless experience subjugation to evaluative judgements.<sup>2</sup> For example, in terms of race, this would be the power a white individual has over someone who is Black—one example of a majority and minority relationship. This hierarchical relationship is controlled by norms, where conclusions are made based on a moral judgement. This means that normative society establishes standards, for instance, viewing heterosexuality as the natural and acceptable sexual identity, while considering homosexuality as a shameful alternative. What is meant by normative society is the consideration of society as a governing body in relation to the norms that we commonly accept, one that dictates the way we behave by implementing norms that are standardized. The idea that homosexuality is a shameful alternative is grounded in normative institutions created and maintained by normative society. These institutions include religion, education, and other commonly accepted sources of opinion and knowledge.

To explain the detrimental nature of shame, as well as to explore its role as a tool for oppression, I will focus on three thinkers as my primary sources. First, there is Krista K. Thomason, who explores shame in relation to guilt. Second is Jeffrie G. Murphy, who explores judgement and the vulnerability of our identities. Third is Thomas Nagel, who explores the distinction between the public and private spheres and the ways in which we wrongfully judge private matters as public ones. I will supplement these primary thinkers with figures such as Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Simone de Beauvoir, among others. The supplementary role of these figures will enhance arguments in

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<sup>2</sup> Thomason, Krista K. *Naked: The Dark Side of Shame and Moral Life*. Oxford University Press, 2018. Page 71

relation to normative society, agency, authority, and the reductive nature of norms.<sup>3</sup> All this will be implemented in order to aid my argument about society's role in weaponizing shame as a tool for oppression.

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<sup>3</sup> The term "norms" refers to commonly accepted behaviours and practices. Heterosexuality is a commonly accepted norm, while homosexuality is seen as an alternative, giving it an additive nature rather than something of standard substance.

# Chapter 1.

## Three Distinctions Concerning Shame

When exploring shame, it is important to make the distinction between feelings of shame and feelings of guilt, as the two are often misconstrued and conflated. One clear difference between the two is the utilization of shame as an oppressive tool, often implemented in order to reduce, control, and constrict.

### 1. Shame versus Guilt

There are three distinctions between shame and guilt that I will highlight here in considering the oppressive nature of shame as compared to guilt. I will focus on (1) the involuntary nature of shame as compared to guilt, (2) the fact that shame more centrally concerns one's identity as compared to one's actions, and (3) the hierarchical categorization that results from feelings of shame and acts of shaming.

To illustrate these distinctions, I will use an example of a person A hitting a person B. I will modify the example in each case showing how it can be used to illustrate the various distinctions of on which I focus here, shame versus guilt, acting versus identity, and relational versus hierarchical relations between person A and person B.

#### 1.1 Voluntary versus Involuntary

I argue that feelings of guilt are most often a result of voluntary action whereas shame is more closely connected to one's identity. I focus thus on the voluntary nature of guilt and the involuntary nature of shame. Let's consider a version of our example involving person A and person B that highlights an action that results in guilt.

Take, for instance, the simple example of one person hitting another person (perhaps for no good reason). If person A hits person B in such circumstances, they have perhaps broken a taboo of respect. They have made a decision to commit the act of harming another individual physically. Let

us assume that person A has a certain degree of awareness that their action is wrong because of their own normative development, which is to say that they have been taught right from wrong from an early age based on what is commonly, and therefore normatively, considered as right and wrong ways to act. As children, we are taught certain rules, taught to acknowledge and accept them, and taught that there will be consequences when choosing to break those rules.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, in a case such as this, feelings of guilt might result from the moral awareness that we have broken a rule, we have acted in a way that has harmed another individual, we are aware that the breaking of a rule could have been avoided due to the voluntary nature of choosing to physically harm someone. This sort of case nicely illustrates the connection between voluntary action and guilt. Person A chooses to hit person B and therefore feels guilty.

It is important to be clear about what I mean by voluntary action. Let us now consider a modification of the case involving person A acting in a state of rage when harming person B. In this scenario, we might say about person A that they simply were not themselves in that moment, so the act was involuntary. There is, of course, a sense in which this action could be called involuntary. There is another way we can think of it as actually voluntary in the way I am using the term in relation to my distinction between guilt and shame.

I propose that there is an important difference between the sort of *involuntary* action by person A in this second version of the example and the *involuntary* nature of our relationship to the identity markers that we do not choose—our nonvoluntary identities. I want to propose that even when a choice is at the subconscious level and so in some sense involuntary, it is still a choice to harm someone. Furthermore, in terms of the distinction between shame and guilt, this choice to

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<sup>4</sup> Murphy, Jeffrie G. *Punishment and the Moral Emotions: Essays in Law, Morality, and Religion*. Oxford University Press, 2012. Page 97.

commit a harmful act can result in guilt that is relevant to the act itself. It is not a reaction to a nonvoluntary feature of the identity of the individual who has caused the physical harm to another.<sup>5</sup>

One might object that being the kind of person who would physically harm another can be understood as part of one's identity. There is an important difference, however, between being the kind of person who might hit someone out of anger and being someone with a set of nonvoluntary identity markers. These identities are not chosen in any way of using the term choice. Indeed, one cannot be held responsible or accountable for having these identities. By contrast, one can be held responsible and held accountable for being the kind of person who hits, whether or not in rage.

It is in this sense I talk about things that involve choice. I maintain that this sense of voluntary versus involuntary maps onto the distinction between guilt and shame.

## **1.2 Action versus Identity**

The distinction I make between the voluntary nature of guilt and involuntary nature of shame serves to highlight shame's oppressive power; shame tends to be oppressive because it shames the individual for aspects of their identity they cannot control, the vulnerabilities of their nonvoluntary identities. Sexuality, gender, and race, among others, all serve as possible identity vulnerabilities due to the fact that one can be shamed for them even when one has no choice or say over them, and this shaming can negatively impact one's autonomy and agency as an individual in a way that I characterize as oppressive.

Furthermore, unlike the case of a person who tends to hit in anger and can try to work on changing themselves in order no longer to feel guilty, someone shamed from their nonvoluntary identities cannot in any healthy way work to resolve shame that is directed either externally or internally.

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<sup>5</sup> The action can be considered voluntary because person A can be blamed, at least morally speaking, for causing physical harm to person B. Even given the context of being in a rage, person A can be held accountable and responsible.

If I am shamed for being a woman based on systemic gender norms, how can I move past those feelings of shame if I have always considered myself a woman and will always consider myself a woman? If being a woman is something I consider to be central to my identity or being Black, or gay, or any other identity marker that we consider to occur naturally,<sup>6</sup> then I am being shamed for something that is fundamental to my identity. Shame thus becomes irresolvable.

Jeffrie G. Murphy makes this point about shame which he maintains is directed towards inappropriate objects, such as the vulnerabilities of identity that I previously mentioned. Shame is thus deeply destructive to the individual.<sup>7</sup> Again, this is due to the fact that shame is linked to our identities, especially the vulnerabilities of our nonvoluntary identities.

Let us modify our example of person A causing harm to person B that can highlight an instance of shame. Imagine person A accidentally causes physical harm to person B, perhaps by inadvertently tripping them, and imagine that person A is blamed and made to feel guilty over this. Here, as before, the action is connected with guilt. Now imagine that person A is a person with a minority identity, say, a person of colour, and person B is a person with a majority identity, say, a white person. In this case, I propose that the guilt that person A will be made to feel could be coupled with shame precisely because person A is a person of colour. In this scenario, the act of causing harm is linked back to a vulnerability of their identity. Person A is shamed because person A is a person of colour and person B is white, so a case of a harmful act becomes a case of a harmful act blamed on the nonvoluntary identity of the person acting and connected with race relations.

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<sup>6</sup> Occurring naturally means without say or choice from the individual. We cannot choose our skin colour, our biological sex, nor our sexuality.

<sup>7</sup> Murphy, Jeffrie G. *Punishment and the Moral Emotions: Essays in Law, Morality, and Religion*. Oxford University Press, 2012. Page 106.

The shame in this scenario involves an additional layer, one that involves the identity of the person who is shamed, and so it is associated with something that goes beyond the act itself. Person A is made to feel that violence is intrinsic to their identity because race is intrinsic to their identity, and because normative society associates their race with violence. This is a scenario where race and violence are made to have a causal relationship, thus fueling feelings of shame directed externally and internally onto individuals.

Again, this example helps illustrate the sort of causal relationship there can be between shame and a vulnerable identity marker such as race. It highlights the ways in which shame is linked to certain actions, specifically those pertaining to identity. In this example, person A's race is linked back to their actions based on stereotypes pertaining to their race.

### **1.3 Equality versus Subordination**

The third difference I use to distinguish shame from guilt has to do with the kinds of relationships that manifest the respective emotions. I argue that two people in a relationship that is impacted by feelings of guilt may well remain relatively equal in moral status, however the relationship between two people that involves shame necessarily is a hierarchical relationship, one in which the person who shames the other is somehow above the person who is shamed. This hierarchical relationship puts the person being shamed in a subordinate position to the person doing the shaming.

Feelings of guilt may arise when one has caused harm to or mistreated another person. In such a case, one has acted in a way that has been reductive of the individual one has harmed<sup>8</sup>, and this can reflect back on the individual who has caused harm through feelings of guilt.

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<sup>8</sup> To act in a way that is reductive of the individual that you have harmed is to behave in a way that exerts some sort of power over them. If I harm another person, I am reducing that person to something less than my equal. This is due to the fact that I have made a decision to harm them, knowing it will negatively impact their life in some way.

Let us return to the example of person A and person B. Let's say person A spontaneously feels or is made to feel guilty for physically harming person B. In this scenario, I propose that it is plausible to suppose that person A may have seen person B as subordinate to them in the moment of harm. I propose, however, that the manifestation of guilt instead of shame reveals that this feeling of dominance over person B does not persist past the harmful act. Person A feels guilty for the reductive act of harming B. I propose that this implies that person A sees person B as an equal, at least morally speaking. This is based, in part, on the fact that there is an assumption that person A had a choice between harming and not harming person B, yet still proceeded to do so. They feel guilty based on the fact that they chose to harm B.

In order to think of this as a case involving shame, we would need to modify the scenario. If we take the example of person A causing harm to person B, there will need to be added caveats in order to illustrate the hierarchical nature of shame. This is because I posit that one does not feel shame as an oppressive experience for causing only physical harm to someone else. Person A can feel guilty for harming person B, however they are not likely to feel shame unless somehow the blame is directed also at vulnerable identities, ones that are normatively looked down upon. This case thus differs from a case in which a person is shamed and feels ashamed when the harmful act done by or to them is linked to a vulnerability of their identity.

As noted above, if person A harms person B and person A is Black and person B is white, person A can feel not only guilt but also shame for hitting person B. Again, shame as an oppressive experience must be linked to a person's identity in order to actually oppress and constrict the individual. This oppression can also work when person A, the one doing the harm, has a majority identity marker.

Let us imagine that person A causes physical harm to person B, like a slap to the face. In this case, let us also imagine that person A bases their act of violence on the fact that person A is white

and B is Black, and the reason for the harm caused to B is made clear to be based on race. Person A not only acts reductive to B as a human being in the mere act of causing physical harm, but given that the reason for the harm is linked to B's identity, their race, this causes B to internalize the experience of someone feeling the need to cause harm to them based on a something they cannot control.

Now imagine person A is Black and person B is white, and the harm person A causes to person B is accidental. Like above, a causal relationship is implemented in order to fuel the feeling of shame put onto the person with a minority identity marker, person A, for accidentally causing harm to a person with a majority identity marker, person B. Where person A should only feel guilty for the accidental harm caused, they are made to feel ashamed due to person B blaming A's act of violence on their race, linking the shame put onto A to their race, a vulnerable identity marker since they are a person of colour.

The identity marker is vulnerable due to negative stereotypes commonly attributed to race. Again, person A may be blamed and made to feel ashamed for the violence put onto person B because their violence act may be attributed to the fact that they are Black, and therefore assumed to be inherently violent. The assumption of B being inherently violent due to race is linked to the authority that normative society has.

As explained above, normative society is society as a governing body in relation to the norms that we commonly accept, one that dictates the way we behave by implementing norms that are standardized. As L. W. Loutzenheiser and L.B. MacIntosh put it, "normative is that through which standards and norms assumed to be morally superior are created and kept in place."<sup>9</sup> This is connected with, for instance, the ways in which children are taught commonly acknowledged rights

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<sup>9</sup> Loutzenheiser, L. W., & MacIntosh, L. B. (2004). Citizenships, Sexualities, and Education. *Theory Into Practice*, 43(2), 151–158. Page 152.

from wrongs. Stereotypes are rooted in prejudices that may not be commonly acknowledged in the sense of explicitly linking violence with race, but there can nonetheless be a causal relationship between the two that has been previously drawn and thus is part of the standardization of norms.

This is to say that there is a certain precedent in society that stereotypes create, fueling, for instance, racist assumptions that link race with violence, thus fueling feelings of shame about one's race when one's race is one that is linked with violence. The experience causes such person's race to become a vulnerable part of their identity. A person of colour, for instance, made me made aware of the fact that others think less of them merely based on the color of their skin. This feeling of being made aware of a point of vulnerability within the person of colour's identity causes that person to feel ashamed of their race.

Taking our example of a white person and a Black person, the white person may hold power over the Black person when. If person A is Black and person B is white, and person A harms person B, person A may hold power over person B in the moment of causing physical harm to them, but if person A is white and person B is Black, A can continue to hold power over B by means of shaming. Person A can make person B aware of a point of vulnerability within their identity and, by doing so, has thus recalibrated B's identity to something to be ashamed of, or at least to be made aware that person B lives outside the binary that person A considers as normative due to B's race.

The awareness that person A thinks less of person B based on the colour of B's skin constricts and oppresses person B through feelings of shame for a part of their identity. Importantly, again, identity is something that cannot be controlled, it is something intrinsic to the individual. In a case such as this person B is made to feel ashamed of being Black due to person A's treatment of them and is thus made to feel shame for their identity vulnerability, in this case, their race, which is something one should never be ashamed of. This feeling of shame, put onto person B by person A causes shame to gain power and, indeed, to be oppressive.

As long as a person feels ashamed for the colour of their skin, or for any others of their nonvoluntary identities, and is subordinate to others based on those identity markers, shame remains a powerful constraint in that person's life. It is shame that can be directed at the person both externally, from others onto them, and internally, directed by themselves onto themselves.

## **2. Internal versus External Shame**

Thus far we have focused on three distinctions between shame and guilt, the involuntary nature of shame as compared to guilt, the fact that shame more centrally concerns one's identity as compared to one's actions, and the hierarchical categorization that results from feelings of shame and acts of shaming. In order to be clear about differences between shame and guilt, it is also important to distinguish between shame one puts onto oneself, what I will call 'internal shame', and shame put onto the individual by others, what I will call 'external shame'.<sup>10</sup>

Shame is a constrictive and oppressive emotion, whether it is internal or external, however the source of shame is important in our considerations of its power to reduce and control the individual. In this section, I distinguish between internal and external shame, a distinction that's important for understanding the distinction between guilt and shame. Take, for instance, the distinction between guilt and specifically internal shame. As I have proposed, one can feel guilty for an action, whether or not someone external is also making one feel guilty. Internal shame is different from guilt in that it is a negative feeling one has about oneself resulting from one's identity rather than one's actions. External shame is importantly different from internal shame, though.

As we've seen, external shame is shame put onto someone from outside oneself. It's important to point out that external shame is not strictly a one-on-one relationship. External shame

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<sup>10</sup>Of course, the person who is shamed externally will feel shame on the inside, so, in that sense, they'll experience internal shame, but, as I'm using the terms, I'll call shame one directs to oneself, "internal shame," and shame put onto someone from others, "external shame."

can and does undoubtedly manifest itself on a one-on-one basis, for instance, where person A directly shames person B. However, there is the idea of society as an external shaming body. This is the idea of what we might think of as an invisible jury.

When considering shame and the ways the emotion manifests in our lives, especially in terms of external shame, it is crucial to consider the idea of society as a shaming body, one that has the same power to shame the individual. The idea of an invisible jury is related to the idea of normative society as, again, a governing body in relation to the norms that we commonly accept, one that dictates the way we behave by implementing norms that are standardized.

The idea of the invisible jury of society can be better understood by considering the ideas set forth by Jeremy Bentham through the Panopticon. Bentham uses an example of a prison being created, one where constant surveillance is possible due to the structure of the building surrounding a watch tower.<sup>11</sup> The guard in the watchtower can constantly gaze upon the prisoners, however it is difficult for the prisoners to tell when they are being gazed upon due to the obstructed view within their cells.

There is a sense in which society can be understood to function in the same way when considering societal relevance to shame. Society is like an invisible jury because it is constantly gazing upon the individual and coming to conclusions based on judgements made about the individual, in relevance to social norms and behaviours. External shame manifests in the idea of being Othered. By “being Othered,” I mean being treated as different from or outside the norm, or being excluded or marginalized by perceived differences from those of the dominant social group. People with vulnerable, or minority identities are often Othered, whether by another individual or society as a body, manifesting as an invisible jury. In this way, individuals are externally shamed.

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<sup>11</sup> Bentham, Jeremy. *Selected Writings*, edited by Stephen G. Engelmann, Yale University Press, 2011. *ProQuest Ebook Central*. Page 284.

On the other hand, internal shame exists as shame directed at oneself. It is shame internalized by the individual, an emotion put onto oneself. Importantly, though, internal shaming is not completely unlike external shaming. The two can be connected in the sense that external shaming, shame put onto someone by an external source, can then become internal shame through the very process of internalization, where the act of shaming another becomes the act of shaming oneself. However, one does not have to experience external shame *directly* in order to feel internal shame. The feeling of internal shame can manifest itself without a direct experience of being externally shamed.

Krista K. Thomason discusses this concept of internal shame in relation to a social awareness of shameful acts, experiences, or identity markers.<sup>12</sup> The very knowledge that a portion of one's identity is susceptible to shame and disapproval is caused by a knowledge that one's identity is vulnerable, thus the internalization of shame. Again, an instance of external shaming does not have to occur for one to feel internal shame. Even without being externally shamed, an individual can feel internally shamed precisely when the individual has internalized the fact that a part of their identity, whether their sexuality, race, or gender, is something to be ashamed of based on social norms commonly accepted by those around them. As Thomason explains, "we feel overshadowed by that which causes our shame in part because we feel as though others see only that thing and draw their conclusions about us based entirely on that thing."<sup>13</sup>

The external element develops from normative society, where standards of expectations have been created and commonly accepted, allowing them to become a normative standard. Normative society can thus be oppressive in the sense that it shames people for existing outside of what is acceptable.

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<sup>12</sup> Thomason, Krista K. *Naked: The Dark Side of Shame and Moral Life*. Oxford University Press, 2018. Page 104.

<sup>13</sup> Thomason, Krista K. *Naked: The Dark Side of Shame and Moral Life*. Oxford University Press, 2018. Page 157.

For example, one does not have to grow up around homophobic family members or friends, or to have experienced homophobia directly in order to experience internalized homophobia—the idea that one has internalized the idea that homosexuality is unacceptable, is something intrinsically shameful, because it goes against traditional social norms. Instead of being shamed by another person or society as an entity, the individual who feels internal shame is essentially shaming themselves. The internal shame that they experience is based on the knowledge that their identity does not fit into binary definitions of what is acceptable. Again, one does not have to directly be shamed by another in order to feel shame, at least internal shame. The mere awareness of, for instance, homosexuality having been disapproved of is enough for one who shares this identity to experience a damaging degree of shame, which causes the person to alter their behaviour in order to conform, to get away from the feeling of shame. The person’s autonomy and agency are thus diminished. This highlights the oppressive nature of shame.

### 3. **Private versus Public Concerns**

The amalgamation of the distinctions discussed above lie within the third distinction, one between private and public concerns. This is a distinction that philosopher Thomas Nagel argues is essential. With respect to the matters concerning morality and moral judgement on which we have been focusing, Nagel’s arguments on the basis of the separation between public and private life are highly relevant. This is especially so when considering shame.

The public versus private life distinction has to do with the balance between the private having to do with personal autonomy and freedom and the public having to do with living with others and navigating social norms and values. Nagel explains that the distinction between public and private life becomes increasingly muddled as one gains freedoms. Indeed, we essentially lose out on privacy in the name of an increase of freedoms.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Nagel, Thomas. *Concealment and Exposure: And Other Essays*. Oxford University Press, 2004. Page 43.

Let's consider an example. A woman who was of school age before the enactment of title IX in 1972, would not have held the legally protected right to an education. Following the enactment of title IX,<sup>15</sup> a portion of her life that was not protected by law, that was a private matter, became public due to the newfound protection of the right to education. What the individual was not born with as seemingly natural rights they gain access to through the growth of the freedoms they are allowed to experience. This poses a possible issue, however, when one considers that the granting of freedoms allows an otherwise private matter to become a public concern, especially when the right at issue was not considered a fundamental or natural right. Women following the enactment of title IX enjoyed the right to an education regardless of sex, however the earned right meant a portion of these women's lives, namely their right to education, had become a matter of the public.

There is a worry for groups that have to earn rights. When rights have to be earned, such rights can be taken away as easily as they have been given. Not only that, but they can also be reconsidered and recalibrated based on the interests of the governing, or majority, group.

Take the example of same-sex marriage where the right to marry is not seen as an established right for homosexual couples, but instead is seen as something that had to be earned. Already this impacts the discussion because there is a distinction between a straight couple's natural, what I'm calling 'established', right to marry, and the earned alternative, a homosexual couple gaining the right to marry. The fact that Queer couples are not seen as couples who fundamentally have the right to marry in the same sense that straight couples do already lays the foundation for shame to be used as a tool of oppression. Queer couples can be shamed due to the very fact that Queer couples had to work to *earn* their rights while straight couples did not, causing a distinction.

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<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Education. "Title IX and Sex Discrimination." *Title IX and Sex Discrimination*, 20 Aug. 2021. U.S. Department of Education, [www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix\\_dis.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix_dis.html), [http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix\\_dis.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix_dis.html).

Holding a right that had to be earned while others hold the same right in a way that is treated as natural, that is established rather than earned, gives shame space to function. Those having to earn a right are more at the mercy of law functioning as an authority than those whose rights have been established by law.

Returning to our example, the granting of the right to marry, this increase in freedoms, causes Queer couples to be susceptible to external criticism about private matters. This is to say that gaining the right to marry puts one's sexual orientation into the public sphere, where it can be questioned and overturned as society pleases. The fact that minority rights, such as Queer rights, had to be earned makes them vulnerable to critique and certainly not guaranteed in the same way as the rights of heterosexual couples. This vulnerability is due to a lack of essential rights for people with minority identities,<sup>16</sup> which gives power to shame as an oppressive tool.

Again, there is an important distinction between the individual who gains a right and the individual who was born with that right. In the case in which one has to earn a right, it is not assumed to be intrinsic or essential to the individual. Consider someone who was born with the right to marry as contrasted with someone who had to earn that right. The one born with it has a right that is of private concern with public protection, protection under the law. One who was born without the right to marry and had to earn that right never had the protection of the right under the law prior to earning that right. Earning the right, however, means there's a sense in which marriage is not a private matter. Once that right is earned, it exists as something to do with the public.

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<sup>16</sup> The Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights defines minority identities with several possible definitions. One being that "a minority includes individuals differentiated according to race, colour, ethnicity, age, religious belief or affiliation, political or other opinion, national or social origin, gender, sexual orientation, transgender identity, mental or other disability, health status, economic or indigenous status." United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. "Selection of responses from UN entities as to their understanding of the concept of minority." [ohchr.org](http://ohchr.org)

I maintain that this blurred line between public and private life that minority identities experience causes them to be more at risk of being shamed due to the fact that the viability of their identities is constantly being questioned and re-questioned. This applies to a range of examples, including the example of racial segregation in schools, the right of women to attend university, same-sex marriage, and much more.

In summary, then, those of minority identities must work to gain the rights that are guaranteed to the majority, and this blurs the lines between public and private life. Rights of private life become concerns of the public when fundamental rights are not guaranteed. Given that minorities have to work to prove their viability, their vulnerability to shaming is made evident due to the idea that they are not equal to those in the majority or the binary.

This idea relates to Nagel's argument that rights are a matter of status. The more rights an individual has, the more viable an individual they are under systems of justification and authorization.<sup>17</sup> Those with minority identities are of minority status under such systems, causing them to be at risk of being shamed in a way that is oppressive. As explained above, the individual with minority identities is shamed by those of the majority, or the majority as a social entity such as normative society.

We see, then, that there is a power imbalance due to the rights and freedoms guaranteed to the majority and earned by the minority. This power imbalance plays into the vulnerabilities of certain identity markers. Those with authority are far less vulnerable in their identities than those who lack authority. This authority is in the sense of the binary and normative society, where those who live within the binary, those who live within the lines of social expectations, hold a certain sense of authority over those who are perceived to be going against social norms. When discussing the

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<sup>17</sup> Nagel, Thomas. *Concealment and Exposure: And Other Essays*. Oxford University Press, 2004. Page 33.

distinction between established and earned rights, rights of the majority and rights of minorities, a guarantee of rights allows such rights to be seen as natural and binary, while the earning of rights causes them to be vulnerable to critique. This vulnerability creates space for shame.

## Chapter 2. Shame and Society: Luck, Liability, and Norms.

### 1. Luck and Social Relationships

The degree to which shame is experienced, as well as the type of shame experienced, varies drastically from person to person. The influence on that variation seems to be a common thread. It is the influence of our social relationships. The people we are born to and call parents, the country in which we hold citizenship, our economic status, our race, our sexuality, and our sex are all factors that shape and mold not only who we are as individuals but also the shame we will face throughout our lives.

When discussing luck egalitarianism, John Rawls compellingly highlights the ways in which people are influenced by their economic, racial, gendered, and general social standing.<sup>18</sup> The luck one has the privilege of experiencing is upheld by social structures as well as normative conceptions of the binary. As previously stated, these normative conceptions fuel what is commonly acknowledged as moral. Put simply, in what bell hooks characterizes as contexts of "white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure."<sup>19</sup>

The experience of people with minority identities inherently inhibits experiences of luck. To live outside of the binary is to experience less luck than those living within the binary due to what society considers to be normative and an experience or identity worthy of general privilege. This consideration of luck pertaining to the identity of the individual also pertains to the social relationships that the individual holds. Not only does our gender, where we are born, our class, or

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<sup>18</sup> Arneson, Richard J. "Luck Egalitarianism Interpreted and Defended." *Philosophical Topics*, vol. 32, no. 1/2, 2004, pp. 1–20. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43154426>. Page 2.

<sup>19</sup> hooks, bell, 1952-2021. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000. Page 4.

our race depend on luck, but so do who our parents are, our siblings, our friends, and those who hold authority in our lives.

The luck of our social relationships is relevant to shame because it will impact both the type of and the degree of which we will experience shame. One who has homophobic parents, for example, is more likely to feel shame about being gay than one who has parents who are accepting. The same can be said for having a racist friend, or a misogynistic boyfriend. The people with whom we surround ourselves impact our feelings and experiences of shame, both directly and indirectly. They can be our very sources of shame or merely influence the shame we feel. Fundamentally, the shame we experience is determined by the luck of our social relationships.

## **2. Being Subject to Interpretation**

When considering the luck of social relationships, one must first consider the susceptibility to being the subject of another. For considerations relevant to the idea of the subject and the Other, both Jean Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault offer helpful ideas. First and foremost, Sartre and Foucault offer helpful considerations relevant to the idea of the subject and the Other. The idea that when one becomes the subject of another's interpretation, one becomes vulnerable to being shamed or feeling ashamed due to the agency that the individual has when viewing another as a subject or Other.<sup>20</sup> The agency that one has over another, and thus the agency when Othering someone, stems from the majority/minority dichotomy previously touched upon. Normative conceptions of correct ways to exist that are commonly acknowledged and accepted fuel agency between those that hold the power of a normative existence and those who lack power due to being interpreted as living outside of the normative.

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<sup>20</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul, et al. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, Translated by Hazel Estella Barnes, Routledge, 2003. Page 245.

To be Othered is to be interpreted and reviewed, which causes us to also conclude that our identities are not solely up to us to perceive. One's identity is intrinsically social and therefore shame for one's identity is a result of that socialization. Linda Martin Alcoff explains that "this public identity is our socially perceived self within the systems of perception and classification and the networks of community in which we live."<sup>21</sup> The awareness that we are subject to interpretation is by virtue of the vulnerabilities of our identity as well as the binary aspects of it.

Binary conceptions relate to normativity in the sense that there are normative considerations of the binary. A binary conception of a woman is as a largely feminine individual, who might be seen as existing in line with gender roles such as being dainty, quiet, reserved, and lacking any kind of strong opinions. This is a highly traditional view of a woman, of course, due to the fact that tradition is rooted in the binary. One whose identity exists in line with binary conceptions of gender is one who is considered to be living in line with normativity. They perform gender in a way that satisfies that is both binary and normative, which causes us to alter and constrict our identities in an attempt to control the conclusions and judgements made about us.<sup>22</sup>

The conclusions made about us may be damaging due to the negative nature of those conclusions. One's own perception about being a gay woman is different from person A, B, and C's perceptions of being a gay woman. Their identity as a gay woman is vulnerable due to normative conceptions, living outside of the binary by being gay and judged based on what a gay woman "should" be. The authority and agency that those with majority identities is fueled by normative society in which the majority hold power by living in line with socially expected identity markers and behaviours.

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<sup>21</sup> Alcoff, Linda Martin, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*, Studies in Feminist Philosophy (New York, 2006; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Feb. 2006). Page 92.

<sup>22</sup> Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Tenth Anniversary Edition*. Routledge, 1999. EBSCOhost. Page 173.

In turn, one's own view of being a gay woman is drastically different from the view of someone who is homophobic, sexist, and/or misogynistic. There is a fear that the person holding the identity of a gay woman will be reduced to the vulnerable identity markers of being a woman, gay, or a combination of the two. This awareness and hyper-sensitivity to always being under the watchful eye of society is explained by Foucault and the panopticon, where society is structured similarly to the panopticon prison.

In Foucault's sense, we are all prisoners vulnerable to the watchful eye of others, the Other is the prisoner, and the subject is the onlooker. We all experience this duality, which allows us to have an intrinsic knowledge of the objectification of the Other. We are aware of the fact that society requires us to hold a specific position that makes us vulnerable to the judgements and conclusions of others, however we also hold that power over others. The difference is that, similarly to the previous discussion of luck, there is more vulnerability to being seen and judged for minority identities than for binary identities. This relates to the aforementioned status that Nagel discusses. A person with minority identities holds a decreased status, one of violability, due to the fact that the majority constantly holds power over the minority. To be of a minority identity is to hold an identity that is systematically marginalized.

Thus, it can be argued that the more luck one holds, the less vulnerable one is to being Othered. To say that being gay is unlucky based on Rawls' conception of luck is not to say that being gay is bad, but it is to say that it is more socially acceptable to be straight, to live within the binary, to act in line with norms. A person who is gay has a harder time accessing luck due to their social positioning. If we consider the majority/minority hierarchy, then it makes sense to conclude that those of the majority are luckier than those of the minority due to social acceptance.

This is not to say that just because one holds privilege it means that one will not be subject to objectification, however the way that objectification will manifest and shape people's lives is

dependent on how vulnerable they are, how much of their core identity is subject to the judgement and interpretation of others. I argue that people with minority identities are more likely to be subject to interpretation, judged, and even ridiculed by means of objectification. Thus, minority identities are more liable to feelings of shame than binary or privileged identities.

### 3. Normative Society

#### 3.1 Performativity and Butler

Judith Butler explores the ways in which normative society shapes our identities, specifically in terms of gender and binary conceptions as a supposed reality instead of the cultural product that it arguably is. Butler's arguments about gender are relevant in discussing shame due to the notions of performativity that come with an acute awareness of being judged based on instances of objectification.

Butler's idea of performativity is that our normative conceptions of gender, the commonly accepted gender roles, are simply performances we put on. This is not to say that our performances are inauthentic, as the act of performing is part of our lived reality. For Butler, what we perform is what we are. The performance of gender is perpetuated by stylized repeated acts, which become seemingly natural over time.<sup>23</sup> Just as we perform gender, it seems we perform in certain ways in order to also avoid feelings of shame put onto us or internalized by us.

In order to better understand this phenomenon, let's take a closer look at Butler's conceptions of normative language, performativity, and a certain liability to shame that comes with those instances. Firstly, Butler explores the idea of an anticipatory authority that we expect others to have over us.<sup>24</sup> In normative society, one where normative standards of acting are held at a morally

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<sup>23</sup> Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 519–31. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>. Page 523.

<sup>24</sup> Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1999, <http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9780203902752>. Page 14.

high regard, we are constricted by our social relationships and the burden of being subject to the authority of another, similar to discussions pertaining to Sartre and Foucault about the Self and the Other.

To these conceptions of the Other/Self, Butler adds that the very anticipation of an authoritative other conjures the individual as object and the viewer as authority or agent. The mere awareness that there might be an authoritative agent passing judgements on us is enough to constrict our lives and choices. This is an argument Butler makes in relation to gender and its inherent performativity, the very anticipation of an agent judging based on normative considerations of gender will cause one to act in line with those considerations in order to avoid judgements passed about them.

If binary conceptions of gender are the norm, cis-gender identities, then it can be expected that normative society constricts individuals to believe that fabricated binary is the standard, which then allows norms to be conflated with reality. This conflation exists in the sense of the repetition necessitated by gender performativity that is so central to Butler's arguments. The act of repeating an inauthentic performance points to the idea of fabrication. However, the repetition of a fabricated reality through performativity eventually leads to that fabricated reality to be considered an authentic or true reality, perhaps due to its normative nature.

The normative treatment of gender binaries causes people to be judged based on or in fear of said binaries, thus giving normative society agency over our choices. One who fears being shamed for living outside of the binary will alter and shape their lives based on that fear, thus giving power to feelings of shame. For example, a mother who fears being viewed as a bad mother may give up her career in order to raise her children, as not to be shamed for spending too much time away from them and inadvertently being both a "bad" mother and "bad" woman, based on binary expectations

of both what a good mother and woman is. This notion of what a “good” or “bad” woman is instilled in us from a young age through socialization and repetition.

Alcoff offers helpful insight into this point about a normatively good or bad mother. Alcoff writes that “learning that someone is a mother produces unconscious or conscious reactions in people, involving assumptions that may involve one’s intellectual state, one’s emotional state, one’s ability to achieve detached objectivity on certain matters, one’s maturity, or one’s moral status as a working mother.”<sup>25</sup>

A woman will be morally judged for the way she performs motherhood, and whether she chooses to partake in that performance in the first place. This is relevant to Butler’s idea of the very performativity of gender, where the repetition and ritualization of gendered norms and bodily actions imbed gender as a reality instead of the cultural social product that it is. Just as we can act or present ourselves in ways that align with our perceived gender, a woman sitting with her legs crossed or dressing increasingly feminine, one can also act in these ways based on any of the vulnerabilities of their identity in order to avoid the negative phenomenon of shame.

The anticipatory nature of social agents free to make judgements about individuals causes a constriction of the self, as we have discussed, but it also causes a kind of pre-emptive of internalized judgement, sometimes manifesting as shame. The very awareness that someone could judge me for being a “bad” mother for not spending enough time with my children because of the needs of my career is enough to constrict and constrain my decisions based on the fear of being shamed. The very knowledge that I am acting in a way that goes against the expectations of my gender, my race, my sexuality, or the fact that I hold an identity marker that is inherently away from the binary are all enough to influence me.

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<sup>25</sup> Alcoff, Linda Martín, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*, Studies in Feminist Philosophy (New York, 2006; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Feb. 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195137345.001.0001>. Page 90.

### 3.2 Vulnerability in Relation to Norms

Shame does not have to be an active aspect of our lives in order to impact us, the power of normative society is that it constrains and constricts individuals based on what is normative and what is “acceptable,” thus allowing shame to be implemented when it is acknowledged that one is acting outside of acceptable behaviours. Essentially, normativity influences what is commonly considered as ethical and moral due to its influence over acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours.

The fear of judgement from normative society can also be explained using the example of sexuality. There is an idea that one may “become” gay, which is in reality the realizing of one’s sexuality, and may fear what that transformation would mean for their place in society.<sup>26</sup> With vulnerable identity markers, such as sexuality, one fears the conclusions made about that identity marker due to the knowledge that it is not commonly accepted to hold that identity marker.

Vulnerability of these identity markers is also an intersectional issue, as Butler clearly states with the convergence of gender and sexuality. The vulnerability of being gay will, in turn, also become the vulnerability of being a gay woman, for example. The shame feared for being gay can also be felt for being both gay and a woman, and not fitting in line with the expectations of womanhood or heterosexuality, or the innate heterosexuality necessary of a “good” woman.

The shame that occurs for minority identities is shame based on the idea that one is not living in line with social norms, accepted behaviours, and so on. Shame produces certain kinds of behaviours because it forces the individual to conform to social norms.<sup>27</sup> To shame someone is to question the viability in which they live as a member of society. The power of shame stems from the idea that one who is shamed loses their natural place in society, shaming causes one to be seen as less than or to feel less than, thus allowing their conceptions of social norms to create a dissonance

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<sup>26</sup> Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1999, <http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9780203902752>. Page 11.

<sup>27</sup> Thomason, Krista K. *Naked: The Dark Side of Shame and Moral Life*. Oxford University Press, 2018. Page 42.

with their self-conception. One who is shamed for their identity is aware that their self-conception is not perceived to fall in line with social norms, which leads to feelings of ostracization, as well as a need to reform in order to re-enter society as an example of what is normative.

### **3.3 Normative Language**

To add to Butler's discussions about normative society, it seems relevant to also discuss the ways in which normative language impacts and shapes what should be shameful and what is normative. When considering minority and/or vulnerable identities, it is important to consider the ways in which language treats these identities, through which we also learn how to treat these identities.

Take, for example, the shaming of a woman for being sexually active versus the shaming of a man. Firstly, it can be argued that a woman is more often shamed for being sexually active than a man due to social expectations falling in line with virginity and what it means to be a good and virtuous woman. This is an additional point to the main argument of language, though. There are words common to the English language such as whore, bitch, slut, tramp, and more. All exist and have been implemented in order to make a woman feel bad for being sexually active, for making an autonomous choice about her body. There seems to be a singular equivalent to these insults for men, which would be a man-whore. Even though this is an insult, it allows for a sense of masculinity to be intact, as well as differentiates sexual imprudence between men and women due to the addition of "man" to "man-whore." To take an insult towards women and simply add man as the male equivalent allows for normative language to conclude that even in supposed sexual imprudence of promiscuity, men and women do not damage normative society in the same ways.

Being a whore is not a replacement for being a man, hence the term man-whore, while being a whore, slut, or tramp are accepted replacements for being a woman. No woman is called a woman-slut, a woman-whore, or a woman-tramp. There is a degree of replaceability when it comes to the

identity of woman, for a woman to be sexually active and sexually autonomous, it seems to say much more about her womanhood and viability as a “good” woman than merely her sexuality. For a man to be a man-whore seems to really just be a conclusion of being a man in general, as sexuality seems innate to manhood.

Larger normative society, where normative language is of great influence, controls the ways in which one behaves, in fear of being shamed for so-called missteps.

#### **4. Social Positioning and Liability to Shame**

The differences between the treatment of men and women in relation to feelings of shame has also been showcased by Sandra Lee Bartky in her book *Femininity and Domination*. What Bartky brings to the surface is internalized shame in women and the idea that to be a woman is to inherently fall short of a standard or norm since womanhood is a minority experience. When feelings of shame manifest, Bartky argues that they manifest differently in women than they do in men.<sup>28</sup> This is notably not due to emotional capacities being gender-related, but more with the normative treatment of men versus women that Butler has brought forth. This normative treatment works to create a narrative that makes minority identities to be inherently less-than, seeing as they do not live in line with the binary. To be susceptible to shame as a minority identity is to be seen as inadequate, which seems to also be a give-in of minority identities regardless of feelings of shame, hence the very term “minority” identity. The majority is what is exemplary, the minority is what is inadequate, both to which feelings of shame follow accordingly. It becomes difficult to shame those with majority identity markers due to the fact that their very existence can be attributed to normative, binary, and commonly accepted behaviours. Because of their exemplary nature that stems from privilege and a sense of authority within normative society, they hold power as majority identities.

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<sup>28</sup> Bartky, Sandra Lee. *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. Routledge, 1990. Page 74.

The general self is susceptible to constraints put onto it by normative society, however this sense of constraint goes even further when considering minority identities. Who a person is is who they are made out to be, thus the significant correlation between society and the self. Bartky discusses feelings of who a woman is being who the woman is *made out* to be through discussions of shame as a result of a subordinate status within a larger gender hierarchy. It seems that simply existing and being perceived as a woman is enough for feelings of shame to manifest in relation to one's gender. A woman does not have to believe that she is shameful in order to *feel* ashamed of her status or social position as a woman, it is enough for the systematic reduction of women to be internalized to a degree of which causes the individual to feel constricted, constrained, and unequal to those positioned as the majority. If this shame is a result of having a minority identity, such as being a woman, then the shame is something that becomes oppressive in the sense that it is a feeling to which there is no salvation. The oppressed individual struggles with a constant experience of oppression through the very knowledge that they are oppressed as a minority group, thus causing shame to further implement itself in the conception of the self for the individual of a minority identity, whether it be internal selfhood or external conclusions about the self.

The authority over minority identities that comes with being part of the majority lends itself to the constant perpetuation and prolonging of feelings of shame. Where there is a hierarchy of oppressed and oppressor, the one who is shamed and the one who does the shaming, there is an ongoing system of oppression that perpetuates itself in a vicious cycle. Bartky puts it eloquently, expressing that “the experience of shame may tend to lend legitimacy to the structure of authority that occasions it, for the majesty of judgement is affirmed in its very capacity to injure.”<sup>29</sup> The experience of shame is legitimized by a majority/minority divide. Where gender is a social hierarchy, being a woman is being positioned in a subordinate status, thus rendering feelings of shame based

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<sup>29</sup> Bartky, Sandra Lee. *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*. Routledge, 1990. Page 97.

on that subordination. This gender hierarchy perpetuates itself through the subordination of women, to which repetition causes the subordination of women to become normative due to the systemic nature of oppression and, in turn, of shame.

## Chapter 3.

### Rights, Freedoms, and Privileges in Accordance with Shame

I return now to Nagel's discussion of the distinction between public and private life and his focus on rights as a concern of public life and discuss a further way in which this relates to discussions of shame. Nagel clearly expresses that what one thinks or feels should be of one's own concern, so long as one does not cause harm to another.<sup>30</sup> The lack of public and private distinction brought forth by Nagel, however, demonstrates that an increase in freedoms leads to blurred lines between the public and private. This lack of a clear distinction exists in terms of people's public and private lives.

To add onto my previous discussion of Nagel, I posit that an increase in freedoms, rights, and privileges of specifically minority identities blurs the lines of public and private in a way that is distinctly oppressive, due to the idea that one has to earn while others hold the same rights in a way that has already been established. With this distinction, working in tandem with the distinctions of posed by Nagel, I will explore the idea of "false freedoms", where freedoms are granted to individuals through means of rights and/or privileges, however they are not full rights, this is to say that they cannot be fully realized. The idea of false freedoms exists in line with Michael Rosen's ideas concerning dignity and the value we attach to dignity.

#### 1. **Established versus Earned Rights**

Before delving into the discussion of rights, I return to the distinction highlighted above between rights of the majority that are established rights, and rights of the minority that are earned rights. My definition of an established right is a right that exists in line with normative conceptions of rights that should be realized. An established right is one that is commonly regarded as natural or

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<sup>30</sup> Nagel, Thomas. *Concealment and Exposure: And Other Essays*. Oxford University Press, 2004. Page 43.

normal for a fair and just society to protect. This may be the right to education, the right to marry, and so on. The difference between established and earned rights is that earned rights are not seen as rights that should be protected, rather it is a right that *happens* to be protected due to some sort of social upheaval, protest, activism, etc.

The nature of an earned right in comparison to its established counterpart is that once the right is realized, it still does not provide the individual with the full capacity to realize that right, thus my idea of false freedoms. A false freedom is when a right, usually one that is earned rather than established, is recognized by a governing body in the sense that it is protected from interference, however it exists in a differentiating manner to its established counterpart. The current standing of the right to marry between heterosexual and homosexual couples in Italy is a perfect example of false freedoms, which I will expand upon further within this chapter.

Rights become oppressive once a group has to work to earn the rights otherwise established for those of the majority, due to the fact that a hierarchical relationship exists between those with established rights and those with earned rights. Presumably, those with established rights, who live within the binary, control the realization of rights of the group that works to “earn” said rights. This is a point of authority in the difference between the way rights are realized between those of the majority and those of the minority. This is the idea that the established rights are viewed as a given by normative society, it seems silly to ever question one’s right to marriage or education. Yet, established rights are not equally realized for all. They hold conditions and exceptions, thus implementing a need for earned rights to be developed following social upheaval.

The distinction between established and earned rights is oppressive in the sense that the group that has to earn the right(s) is seen as less deserving than groups in which the rights are considered to be naturally occurring, at least in the sense that they are already established. Michael

Rosen's ideas regarding dignity help clarify the relevance of this distinction between to established versus earned rights.

Rosen argues that the dignity of a being reflects how much value we attribute to them, where dignity is the degree of respect we perceive one to have as moral agents within a larger moral community.<sup>31</sup> Dignitary harm is one that denies the individual of their capacity as a moral agent, it is to see them as less-than, especially in comparison to the moral community. Rosen and Nagel converge when it comes to Rosen's claims about dignity and Nagel's claims about inviolability. The inviolability of an individual is the idea that the individual should be protected from certain kinds of harms, where their value is attributed to both the idea that the individual should not suffer these harms, but also that they should be protected from them, traditionally through the implementation of rights.<sup>32</sup>

## **2. Positive versus Negative Rights**

Here I use the conceptual scheme of understanding rights in terms of positive and negative rights in order to highlight a point about inviolability, dignity, and shame. Nagel's idea of inviolability works in tandem with the idea of positive rights, where one has the right not only to act without interference, which is a negative right, but to also be protected.<sup>33</sup> With this consideration, a negative right is a right that creates duties in others to refrain from interfering with one's rights. For positive rights, they are the rights that creates duties in others to see to it that a certain right or interest is not only realized, but also protected. Expanding upon inviolability and positive rights, I argue that one should not only have the right against interference, but also the right to protection. I

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<sup>31</sup> Beitz, Charles R. "Human Dignity in the Theory of Human Rights: Nothing but a Phrase?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2013, pp. 259–90. JSTOR. Page 272.

<sup>32</sup> Beitz, Charles R. "Human Dignity in the Theory of Human Rights: Nothing but a Phrase?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2013, pp. 259–90. JSTOR. Page 281.

<sup>33</sup> A full discussion of positive and negative rights goes beyond the scope of this paper. I make the distinction between the two and write in favour of positive rights in order to show the importance of lack of outside interference as well as protections in order to flag the idea that shame is not something intrinsic to society. It is contingent and can be changed when the manifestation of rights change.

maintain that protection is one way to combat the oppressive nature of shame. The oppressive nature of shame within established and earned discourse is what I consider as human rights being unequally recognized. This is to say that shame can be combatted when one has the right to non-interference as well as the right to be positively protected and supported in realizing their rights.

### **3. Inviolability and Dignity**

Inviolability, in convergence with dignity, influences the degree to which one feels shame. One's vulnerability when it comes to the rights one holds will impact how much shame one feels, how much shame one is susceptible to feeling. This relationship between shame and rights is exacerbated by the fact that some individuals have the privilege of established rights, while others have rights that had to have been earned. There are several issues within the difference between earned and established rights, one of which concerns the fact that the individuals with privilege, whose identity markers are not traditionally susceptible to much vulnerability or shame, like those who live within the binary, are usually seen as those with established rights. This is to say that someone who lives within the binary, one who lives in line with the earlier quote from hooks about white capitalistic structures. Thus, someone who is white is at the top of the race binary, someone who is a man at the top of the gender binary, and someone who is straight at the top of the sexuality binary. What I mean by top is the idea that they hold the most power and privilege due to their position within binary conceptions of race, sexuality, and gender. This consideration is to say that rights manifest differently within minority communities.

Take the right to education for women, the right to vote for communities of colour, the right to marry for same-sex couples, and so on. Aspects of freedom such as education, voting, and marriage are seen as something gained or earned by minority identities, differentiating them from privileged communities who hold those rights naturally due to the fact that they are already established, prior to those rights being realized for minority identities. Rights are attributed

differently to identities within the binary and those external to the binary, thus creating a hierarchical relationship between those with established rights and those with earned rights. There is something to be said about living in line with a set of identity markers that have never been questioned by the legal system, where your rights have never been seen as conditional.

The hierarchical power of the relationship between established and earned rights is one that highlights the power that the privileged have over those who lack it. Not only does the differentiation between established and earned rights create hierarchy, it also highlights the conditional nature of rights considered as earned rather than established. When rights are earned rather than seen as established, they are seen as conditional in the sense that they can be taken away. They are not rights that are seen as entitlements, the fact that they have been granted proves that they are not seen as intrinsic to the individual, the power earned rights hold lie with those in power, those granting and taking away the so-called rights.

#### **4. False Freedoms**

Our focus on earned rights leads us to a discussion of “false freedoms”, where a freedom is granted to the individual but is not fully realized, at least not in a way that is equal to those with established rights. Italy is a country that exemplifies my idea of false freedoms well. It’s a place where same-sex couples *technically* have the right, or the freedom, to marry. However, the right to marry for same-sex couples is a false freedom in Italy due to the fact that same-sex couples cannot fully realize their rights, at least not in the same way that heterosexual couples can.<sup>34</sup>

The conditions that make these supposed rights, or freedoms, false are as follows: firstly, same-sex couples are not allowed to partake in a marriage, only a civil union. There is a

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<sup>34</sup> There is something to note about false freedoms for same-sex couples globally. One could compare Italy to the US and come to the conclusion that same-sex couples have false freedoms in both countries. However, for the sake of this paper, I will focus on the false freedoms of Italy as I feel it most clearly highlights the points I am trying to make about the way false freedoms manifest, as well as the differences between an established versus earned right to marry.

monopolization on the word marriage that exists for heterosexual couples that is evident under Italian legislation.<sup>35</sup> Second, same-sex couples are not allowed to partake in joint adoption in Italy and are often turned away on the basis of their sexualities.<sup>36</sup> Obviously, joint adoption is legal for heterosexual couples, showing that established rights are a result of normative considerations of what is acceptable, and thus what should be protected. The idea of a nuclear family, where there is the traditional unit of mother and father, is seen as the binary understanding of the parental unit, in the sense that it is what is traditionally done by the majority. Third, the opportunity for In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) is withheld from same-sex couples. Those who seek IVF services abroad are at risk of being fined a hefty sum.<sup>37</sup>

All this is to say that under Italian law, same-sex couples seemingly have the freedom to share their lives together in the same way that heterosexual couples have always been allowed to, however conditions are in place that cause their freedom to be false, specifically in the sense that their freedom is not of an equal caliber to heterosexual couples, for example. The right to marry is not *really* the right to marry, not in the way it is commonly understood to be. This is the intrinsic difference between established and earned rights. Same-sex couples in Italy have earned the right to marry, something that was already established for heterosexual couples. The right to marry is thus something that an authority granted same-sex couples, rather than the right existing as something established in the sense that it is intrinsic to the practice of marriage as a whole.

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<sup>35</sup> *Civil Unions - Consiglio Nazionale Del Notariato*. [notariato.it/en/famiglia/civil-unions/#:~:text=Since%205%20June%202016%2C%20the](http://notariato.it/en/famiglia/civil-unions/#:~:text=Since%205%20June%202016%2C%20the).

<sup>36</sup> Riezzo, Irene, et al. "Italian Law on Medically Assisted Reproduction: Do Women's Autonomy and Health Matter?" *BMC Women's Health*, vol. 16, no. 1, 23 July 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-016-0324-4>.

<sup>37</sup> Riezzo, Irene, et al. "Italian Law on Medically Assisted Reproduction: Do Women's Autonomy and Health Matter?" *BMC Women's Health*, vol. 16, no. 1, 23 July 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-016-0324-4>.

To connect my idea of false freedoms to the dignity that Rosen discusses and the inviolability that Nagel discusses is only natural. False freedoms highlight the fact that minority identities are attributed with less dignity than those of the majority. The rights of those of the minority, those who experience earned rights, are seen as less valuable than established rights. In turn, the inviolability of the individual, the right to be protected from certain kinds of harm, decreases as dignity and/or the value of the individual does. The very fact that a group had to earn a right that was already established for another group creates a susceptibility to shame, making the groups unequal and giving way to oppression for the earned rights group.

##### **5. Earned Rights and Vulnerability to Shame**

Returning to the example of same-sex marriage in Italy, even if homosexual couples had earned all the same rights as heterosexual couples and were granted the means to realize them equally to those of the majority (those who are heterosexual), the fact that their rights were earned rather than already established makes them vulnerable to shaming. They are not seen as naturally deserving of the right to marry, not in the way that those of the majority are. Earned rights connect themselves to false freedoms through the idea that the rights granted are of the bare minimum, in both implementation and realization. The implementation of the right for same-sex marriage can be viewed as a reaction to extreme social upheaval in the name of marriage equality, however the right is a sort of false freedom in the sense that it does not allow individuals the capacity to realize their right to marriage fully, thus further differentiating a same-sex couples earned right to marry from the established binary right to marry for heterosexual couples. The right came as a reaction to upheaval rather than a result of being a human being partaking in society, the lack of established rights perpetuated a difference between straight and gay couples.

The differences highlighted by established versus earned rights, as well as those having to do with dignity, value, and inviolability signify the increased susceptibility that minority identities have

to feelings of shame. As previously discussed, shame holds power over the individual exposed to it in a way that is oppressive because it is based on a vulnerability of their identity, something naturally occurring to them that is impossible to escape. I assume that something like sexuality is naturally occurring. The oppressive nature of shame based on something one cannot make a decision about causes the individual to feel that there is no escaping the shame put onto them because there is no escaping the trait that they are being shamed for.

Shame perpetuates a hierarchical relationship, both mimicked and exacerbated by the hierarchical relationship between those with established rights and those with earned rights. The susceptibility to shame that minority identities face is, in part, due to the hierarchical and differentiating nature of their rights. The conditionality of minority rights, as well as the fact that they are unable to be fully recognized in a way that can be considered equal to those of the majority, exacerbates their positions of vulnerability. The fact that rights manifest differently for those of the majority and those of the minority pushes the narrative that the majority is the majority for a reason, in the sense that they may hold more dignity, and therefore more value, than those of the minority, granting them authority over the minority. This authority seeps into the dynamics of shamed and shamer, where the shamed is seen as less-than the shamer, so the minority is seen as less-than the majority.

Nagel states that rights can be seen as a status, where the kinds of rights one has expresses the kind of place they hold in society.<sup>38</sup> Those with earned rights hold arguably less valuable space in society, based on the fact that their rights are not seen as something already established, rather something needing to be earned. To have earned rather than established rights is to be liable to the authority of society by means of gaining and losing one's rights. For a difference to exist in the manifestation of rights between those of the majority and those of the minority perpetuates a

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<sup>38</sup> Nagel, Thomas. *Concealment and Exposure: And Other Essays*. Oxford University Press, 2004. Page 33.

normative understanding that there is a difference between those of the majority and those of the minority, enough of a difference that one group deserves to be within the authoritative binary<sup>39</sup>, and the other group in the vulnerable minority. Those with earned rights have rights that are viewed as conditional, thus reducing their dignity and value within the moral community. This decreased dignity leads them to be vulnerable to shaming based on their commonly acknowledged inferiority, sustained by the hierarchical relationship the majority and minority share. Thus, the kinds of rights one has leads to the degree of shame to which they are vulnerable to.

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<sup>39</sup> The authoritative binary is one of a normative foundation. It is the idea that the binary has power because it exists in line with normative conceptions, and vice versa. Thus, the binary is consequently something authoritative over those who live outside it.

## Chapter 4. A Case Study of Shame: Israeli Pinkwashing.

“An occupying country cannot celebrate freedom while denying it from a whole nation.”<sup>40</sup>

As I have highlighted throughout the course of this work, shame can very clearly be a tool that can be utilized in order to further oppression. This can happen at the individual level, with one individual oppressing another, but, as we’ve seen, it can also happen as a societal level, with society, as a body oppressing individuals.

I provide here a clear-cut example from our contemporary political world of shame being used as a tool of oppression by one powerful group against another more vulnerable group. The example on which I focus here is discussed by Saed Atshan in his book *Queer Palestine and the Empire of Critique*. Atshan explores the ways in which the Israeli government and larger regime utilizes pinkwashing as a means to control and constrict—and, as I’ll argue, to shame—the Queer Palestinian population. This is accomplished through pinkwashing, which Atshan defines as “a discourse on Israeli LGBTQ rights aimed at detracting attention from violations of Palestinian human rights.”<sup>41</sup>

I focus here on three of Atshan’s points, highlighting how they pertain to my discussion of shame’s oppressive nature. First, pinkwashing is utilized in order to portray an image of the otherwise uncivilized and hostile region of the Middle East, especially in comparison to Israel, treated as *Western*. There is a double standard when speaking about the freedoms involved in Israel

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<sup>40</sup> Atshan, Sa’ed. *Queer Palestine and the Empire of Critique*. Stanford University Press, 2020. Page 172.

<sup>41</sup> Atshan, Sa’ed. *Queer Palestine and the Empire of Critique*. Stanford University Press, 2020. Page 3.

and those of Palestine, one that disregards a clear oppressed/oppressor relationship. Second, Israel's use of pinkwashing acts as a means of coercion that furthers the State interests of Israel at the expense of the interests of Queer Palestinians. Third, the pinkwashing makes it more difficult if not impossible for Queer Palestinians to focus on dismantling misconceptions about being Queer within their own communities. After all, an occupied people must first battle the oppressor before being granted the privilege of looking to the issues of their own communities.

It is clear from this that Queer Palestinians deal with what I've been calling internal shame, namely, shame directed at themselves, and external shame, shame directed onto them by others, a distinction I discussed in Chapter 1 above. We have seen how external shame can oppress, for instance, by the invisible jury of society, as well as the ways in which minorities are susceptible to the shaming of the majority due to the authoritative power that living within the binary grants. Moreover, the invisible jury of society or normative society, understood as a governing body that dictates the way we behave via norms that are standardized, controls normative conceptions of acceptable behaviour based on the aforementioned binary, one in which those who are, for instance, white, straight, and male are privileged.

Queer Palestinians hold identity markers that are of the minority. Individual Queer Palestinians are externally shamed by individuals. My focus here, however, is an even more oppressive shame, the external shame put on them by the oppressive power of Israel, and the internal shame felt by the internal Palestinian community of a Queer Palestinian. Internal and external shame work together to create an inner-community and external oppressor relationship of shame. This example illustrates one especially pernicious use of shame as a tool of oppression. It focuses on the oppressive nature of shame when utilized as a tool for political gain.

I begin by taking a closer look at the double standards of freedom between East and West. Next, I focus on the specific case of pinkwashing being used by Israel to oppress Queer Palestinians. I then take a closer look at this example by focusing again on the internal versus external distinction.

### **1. Double Standards of Freedom (an East versus West Dichotomy)**

To begin, one must consider the historical relevance of the double standards found within political discussions of Palestine and Israel, namely the history of Orientalism. Edward W. Said's book of the same title delves into the social and political phenomenon of Orientalism. What Orientalism posits is a binary distinction between the West and the East. This distinction assumes the West is civilized, an upholder of human rights, and an overall moral example.<sup>42</sup> The East is connoted with the opposite of these virtues, relating the Orient with barbarism, vulgarity, and extreme immorality. Orientalism is directed related to shame, to the shaming of those with minority or vulnerable identities.

Orientalism is a hierarchical relationship of Othering, where the Other is subordinate especially in terms of morality. The Othering nature of Orientalism subordinates the Orient in comparison to the West. This Othering gives a sense of validity to colonial pursuits in the name of "civilizing" the Other.<sup>43</sup> Even in post-colonial discussions of the East and West dichotomy, the historically imbedded tradition of the East as subordinate to the West remains. Said discusses the age-old tradition of Orientalizing, and therefore Othering (through subjection), the region known to be the Middle East. In essence, Said describes Orientalism as a trend of seeing the East, more often the Near East, as an ontological Other, extremely opposite to the virtuous West.<sup>44</sup> As Orientalism

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<sup>42</sup> Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. First Vintage Books edition, Vintage Books, 1979. Page 206.

<sup>43</sup> Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. First Vintage Books edition, Vintage Books, 1979. Page 207.

<sup>44</sup> Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. First Vintage Books edition, Vintage Books, 1979. Page 206.

subjugates the figure of the Oriental or Arab, it reduces an otherwise multifaceted individual to their identity as interpreted by a Western power.

*“Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen or looked at; they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined or – as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory – taken over. – Since the Oriental was a member of a subject race, he had to be subjected: it was that simple.”<sup>45</sup>*

Said’s account of Orientalism holds significant relevance in the contemporary political sphere, especially in regard to the oppressive power Israel, as an occupying force, currently holds over Palestine. Focusing on discussions of Orientalism can help us frame the oppressed/oppressor relationship that exists between Israel and Palestine, one that involves a pronounced hierarchical imbalance, the sort of imbalance that creates the sorts of relationship of shaming and shamed spelled out in the above chapters.

As we’ve seen, the shamer/shamed relationship manifests as one that subordinates the individual or group who is shamed by the individual or group doing the shaming. As I have argued, the power of shaming resides in an assumption of moral superiority those being shamed, one that embeds itself in vulnerabilities of those being shamed. This shaming can be seen as highlighted by the way Israel is continually described as the only democracy within the Middle East. This gives a sense of moral, let alone also political, agency that Israel holds over the Palestinian population, as well as the larger Middle Eastern region as a whole. What is striking here is that the moral superiority that Israel claims over Palestine includes superiority based on LGBTQ+ tolerance grounds. This then is used to exercise further authority over Palestine. As Israel fixates on a comparison between the superior tolerance of Israel and the immoral homophobia of Palestine, Israel shifts the narrative

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<sup>45</sup> Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. First Vintage Books edition, Vintage Books, 1979. Page 207.

from the widespread oppression of the Palestinian people, focusing rather on the shame within the culture.<sup>46</sup> However, Israel fails to acknowledge the ways in which it utilizes that internal community shame through blackmailing of the Queer Palestinians. Israel, for instance, threatens to out Queer Palestinians to their community if they do not comply.<sup>47</sup>

This is directly related to pinkwashing. There is thus a common narrative in place that Israel is intrinsically more civilized than the rest of the Middle Eastern, and that one way that they are more civilized has to do with their supposed tolerance of the LGBTQ+ community, at least a more significant tolerance as compared to the larger Middle East. This is a phenomenon where the region is utilized as a moral yardstick in order to underscore the superior morality of Israel and, in turn, further the image of the inferior morality of the larger, more Arab, Middle East. This is a notable continuation of an intrinsically colonial narrative, the argument that an otherwise uncivilized people has been introduced to civility, have become humane, thanks to a Western power. This narrative fuels pinkwashing, in turn also fueling ideas pertaining to shame and the utilization of shame as a tool in order to constrict the individual.

## **2. Pinkwashing as a Tool for Oppression and a Means of Coercion**

Pinkwashing instills a hyper fixation on a supposed moral dominance that Israel has over Palestine in the name of increased freedoms for the Queer community. Israel claims a uniquely democratic existence, unique as compared to the rest of the region, a narrative the Western media often pushes. However, pinkwashing fails to recognize the ways in which a supposed Queer pride is utilized as a means of coercion, especially in the oppressed/oppressor relationship between Palestine and Israel. As mentioned above, the Israeli government routinely threatens to out Palestinians to their community, blackmailing them into working as informants.

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<sup>46</sup> Atshan, Sa'ed. *Queer Palestine and the Empire of Critique*. Stanford University Press, 2020. Page 220.

<sup>47</sup> Atshan, Sa'ed. *Queer Palestine and the Empire of Critique*. Stanford University Press, 2020. Page 220.

*“Israel’s IDF has admitted using homophobia as a weapon against the Palestinians in their ongoing invasion of the Gaza Strip – with, seemingly, the hope the abhorrent tactic will help grow chaos and confusion amongst the occupied people. – It is claimed that the tactic is a way of portraying the Palestinians as being inherently homophobic, and thus a bid to help turn Western opinion against the war-torn Arabs. Queer and trans people in Gaza already exist on the margins of society and this attack seemingly only serves to further alienate them, while also serving a key Israeli propaganda objective, according to recent reports.”<sup>48</sup>*

This coercive practice by Israel over the Queer Palestinian population firstly dismantles any viable claims to democracy that Israel pushes, further disproving the standard consideration of Israel as the only true democracy within the Middle East. Second, and perhaps more relevant to the discussion of shame, the coercive practices exhibited by Israeli intelligence showcase the ways in which shame can be used as a tool of oppression.

In order for the outing of an individual to be something one fears, the identity of being gay must require a degree of shame, at least in the sense of recognizing a degree of danger in coming out to one’s community. This degree of shame, as well the tumultuous power of community, fuels the hierarchical difference between Israel and Palestine. The Queer Palestinian population is recognized to be a minority insofar as it is a cultural taboo to be gay in areas such as Palestine. This cultural taboo is utilized by Israel in a way that allows shame to become oppressive to the Queer Palestinian collective.

In the hands of Israeli intelligence, one has to make a choice between serving the oppressor or the judgement of their community. Furthermore, the choice of coming out is being stripped from the individual, further constricting their autonomy and agency over themselves. There is something

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<sup>48</sup> Donald, Paul. “Israeli Forces Admit to Deliberately Outing LGBTQ Palestinians.” *The Mirror US*, 17 Nov. 2023, [www.themirror.com/news/world-news/israeli-security-forces-admit-deliberately-195756](http://www.themirror.com/news/world-news/israeli-security-forces-admit-deliberately-195756).

to be said about not coming out when one has weighed the consequences of the reactions pertaining to their community, concluding that hiding one's identity is safer than making the decision to come out. Of course, this says something about shame within one's community, which I will delve further into in the third point of this chapter. The primary focus here is the way in which Israel as a political power utilizes a source of shame, one's sexuality, to further their political aims. The Queer Palestinian is reduced to a mere means, which further oppresses them. They are oppressed in their existence as Palestinians under Israeli occupation as well as Queer within a culturally traditional community.

Moreover, Israeli utilization of shame in order to constrict and oppress the individual roots itself in colonial narratives of the Oriental Other being uncivilized and savage, who need to be taught civility, tolerance, and general morality. The relationship between Israel and Palestine in relation to shame is one where Palestine is constantly subordinate to Israel. Israel utilizes the "invisible jury" of the Palestinian collective in order to push their utilization of shame. There is an awareness that being Gay is a cultural taboo, something normatively regarded as shameful within the Palestinian community. This normative shame about being gay gives way to Israeli utilization of shame as a tool for oppression, fueling efforts to blackmail Queer Palestinians.

The East and West dichotomy that I previously mentioned creates a double standard that also fuels the oppressive nature of Israel. Israel lays claim to being a tolerant democracy due to their acceptance of Gay rights. Israel utilizes the connotations of being morally advanced, First World, modern, developed, and more not only to advance their own image, but to advance their image in comparison to the comparably immoral image of Palestine, at least by means of tolerance.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Puar, Jasbir. "Citation and Censure: Pinkwashing and the Sexual Politics of Talking about Israel." *The Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent*, edited by Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira, University of Minnesota Press, 2014, pp. 281–98. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt6wr7wn.14>. Page 289.

### **3. Internal and External Shame: Community Versus the Oppressor**

There is a dichotomy not only between Israel and Palestine as West and East, but also an inner dichotomy that happens within the Palestinian community. The need to combat Israeli pinkwashing allows the narrative of Queer rights for Palestinians to shift its focus to combatting an external oppressor, namely Israel, instead of allowing the space for Queer Palestinians to combat issues within their own community. This is to say that much of the lived Queer Palestinian experience involves combatting oppression by the West, leaving little to no room for one's own community to be amended.

Atshan explains that Palestinians are stripped of the opportunity to combat issues of internal shame, shame put onto them and internalized by their community, because they are too busy combatting the ways in which shame is being utilized against them as a tool for oppression, namely the blackmailing that the Israeli government commits as described in my previous point. This is a phenomenon where shame, at least within one's community, cannot be combatted due to the overwhelming external shame, utilized as a political tool. Furthermore, in the case of the Palestinians, on top of this issue of shame, Palestinian people face a general experience of occupation under Israeli authority. The shame within the community regarding homosexuality is a caveat of a people that cannot risk jeopardizing their collectivization efforts. Israeli occupation of Palestine causes the efforts of the Palestinian people to be hyper-fixated in liberation from Israel, rather than matters of shame and its oppressive nature.

Moreover, Orientalism embeds itself into the dichotomy of internal and external shame due to common narratives, stereotypes, and misconceptions attributed to Palestinians when trying to combat pinkwashing. Atshan details that Palestinians are often made to feel ashamed of their community and identity due to the inherent "backwardness" as Palestinians, especially in comparison to Israelis and people in the greater West.

Just as Queer freedom and liberation is utilized in order to push the Israeli agenda, it also pits Israel as the greater moral power, allowing for any Palestinians to be seen as backward thinking or immoral people. This form of reduction inhibits the Queer Palestinian population from seeking freedom within their own communities. This “backwardness” attributed to the character of the Palestinian people relates not only to a hierarchical influence of shaming, but also to a sense of moral violability.

To use the acceptance of homosexuality as a yardstick for the moral soundness of a people who are being occupied is to cherry-pick points of morality. If Israel has determined that Palestinians are immoral in comparison due to their immoral treatment of homosexual Palestinians while ignoring the fact that they are oppressing and occupying those same Palestinians, then Israel is doing just that. Through this cherry-picking, Israel pushes a narrative that links their right to sovereignty to their moral status, even though this moral status is false. This falsity is exhibited by trends of pinkwashing, especially in regard to the blackmailing done by Israeli intelligence to Queer Palestinians. Israeli grounds itself as the moral superior to Palestine, creating a hierarchical relationship between the two. Israel holds a moral authority over Palestinians due to the shame of being homophobic, thus being seen as morally subordinate to Israel. Israel implements a cycle of shame about shame, where Israel shames the Palestinian population for shaming Queer Palestinians. This cycle of shame gives power to Israel as an authority over Palestine.

If Orientalism reduces the Palestinian to the Oriental Other who is an immoral and savage, then Queer Palestinians fight a double battle: one that is external, put onto them by the West, leaving little time for the internal battle. This also highlights the fact that there is a certain degree of privilege that one must attain in order to actually dismantle the prejudice within one’s own community. For a people constantly subjugated, the oppressor is the constant focus, leaving matters of personal identity to the shadows. As Toni Morrison expressed the point, “the very serious

function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being.”<sup>50</sup>

Just as racism is a distraction that Morrison speaks about, pinkwashing is a distraction to the true needs of the Queer Palestinian population. This is what results of subjugation, where the privilege to amend one’s own community is stripped in order to combat oppression at large. Israel shames Palestine for shaming Queer Palestinians, all while Israel uses that shame to their advantage as an occupying force.

#### **4. Relevance to Shame**

This pinkwashing example and the discussion of the East and West dichotomy highlights a real-world example of the way in which shame can be utilized in order to constrict an individual. For the Queer Palestinian, shame acts as a tool to coerce the individual into acting on behalf of the oppressor, but it also constricts the individual into focusing on the issues of the oppressor rather than the issues within the individual’s community. In this case, internal and external shame exist, however one towers over the other due to the hierarchical oppressed/oppressor relationship. The utilization of shame as a tool for oppression not only constricts and coerces the Queer Palestinian population, but it pushes an agency of Israel over Palestine in the name of morality, allowed through pinkwashing. As we see, then, the issue of internal shame is second to the issue of external shame. Until the Palestinian people are liberated, it seems difficult to imagine how both cases of shames could be combatted.

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<sup>50</sup> From Portland State University’s Oregon Public Speakers Collection: “Black Studies Center public dialogue. Pt. 2,” May 30, 1975 (<http://bit.ly/1vO2hLP>). Part of the Public Dialogue on the American Dream Theme, via Portland State University Library (<http://bit.ly/1q8HG3h>). Morrison’s speech is entitled “A Humanist View.”

## Conclusion

What I have detailed throughout this work are the ways in which shame can be utilized as a tool to oppress individuals and groups of individuals, specifically individuals of minority identities such as women, people of colour, homosexuals, etc. I have attempted to highlight the destructive nature of shame as something that is put onto the individual by an external agent, namely normative society, as well as shame internalized by the individual *due to* normative society. Relationships featuring pronounced hierarchical imbalance fostered by oppressed/oppressor relationships that constantly subjugate the Other imbed shame as a social constant. Within a society that is so highly socialized, where identity seems to often be contingent on our relationships, shame can be used as a destructive tool.

Shame is often used against people with minority identities due to the inherent awareness that they exist as a constant Other. It is difficult to shame those who are seen as holding a position of agency or authority. Said authority results from living within an identity that holds power—being white, male, or straight are all positions of authority based in normative society. This is to say that they are not vulnerable identity markers. The ways in which shame can and has been utilized as a tool for oppression are vast.

I would like to conclude on a note that emphasizes that any kind of shame for one's identity is not something intrinsic or inherent to that identity. One is not bad for being gay, for being a woman, or for being Black. The issue at large is the controlling nature of normative society as it utilizes shame to constrict and oppress, creating a false causal relationship between shame and identity. Just as much of the norms vital to society are fabricated in favour of those in power, so are the reasons for shame.

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