

Regulatory Institutions Network

Shame, ethical identity and conformity: Lessons from research on the psychology of social influence

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Occasional Paper 12
December 2007



**Shame, ethical identity and conformity:
Lessons from research on the psychology of social influence.**

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ISBN 9780980330243 (web)

RegNet Occasional Paper No. 12
December 2007

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Australian National University 2007

National Library of Australia

Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Harris, Nathan, 1970- .
Shame, ethical identity and conformity: Lessons from research
on the psychology of social influence.

Bibliography.
ISBN 9780980330243 (web).

1. Shame. 2. Guilt and culture 3. Criminals--Attitudes
4. Crime--Social aspects 5. Crime - Psychological
Aspects. I. Australian National University. Regulatory Institutions
Network. IV. Title. (Series : RegNet occasional paper ;
12).

364.601

Disclaimer

This article has been written as part of a series of publications issued from the Regulatory Institutions Network. The views contained in this article are representative of the author only and not of the Australian National University or any funding partner.

Understanding emotion is essential to developing an account of why people commit crime and how they react when caught. Research across a number of disciplines suggests that shame, which is the focus of this chapter, plays a significant role in how societies gain conformity (Barbalet, 1998; Benedict, 1946; Braithwaite, 1989; Scheff, 1988). The emotion has been described as significant in explaining whether individuals are likely to commit criminal offences (Grasmick & Bursik, 1990; Svensson, 2004; Tittle, Bratton & Gertz, 2003; Wikström, 2004), as well as how individuals respond to criminal justice interventions having been caught (Ahmed, Harris, Braithwaite & Braithwaite, 2001; Braithwaite, 1989; Retzinger & Scheff, 1996). While this breadth of inquiry suggests that shame is an important topic for criminologists, this chapter will draw on social psychological research to argue that current theoretical conceptions do not provide an adequate explanation of the role that shame plays in conformity or deviance. An alternative explanation based on the premise that shame reflects threat to an individual's ethical-identity will be forwarded.

The first task in addressing this question is to explore the way in which shame has already been cast as an emotion that is central to explaining social conformity. Despite being described by many as an inherently social emotion it will be argued that limited attention has been given to understanding the social factors that lead to feelings of shame. We will then turn to some findings from research on social influence. These suggest that shame is unlikely to be an emotion that only reflects fear of disapproval by others. It is argued that the emotion should instead be conceptualised as a response to the perception of having violated an ethical norm, and that this involves threat to the individual's ethical identity. This conception of shame, which was developed as a consequence of an earlier research project (Harris, 2001), is then used to explain the way in which individuals respond to criminal justice interventions. Research that suggests individuals manage shame-related emotions in different ways is reviewed and

it is argued that the reactions of others are critical in explaining how an individual responds to the threat shame poses to their identity. Finally, some possible implications for why individuals engage in crime are explored. It is proposed that commitments to moral norms, and conformity to social expectations, are dependent upon having an integrated ethical identity.

Shame and conformity

Emotions such as shame, guilt and embarrassment occur when an individual perceives that they have violated a norm, as judged by their self or by others. So a central characteristic of these shame-related emotions is that they are concerned with judgements about what is wrong or undesirable. It is this perception that results in an emotional response that might include feelings of awkwardness, rejection by others, personal failure, a sense of having done wrong, etc. At the micro level these emotions occur as a result of how individuals define their own values (Braithwaite, 1982) or norms in relation to the values or expectations of those around them. However, these expectations also reflect broader social norms, and so these emotions are also important for understanding how social groups or societies seek to maintain conformity with particular values.

This is not a new or revolutionary claim as there are strong theoretical traditions that have conceived of the shame-related emotions in this way. This is particularly evident in the work of Anthropologists like Mead (1937) and Benedict (1946) who sought to distinguish between forms of social control by examining the differences between shame cultures and guilt cultures. Shame in this context is the emotion most obviously related to conformity because shame cultures are described as those that rely primarily on social disapproval to maintain conformity. Guilt cultures are described as

those that rely on individuals internalising social values and regulating their own behaviour.

This distinction between shame and guilt provides the basis for one of the dominant conceptions of shame, the *social threat conception*, which conceives of the emotion as a response to the fear of rejection. An implication of Benedict and Mead's analysis is that shame results from fear of disapproval or rejection by others. This idea is elaborated on by a number of scholars who have argued that shame is a response to the perception that one's social bonds with others are threatened (Leary, 2000; Scheff & Retzinger, 1991), the perception of having transgressed other's values (Gibbons, 1990), or the perception of having lower social status (Gilbert, 1997). It will be argued in the next section that the cause of shame is more complex than this implies because shame is related to the normative judgements that individuals make rather than simply the acceptance of others' judgements. To adequately account for shame we need to examine the process by which individuals come to believe that something is wrong or undesirable.

The other dominant conception of shame, the *personal failure conception*, explains the emotion as a primarily intra-psychic response to negative self-evaluation. This idea stems from psychoanalytic perspectives (Piers & Singer, 1953; H. Lewis, 1971; Wurmser, 1981), which argue that shame is a consequence of tension that arises from a discrepancy between the individual's perceived self (ego) and their perception of who they would like to be (ego-ideal). The individual perceives their self as a failure because they haven't lived up to their own standards. An alternative explanation based on attribution theory, but with a similar emphasis, is that shame results from the individual's attribution that the whole self is a failure (M. Lewis, 1992; Tangney, 1991). These perspectives emphasise the significance of the individual's interpretation of events and provide little explanation as to the social circumstances in which this occurs.

Implications from research on influence

Shame as a product of social influence

The only explanation of conformity that can be taken from these conceptions of shame, given that one of them says little about the social context in which the emotion occurs, is that individuals conform so as to avoid being disapproved of or looked down upon by others. Conformity to social expectations, from this perspective, occurs because the consequence of non-conformity is an unpleasant emotion that we feel as a direct result of perceived disapproval by others. This depiction of shame is remarkably consistent with what social psychology has termed normative influence, which is understood as having occurred when the individual alters their attitude or behaviour in a public context so as to avoid appearing different from the majority (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Cialdini & Trost, 1998). While change in public attitudes or behaviour allows the individual to comply with group norms, it does not represent a change in the individual's private attitudes, and is performed simply to avoid social disapproval. Of course, like the description of shame in shame cultures, the concept of normative influence is primarily concerned with why individuals act to avoid social censure rather than the consequences of social censure itself. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to conclude that the social threat conception of shame and theories of normative influence share the same underlying explanation of conformity (Scheff, 1988).

However, research into social influence suggests that this understanding of shame is simplistic for the simple reason that the opinions of others often effect our beliefs about the world (Festinger, 1950). While initial research suggested that this is particularly significant in contexts where the truth is ambiguous (Sherif, 1936) research has since shown that the importance of social validation is more pervasive. This is particularly evident in research based on Asch's (1956) influential conformity studies. These studies show that individuals are influenced to make incorrect judgements about

fairly easy perceptual tasks when the task is performed among a group who unanimously give an incorrect answer. While, on its own this effect looks like evidence of normative influence (Scheff, 1988), subsequent research has shown that some influence still occurs, though less, when people are allowed to make their judgement in private (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), and that the amount of influence is dependent upon other factors such as consistency amongst the group (Asch, 1956), external verification of the group's response (Crutchfield, 1955), and the identity of the other participants (Abrams, Wetherell, Cochrane, Hogg, & Turner, 1990). These additional findings suggest that a reasonable proportion of the conformity that occurs is explained by perceptions that the group is actually right. This shows that even on a fairly simple task individuals accept others' judgements as a valid source of information and as a result are influenced (Hogg & Turner, 1987).

Moscovici (1976) has argued that uncertainty about one's beliefs, and subsequently influence, occurs when we disagree with people who we would expect to agree with. Social validation is seen as underlying a broad range of beliefs that we hold, and individuals are much more dependent upon others for confirmation about their perceptions about the world than is often recognised.

It is true, of course, that technical instruments permit an individual to make decisions about the environment by himself; but even these instruments conceal a consensus, since the mode of action of a tool or the appropriateness of a measuring device must be agreed upon by all if the result of such operations is to carry any information.

(Moscovici, 1976; p. 70)

Hogg and Turner (1987; Turner, 1991) have built upon the concept of informational influence in forwarding a theory of referent informational influence. This theory argues that others' opinions are accepted as providing accurate information about reality, but only when those people are seen as having the same social identity (Tajfel 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Having the same social identity is critical because the perception that the other person as similar to oneself on relevant dimensions is necessary to accept that they are a valid reference point for one's own beliefs. This claim is supported by a number of studies which show that when others are perceived as having the same identity they exert greater influence (Abrams, et al., 1990).

Psychological research which shows that individuals are responsive to others' interpretations of what is right, is consistent with Williams's (1993) philosophical characterisation of shame and moral decision making. He criticises the Kantian notion that individuals are morally autonomous and argues that without social support for a particular view it is hard to tell whether an individual is '...a solitary bearer of true justice or a deluded crank' (Williams, 1993;99). Shame, according to Williams, should be understood as a response to the perception that what one has done violates values that are important to one's identity, but this is based upon a shared conception of morality. As research in social influence suggests, disapproval is likely to result in feeling shame not just because disapproval communicates what is negatively judged but because it expresses a judgement which the individual perceives as legitimate: the individual accepts the interpretation that what they have done is shameful. Significantly, this also suggests that shame is an emotion that is centrally concerned with the question of what individuals think is right or wrong. Others' opinions are important because, as research on neutralisation theory (Maruna & Copes, 2005; Sykes & Matza, 1957) shows, decisions about the morality of behaviour and possible justifications for actions often occur in contexts that are perceived as ambiguous. Shame, then, might be

understood as the painful recognition that one's behaviour is inconsistent with social values that oneself, and other people like one's self, ascribe to.

Some evidence that shame is dependent upon acceptance of other's opinions, rather than fear of rejection, was found in interviews with drink driving offenders in the Reintegrative Shaming Experiments (Harris, 2001). An important predictor of feeling shame-guilt in these cases was that other people disapproved, but only when the people present at the case were both very disapproving and highly respected by the offender. This finding suggests that disapproval is only significant when it comes from people who the individual respects. Analyses also showed that shame-guilt was negatively related to stigmatisation (but positively related to reintegration). This also seems contrary to the hypothesis that shame is a response to normative pressure, because it suggests that social rejection results in less shame.

Shame, beliefs and identity.

Research on influence may also help explain the observation by numerous scholars that shame is intimately tied to notions of identity (H. Lewis, 1971; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Lynd, 1958; Sabini & Silver, 1997; Williams, 1993, Wurmser, 1981). Indeed, a defining characteristic of the emotion according to a number of conceptions is that shame is the emotion that is evoked when the individual feels that their 'whole self' is deficient in some way (H. Lewis, 1971; M. Lewis, 1992; Tangney, 1991). As discussed above, social identity theory argues that the individual's identity is central to understanding how they react to disapproval from others. Genuine influence will only occur, according to the theory, where individuals perceive others as sharing a relevant identity (Hogg & Turner, 1987). This is because someone who is similar to oneself is seen as having opinions that are valid to oneself. Identity in this framework is logically tied to normative beliefs: individuals have particular normative values because they are

consistent with their identity. Identity is seen as providing the individual with a framework with which to understand the world as well as their place in it.

What is interesting about this understanding of influence is the implication that an individual's identity is also dependent upon them having values that are consistent with their identity. Someone is unlikely to hold a particular identity if they are aware that they have inconsistent beliefs. So the relationship between values and identity is reciprocal, and having certain values is essential to having a particular identity.

If shared social identity is the basis of mutual influence between people (Turner, 1991), it is also a central object of influence: the construction and validation of people's definition of who they are (and are not) are basic to the task of developing shared norms, values and goals... (Turner & Onorato, 1999: p. 27)

If an individual's identity is dependent upon their having particular values then the violation of these values also has important implications for their sense of who they are. In effect, the individual is presented with evidence that is inconsistent with who they thought they were. Thus, shame would seem to involve a threat to identity that involves an inconsistency between beliefs about who one is and evidence to the contrary (Harris, 2001).

While this suggests that shame is a response to the violation of internalised beliefs and has consequences for an individual's sense of identity, there are some important differences between this ethical-identity conception of shame and the proposition that shame is principally defined by negative self-evaluation (M. Lewis, 1992; Tangney, 1991; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, Gramzow, 1992). The latter implies that shame is an almost dysfunctional response, which is damaging to the individual and

impedes their ability to respond appropriately to the situation. In characterising the emotion in this way, Tangney & Dearing (2001) describes it as “...an extremely painful and ugly feeling that has a negative impact on interpersonal behaviour” (p. 3).

The ethical-identity conception suggests that shame has a more complex relationship with sense of identity than simply diminished esteem. The proposition that a defining characteristic of shame is a threat to identity highlights the individual’s capacity to respond in various ways to the inconsistency between behaviour and identity. While an individual may resolve feelings of shame by seeing their self as defective (accepting the group's norms but internalising one’s low status), they might alternatively respond by emphasising a different identity (perceiving themselves as having an alternative identity, which is consistent with their behaviour) or by diminishing the significance of their behaviour in some way (neutralising the behaviour to avoid acknowledging that it is shameful or repairing and apologising which allows the behaviour to be integrated into a positive identity). It is hypothesised that which of these responses occurs will depend upon the degree to which the individual accepts that what they have done is wrong. In turn, this will be influenced by their social relationships with others and the type of social validation they receive.

To summarise, if the research on social influence discussed is applied to shame then it has a number of implications for how we understand the emotion. The first of these is that a precondition for feeling shame is the perception of having violated a social norm, and that this perception is often based upon social validation. The relationship between values and identity suggests that violation of an important norm will undermine the individual's identity because it provides evidence that they don’t subscribe to values that define that identity.

Implications for understanding the role of shame in criminal justice

This analysis of shame has a number of implications for understanding the significance of the emotions in criminological contexts. One of these is that criminal justice interventions represent a context in which shame is very likely to be felt, even if it is sometimes hidden, as is suggested by Scheff & Retzinger (1991). Censure through a court appearance for many people will represent a failure to live up to an accepted value (e.g. not breaking the law) that is important enough for its transgression to represent some kind of threat to their moral identity (e.g. as a good member of society). This will be even more so in cases where the offence is perceived as serious, where the institution is perceived as having greater legitimacy and where the individual's actions are disapproved of by significant others. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that shame is present or at least threatening in many criminal justice interventions (Harris, Walgrave & Braithwaite, 1994).

A second implication is that the way in which individuals manage feelings of shame may determine the effect that criminal justice interventions have on them (Ahmed, et al., 2001). There is growing evidence that individuals manage or respond to shame in a variety of ways. Lewis (1971) and Scheff (1990; & Retzinger, 1991) and Retzinger (1991) have distinguished between acknowledged and unacknowledged forms of shame. While acknowledged shame involves the overt acceptance of the emotion, unacknowledged shame involves either the mislabelling of the emotion (overt undifferentiated shame) or an attempt to suppress the emotion entirely (bypassed shame). They argue that acknowledgement of shame is important because failure to do so is associated with ongoing psychological problems including feelings of anger and hostility towards others. This is consistent with research which shows that individuals who experienced a response similar to unacknowledged shame (unresolved shame) were more likely to feel hostility towards others, following a criminal justice

intervention, than other participants (Harris, 2003). In contrast, overt feelings of shame-guilt were associated with empathy for victims and lower feelings of hostility. Important differences between types of shame have also been found by Ahmed and her colleagues (Ahmed, 2001; Ahmed & Braithwaite, this volume; Ahmed & Braithwaite, in press) in samples of school children and adult workers in Australia and Bangladesh. The types of shame reported by participants in these studies were significant predictors of whether children or adults had bullied others or had been the victims of bullying. This and other research (Nathanson, 1997, Retzinger, 1991; Tangney, 1991) seems to confirm that differences in the emotional response people have to shameful situations is important in understanding their behaviour.

Understanding the emotion of shame is particularly relevant to reintegrative shaming theory (Braithwaite 1989; Braithwaite & Braithwaite, 2001), which predicts that reintegrative shaming will reduce offending but that stigmatising shaming will increase offending. The relationship between identity and influence that is proposed above suggests that the important difference between stigmatisation and reintegration is their effect on the way in which individuals manage shame. Acknowledgement of shame depends upon the individual's acceptance of an interpretation of their behaviour as shameful. Stigmatisation acts in two ways to make this less likely. It firstly diminished the ability of those who are disapproving to provide social validation, because an obvious function of stigmatisation is to differentiate between the identities of the shamers and the shamed. Secondly, stigmatisation also makes reacceptance into that group, and hence acknowledgement of shame, less attractive to the individual. Stigmatisation might be particularly destructive in cases where it undermines important identities, because the individual is left with the choice of maintaining the same social identities but with lower status or attempting to define a new identity. Reintegration, on the other hand, maintains the disapprover's status as a source of social validation by

emphasising similarity in identity and maintains that social identity as attractive for the individual.

Implications for understanding why people commit crime

The relationship between shame and identity that is proposed here may also have implications for understanding why it is that people do or don't commit crime. The significance of shame for explaining the propensity to engage in crime has already been explored within a number of theoretical frameworks. One of these, which is implicit in the anthropological approaches discussed earlier, is as a deterrent. This perspective has been explored by a number of studies that have compared the deterrent qualities of the shame-related emotions, as perceived by participants, with perceptions of official sanctions (Grasmick & Bursik, 1990; Paternoster & Iovanni, 1986; Tibbetts, 1997). In general, these studies have shown that expectations of feeling shame are associated with lower self-reported projections of offending, and in some cases that the effect is comparable with, or greater than, official sanctions.

While these studies suggest that shame may be a significant deterrent, it has been argued in this chapter that of greater significance is the emotion's relationship to ethical values. This is also the basis of the alternative premise that the propensity to feel shame is related to lower offending because it is a reflection of the individual's moral values (Braithwaite, 1989; Svensson, 2004; Wikström, 2004). Reintegrative shaming theory (Braithwaite 1989; Braithwaite & Braithwaite, 2001) suggests that the primary reason why individuals do not commit crime is because these behaviours are internalised, in the form of conscience. From this perspective individuals do not commit crime just because they are deterred by negative consequences but because they perceive the behaviour as the wrong thing to do. Braithwaite argues that one advantage of reintegrative shaming is that it appeals to the individual's moral sensibilities and in

doing so reinforces their commitment to those values. Wikström (2004), who places a similar emphasis on shame's moral qualities, argues that the emotion is a protective factor in preventing offending. Shame in this framework represents a response to the individual's commitment to do the right thing, which in turn influences their perception of the choices available in a given context. Studies by both Wikström (2002) and Svensson (2004) show that juveniles who report that they would feel shame in front of others (e.g. friends) if they committed a crime also reported lower levels of delinquency.

The emphasis that is placed by these theories on the significance of having a commitment to pro-social norms reflects the importance placed on commitment to the law by criminological theory, particularly control theory, and empirical findings that it is a significant factor in predicting delinquency (e.g. Grasmick & Green, 1980; Hirschi, 1969; Siegel, Rathus, & Ruppert, 1973). Shame is seen as a significant emotion because it reflects the individual's commitment to norms. However, the relationship between identity and moral values, that was discussed earlier, suggests that the individual's sense of self may play an important mediating role in this relationship.

A key prediction of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1972) is that individuals have many social identities and that different identities will be salient depending upon the social context. Furthermore, each identity will emphasise different personal characteristics. So the identity of daughter implies very different characteristics to the identity of heavy metal rocker, yet both might belong to the same person. This is significant because if identities and values are interdependent then it also predicts that an individual's commitment to pro-social values will vary across identities. For example, the value of being a careful driver (especially in relation to drink driving) that someone might hold as a good family man, may not be as relevant on a Thursday night after football training, when being a member of the team is more salient. This suggests

that the interaction between an individual's identities is important in determining their commitment to particular values.

An important tension exists between this idea that individuals have multiple identities and research on the self, which suggests that having a consistent or integrated self is psychologically healthy (Baumeister, 1998; Swann, 1987). The social identity perspective takes this into account by arguing that the identities an individual will adopt are limited by the individual's previous beliefs about who they are (Turner, et al., 1987). This is supported by a study (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996), which suggests that individuals engage in a process of negotiating shared identities based upon the underlying values inherent in that identity. It would seem that individuals play an active role in determining how they see themselves, and that they tend to adopt identities that are consistent in the underlying values they espouse. Prior commitments to particular identities means that others cannot be taken on as easily, and so it would follow that most people have commitments across identities to the same ethical values.

The implication of this research is that weak commitment to social norms may be the result of a weakly integrated self, which is characterised by inconsistent identities. This proposition is supported by the research on social validation that was discussed earlier, which shows how influential the opinions of others are in forming our own beliefs. If sharing an identity provides a means of validating the opinions of others, as Hogg and Turner (1987) argue, then it is unsurprising that individuals without coherent social identities are less sure of the moral decisions that they make, or whose judgements they should believe. One context in which having multiple, and sometimes conflicting, identities may explain a low commitment to social norms is adolescence. It is conceivable that the age at which one's social identities are least integrated is during adolescence when the individual starts to form new social relationships that potentially have different value structures. This is exactly what was found by Emler and Reicher

(1995). In their research on 12 to 16 year olds in the United Kingdom they found that young people often held representations of their selves that were mutually incompatible. They concluded that this was possible because the peers and families of these young people had very limited contact with each other, and that that this was even more pronounced for those youth who reported the greatest levels of delinquency. It might be speculated that a characteristic of many delinquents is that they struggle to manage identities that are defined by different values.

This framework for understanding commitment to ethical norms, and moral decision making, suggests that a central issue for at least some offenders may be developing a coherent and stable sense of self. This conclusion is similar to the one reached by Maruna (2001), that what distinguished the long term criminals who had reformed in his sample, from those who persisted in crime, is the narrative the individual has about their own identity. Those who reformed, developed narratives in which offending was not part of their 'real self'. The self that was associated in the past with crime had been the product of bad luck or bad circumstances, but was now less relevant to their ongoing sense of self. In contrast, their 'real self' was presented as having the ambition and capability to 'make good'. These findings might be interpreted as showing that the ability to act according to one's social values, and perhaps acknowledge feeling shame for violating them, is a result of having a coherent sense of self.

Shame and integrity

Conceptualising the value of having an integrated self might be helped by the notion of integrity that can be found in moral philosophy. A number of philosophers such as Frankfurt (1971), Taylor (1985), Williams (1973), and Calhoun (1995) have espoused the virtue of having integrity. It is argued that to have integrity the person must make

decisions about what they want or value, rather than simply acting on every desire, as well as being able to behave in accordance with these higher order goals. Threats to integrity include self-deception about one's desires, weakness of will to act in accordance with one's values, and conflict between competing values (Frankfurt, 1971). An important characteristic of integrity is the notion of wholeness: that the individual's values cohere and that this is reflected in their actions. A second important characteristic, which follows from this, is that individuals must identify with these values. This is important because having integrity means that one's actions are determined by who the person is and what they believe in (Williams, 1973).

This sense of integrity does not mean behaving in accordance with a predetermined set of moral values. It is better understood as having a coherent set of values that the individual feels able to live up to. Shame, as it is described in this chapter, is central to this because it represents a threat to having this coherent set of values (an ethical-identity). The emotion occurs when one's ethical-identity is threatened by a particular act. However, it might also be suggested that for individuals who have low integrity (weak ethical-identities) the threat of shame is always present. Disparate social identities mean that that the individual must fight a continual battle to live up to contradictory normative expectations, and often fail. This suggests that integrity is not just a virtue for ethical reasons, but that psychological integrity is a virtue because it underlies the individual's ability to develop coherent values that they feel able to live up to. These skills are necessary for developing social relationships, for having a sense of self-respect (Taylor, 1985), and behaving in ways that are accepted by one's community.

Conclusion

This paper has developed, on the basis of research on social influence, an account of the social context in which shame occurs. Rather than being a simple response to the fear of rejection it is argued that shame occurs as a result of the individual's perception that what they have done is wrong. An important characteristic of the emotion is that it emerges in a context in which individuals often perceive that there is ambiguity about what is right. The connections between an individual's beliefs, identity and social relationships suggest that the emotion and its resolution have important implications for how the individual sees their self and their relationships with others.

It has been argued that understanding the significance of social context and identity, and their relationship to shame, is important for criminology because it may have significant implications for understanding why it is that some individuals engage in crime and why they stop. Findings that offenders have a weaker commitment to particular values, and that they are less likely to acknowledge feeling shame for committing offences, may reflect a weakly integrated identities. If this is so, then its significance is that the interaction between the individual and the social context will be of central importance (Wikström, 2004). Individuals with lower integrity between their possible identities may have weaker commitment to particular values in some social contexts, than they might in others, because of how they understand their self and others in that context. Measuring an individual's commitment to pro-social values in a way that does not consider context may be a fairly blunt way of understanding the relationship between values and offending. It also ignores the possibility that the individual may not hold strong commitments to any values, rather than just pro-social ones, which would have a different implications for understanding offending.

If ethical-identity is important then this also suggests that attempts to reform or rehabilitate need to include opportunities for offender to build a more integrated sense

of self. Whether such opportunities can be provided through counselling, or even within prison contexts, remains to be seen. Research suggests that of primary significance is the way in which relationships to others, and particularly significant others, are understood, which suggests that change often occurs through what are perceived as profound social interactions (Maruna, 2001). One context in which such interactions might begin are family group conferences, where the offender is asked to account for, or make sense of, their behaviour in a social context that often includes actors from various quarters of their life: partners, children, extended family, work colleagues, friends, and victims. Developing a coherent narrative in such a context and receiving social validation from a range of significant others may be the kind of event that is capable of instigating change.

Significantly, these changes in identity and in relationships seem to be inextricably linked to emotion. Acknowledgement of shame occurs with the offender's willingness to accept the negative judgement of others. Expression of, and resolution of, the emotion would seem to be necessary for the individual to repair social bonds with others and to put past behaviour behind them. Negative emotions of unacknowledged shame and anger are just as important indicators that the individual remains alienated (Ahmed, 2001; Scheff and Retzinger, 1991). Furthermore, if a number of psychologists (e.g. Tomkins, 1962; Brehm, 1999) are right, it is emotions that provide individuals with the motivation that is necessary to translate their beliefs into behaviour, and thus they need to be central to the concerns of criminologists.

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