ARTICLE

Making Sense of Shame in Response to Racism

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Abstract
Some people of colour feel shame in response to racist incidents. This phenomenon seems puzzling since, plausibly, they have nothing to feel shame about. This puzzle arises because we assume that targets of racism feel shame about their race. However, I propose that when an individual is racialised as non-White in a racist incident, shame is sometimes prompted, not by a negative self-assessment of her race, but by her inability to choose when her stigmatised race is made salient. I argue that this can make sense of *some* shame responses to racism. My account also helps to highlight some of the emotional and cognitive costs of racism that have their root in shame as well as a new form of hermeneutical injustice and distinctive communicative harms, contributing to a fuller picture of what is objectionable about racism.

> Shame. Shame and self-contempt. Nausea. When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle.
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> – Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

1. Introduction

Some people report feeling shame in response to racism.[1] More specifically, some report that they feel shame in response to their racialised identity being made salient in certain interpersonal contexts. (Imagine a Black colleague receiving a watermelon as a gift as a part of the company's Secret Santa event.[2]) One common reaction to this report of shame-response to racism is the retort that they have nothing to feel shame about. This is because many, including those who feel shame in response to racism, believe that the bout of shame in question is prompted by the thought that being non-White is a flaw. That is, the root of this shame-response is deemed to be internalised racism. Internalised racism is an undeniable feature of our world and is the best explanation of some bouts of shame experienced by people of colour. However, I argue that appealing to internalised racism cannot accurately capture *all* bouts of shame felt in response to racism. Drawing on David Velleman's (2001) analysis of shame that appeals to self-presentation, I claim that when non-Whiteness is stigmatised and when an

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[1] This phenomenon of shame felt in response to racism has been noted in various fictions. See, for instance, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), Richard Wright's *Black Boy* (1945), and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) (which J. Brooks Bouson [2000] describes as a "shame drama").

[2] William Black (2014) explains how watermelons became a racist trope.

individual is racialised as non-White in a racist incident, her shame response is prompted by her inability to choose when her stigmatised racialised identity is made salient.[3]

This account of the phenomenology of shame in response to racism is based on both introspection (having experienced bouts of shame in response to racism) and conversations with others who have experienced this sort of shame in response to racism. Of course, not everyone responds to racism with shame. Indeed, we don't all respond alike: some might brush off a racist incident; some might respond with anger, indignation, or resentment; some might even laugh at the stupidity of racism. Moreover, not all *shame*-responses to racism are alike. But given that *some* shame-responses to racism do not seem to be attributable to internalised racism according to the subjects of those shame-responses, it would be good to analyse, and make intelligible, this shame-response.

Being able to articulate the content of our shame-responses is particularly important because understanding our shame and identifying the root of our shame is one way of preventing future bouts of shame.[4] So the hope is that those who have felt this kind of shame, having understood it better, would be less disposed to feel shame in response to racism. Hence, although I discuss whether or not the kind of shame-response in which I am interested is appropriate (section 5), my main aim is to understand the phenomenon. Hence, this paper is in the spirit of what María Lugones calls *world-travelling* which is "understanding the phenomenon so as to understand a loving way out of it" (1987, 6). In addition, if the phenomenon that I analyse resonates, then this is a datapoint that should be taken seriously by those who theorise about shame.[5] Moreover, focusing on this phenomenology directs our attention to some of the emotional and cognitive costs of racism that have their root in shame (section 6). This, I hope, contributes to yielding a fuller picture of what is morally objectionable about racism.

1.a Locating the debate

Many (analytical) debates on racism exhibit two trends. First, they are racist-centric: they focus on the agent (her choices, actions, or attitudes) or the institution (its policies or structure) that are evaluable as racist. This is because one main debate concerns the nature of racism: Is it a necessary condition of racism that it traces, in some way, to a belief of an agent, or is racism instead traceable to racial hatred or ill will as defended by Jorge Garcia (1999)?[6] Notwithstanding significant disagreements about the nature of racism, this debate (unsurprisingly) takes as the focus the perpetrator of racism or the object that is evaluable as ra*cist*.

Second, there is a focus on *extreme* cases of racism. In particular, since violent cases of racism continue to occur, and since past, egregious, cases of racism continue to reverberate, both philosophical and political attention are understandably directed towards these blatant and extreme cases of racism. Recently, this trend has subsided significantly and there has been increasing attention on implicit biases and microaggressions, for example.[7] However, whether these are cases of racism is contested. Neil Levy, for instance, argues that those who harbour implicit biases against people of colour are not full-blown racists on any plausible account of racism (2017, 549). But notice that this exhibits the first trend of focusing on the perpetrators of racism.

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[3]I use *racialised* to denote that race is a social construct and that members of a racial(ised) group do not have "a shared essence" (Appiah 1996, 103).

[4]Helen Lewis (1971) discusses how unacknowledged and unprocessed shame can cause psychological symptoms such as depression.

[5]Stephen Bero and I criticise some claims about shame made by Bernard Williams by taking this datapoint seriously. See Bero and Webster (Forthcoming).

[6]There is also disagreement about whether agent-based or individualistic analyses of racism are sufficient or whether we also need structural or institutional analyses of racism. See, for instance, Clevis Headley (2000) and Joshua Glasgow (2009).

[7]Michael Brownstein and Jenny Saul's volumes on implicit bias (2016a, 2016b) include chapters on stereotype threat. For examinations of microaggression, see Derald Wing Sue (2010), Lauren Freeman and Jeanine Weekes Shroer (2020), and Regina Rini (2021).

My aim in outlining these trends is not to object to them, but to clarify that this paper shifts away from *both* trends.[8] That is, I want to direct our attention to the impact that these subtler cases of racism have on people of colour.[9] These subtler cases of racism may seem trivial given the other much more significant and often violent harms that are perpetrated on non-White bodies, but these subtler cases are part of the ideology of White supremacy according to which non-Whiteness is marked, subordinated, and stigmatised. When we direct our attention both to subtler racism that arises in interpersonal contexts *and* to the impact on those who are targets of this kind of racism, we see that one kind of harm caused by racism is shame.

In the next section (section 2), I provide examples of these subtler cases of racism where targets of racism might feel shame in response. In section 3, I outline some features of shame (as well as some contested issues regarding shame) and argue that we have good reasons for thinking that shame is the correct description of the emotional response in question. I propose that the phenomenology of a particular kind of shame-response to racism is better captured by appealing to the fact that stigmatised racialised identities are made salient without the say-so of the targets of racism (section 4). This makes the shame-response intelligible without thinking the targets of racism are ashamed of their racialised identities. In section 5, I examine the appropriateness of such shame-response. The upshot of this paper is a fuller picture of both the phenomenology of those who experience racism and the distinct harms of racism that come to the surface when focusing on the nature of some of the shame-responses to racism (section 6).

2. Shame in response to racism

WHERE ARE YOU FROM?: Michael, a White man, and Neetu, a Sydney-born woman of Indian descent, meet at a conference.
>Neetu: Where are you from?
>Michael: I'm from Sydney. You?
>Neetu: Me too!
>Michael: Oh! … Where are you *really* from?[10]

PET: I was carrying a cardboard pet carrier which I had bought for my cat in preparation for a move in Nottingham, England, in 2016. Two men, a father and his son, were walking past me and I overheard their conversation. I am Asian (of Korean descent).
>Son: I wonder what's in that box.
>Father: … Her dinner!

FAST FOOD: Peter (who is White) and Omar (who is Black) are discussing their favourite fast food.
>Peter: Burger King is my favourite. You?
>Omar: … Umm, I don't really have one. KFC?
>Peter: Of course! You guys love fried chicken![11]

Each of these cases involves racialisation and the person of colour is made aware that they are being seen as a person of colour. In the latter two cases, the targets of racism are also made aware that

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[8]I am, of course, not the only one to resist these trends. See, for instance, George Yancy (2008, 2016) who resists the second trend by focusing on the lived experiences of those who are targets of extreme and often violent cases of racism.

[9]I think that these subtler cases are cases of racism and I refer to them as such. However, if you resist this, you can think of my project as explicating the nature of shame that is sometimes felt in response to problematic racialisation (or racial insensitivity as recommended by Lawrence Blum [2002, 206]).

[10]Or "Where are you *originally* from?" Or "Were you *born* there?"

[11]See Gene Demby (2013) for a discussion of this stereotype.

particular racial stereotypes are operative. When we focus on the harms to the targets of these subtler cases of racism, what becomes apparent is the emotional harm. In particular, *some* people report feeling shame in response.

That shame is one emotional response to racism is unsurprising: we find evidence for this in various fictional narratives (see footnote 1) and Fanon (see epigraph [1952/1986]). Moreover, the three examples given at the beginning of this section are (versions of) real-life experiences and many who have engaged with this paper have reported having felt shame in response to these kinds of racist incidents. Accordingly, some philosophers have taken this phenomenon seriously (Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni 2012, chap. 8.2; Kim 2014; Piper 1992; Velleman 2001). In particular, Cheshire Calhoun's "Apology for Moral Shame" is based on the claim that "people who wholeheartedly condemn sexist or racist insults are still vulnerable to feeling shamed by those insults" (2004, 137).

Despite these reports, one might think that shame is not the correct characterisation of the emotion that is felt by the targets of racism above. Perhaps they feel embarrassed or humiliated, but they are not ashamed. Deciding whether the emotion sometimes felt by targets of racism is shame is challenging, partly because the nature of shame is contested. Moreover, the precise differences between these emotions are controversial. For instance, some claim that embarrassment is a mild variant of shame (Williams 1993, 221) while others disagree and claim that shame is reserved for serious flaws: we are embarrassed, but not ashamed, when we clumsily spill coffee. Some claim that shame is distinctively moral (whereas embarrassment is not).[12] Yet others insist that shame is directed at the *whole self*, whereas embarrassment is directed at *features* of self. Given these controversies, more needs to be said to claim that the targets of racism in my cases can only feel embarrassment, but not shame. More importantly, even if one is convinced that they merely feel embarrassment, we must note that the emotions experienced by targets of racism are excruciating and often devastating, leaving long-lasting marks (much like experiences of shame). In addition, even if targets of racism feel embarrassed in response to racism, a similar puzzle arises: Why should they be embarrassed in response to racism, especially when they don't think that their racialised identity is a flaw?

Perhaps these targets of racism feel humiliation rather than shame. Humiliation is not well-theorised but, arguably, in feeling humiliated, one feels a certain loss of standing in response to an act that is denigrating. What are the differences between shame and humiliation? Perhaps you can only feel humiliation in front of an audience even though you can feel shame when you are alone.[13] Or perhaps one can be humiliated without one's sense of self being diminished. Relatedly, humiliation may be acute (felt in the moment) whereas shame can be felt long after the initial bout. But these alleged differences do not obviously suggest that the targets of subtler cases of racism must feel humiliation rather than shame.

Settling these debates is not the aim of this paper, but I attempt to show (in section 3.2) that we have good reasons for thinking that *some* targets of racism sometimes feel shame in response to certain kinds of racism, shifting the burden of proof to those who deny that they feel shame. If you disagree and/or think that you can discharge this burden, then you can think of my project as explicating the nature of the emotion—whatever it is—that is sometimes experienced in response to racism.

3. A puzzle about the shame-response to racism

Although there are disagreements about what characterises shame, many accept that shame necessarily involves a negative self-assessment. As Bernard Williams claims, we are ashamed when

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[12]Indeed, many emphasise this special *moral* role that shame plays (Buss 1999; Calhoun 2004). Williams argues for a connection between shame and the ethical. For a (critical) discussion of the latter, see Bero and Webster (Forthcoming).

[13]The rejection of an *audience requirement* may be compatible with shame being a social emotion. See Bero (2020).

we have "contemptibly fallen short of what we might have hoped of ourselves" (1993, 92).[14] Accordingly, I aim to make intelligible a particular shame-response to racism on the assumption that an agent feels shame only if there is some feature of herself that she judges to be a flaw. Many accounts of shame also require that the agent *endorses* the relevant standard or ideal that she has fallen below. For example, Sarah Buss claims that "shame is an acknowledgement that one is, indeed, this very object … [and] that this is a weakness or fault" (1999, 527).[15] It is easy to see why endorsing the relevant standards or ideals seems necessary for shame. If I fall below some standard that doesn't have a grip on me, then this will not cause me to feel shame. This can explain why "[t]he most popular view of shame is that someone only feels ashamed if she fails to live up to standards … that she, herself, accepts" (Maibom 2010, 566).[16]

If this "popular" view is correct, then we seem to have a problem. What is the standard that a target of racism falls below? One natural candidate is the standard according to which non-Whiteness is a flaw. But, plausibly, many targets of racism (including the very same people who report feeling shame) do *not* endorse this standard; in fact, they categorically reject it.[17] That is, the endorsement requirement *coupled with* the claim that the relevant standard in all shame-responses to racism is the standard of Whiteness—according to which being racialised as non-White is a flaw—gives rise to a dilemma:

Either: *S* does not feel shame in response to racism;
Or: *S* feels shame in response to racism and endorses the standard of Whiteness.

I argue against both horns. More specifically, in section 4, I argue that sometimes some targets of racism can feel shame in response to racism not because they think being racialised as non-White is a flaw but rather because they did not wish for their stigmatised racialised identity to be made salient. The rest of this section is dedicated to rejecting the two horns.

3.a Against the first horn

One common response to the claim that targets of racism sometimes feel shame in response to racism is that shame is not an accurate characterisation of their emotional response. As mentioned, given the controversies regarding the nature of shame as well as other related emotions, it is difficult to settle this debate conclusively. Here, I outline two earmarks of shame that have been noted in the literature and show that these are present in those who report feeling shame in response to racism. These earmarks have argumentative force because paying attention to the roles that emotions play in agents' motivational structure is one way of drawing boundaries between different emotions.[18]

First, we see that "[t]he action tendency of shame is to disappear or to hide oneself" (Elster 1999, 39). As John Deigh claims, an explanation of shame would be inadequate if it failed to explain acts of concealment as expressions of shame (1983, 244).[19] This desire to hide or disappear is certainly sometimes felt by targets of racism:

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[14]Even this is uncontested. See Calhoun (2004) and Krista Thomason (2018).

[15]John Rawls claims that "feelings of shame are relative to our aspirations" (1973, 444); Jay Wallace claims that "in feeling shame about an action, one thinks of the action as revealing the lack of an excellence that one values and aspires to possess" (1994, 239); and Michelle Mason claims that shame "presents one's character as meriting some degree of withdrawal of esteem in virtue of one's failure to approximate a legitimate character ideal" (2010, 418–19).

[16]See also John Kekes who writes: "[i]t is essential that we ourselves should accept the standard, otherwise we would not feel badly about falling short of it" (1988, 283). Heidi Maibom (2010) rejects this "popular" view and argues that shame concerns failure to live up to public standards.

[17]Recall that this is Calhoun's starting point (2004).

[18]I am not assuming that emotions are reducible to their action tendencies. I am assuming a weaker claim that an emotion is characterised by action tendencies it motivates (along with its cognitive base and feeling).

[19]We might also have this desire when we are embarrassed or humiliated. However, as I noted in section 2, the differences between these emotions are controversial and similar questions arise even if we reject that targets of racism feel shame.

"Understand, my dear boy, color prejudice is something I find utterly foreign… . I had a Senegalese buddy in the army who was really clever."
Where am I to be classified? Or, if you prefer, tucked away? … Where shall I hide? (Fanon [1952] 1986, 85)

The second role that shame plays in our motivational structure is to regulate our behaviour (Elster 1999, 101). Since feeling shame is unpleasant, we try to avoid engaging in conduct that might prompt shame. Hence, shame can help "in attempts to reconstruct or improve oneself" (Williams 1993, 79).[20] Many people of colour, especially when in predominantly White communities, often act in ways to avoid racist incidents partly to prevent experiencing shame. For instance, someone of Indian descent may be reluctant to profess her love of Indian food especially with new acquaintances for fear of making her racialised identity salient by being cast as someone who loves Indian food because of her racialised identity.[21]

Given that targets of racism want to hide or disappear when faced with racist incidents coupled with the fact that they regulate their behaviour in order to avoid racist incidents, we have some reasons for positing that that they feel shame. These reasons are inconclusive, but these earmarks of shame—coupled with testimony from targets of racism that they experience shame in response to racism—give us good reasons to think that targets of racism genuinely feel shame in response to racism. Of course, self-reporting of one's own emotional states is fallible, but in the absence of a positive reason for thinking that those who experience racism are particularly unreliable in their assessment of their emotional responses, we should reject the first horn of the dilemma and think that sometimes an agent can feel shame in response to racism.[22]

3.b Rejecting the second horn: The endorsement requirement

If we reject the first horn, we are left with the second horn: an agent feels shame in response to racism and she endorses the standard according to which her non-Whiteness is a flaw.[23] This is because many accept the endorsement requirement for shame.[24] For instance, Gabriele Taylor claims that we feel "genuine" shame when we betray our own values, but we feel "false" shame when we temporarily accept "an alien standard [that is] imposed" on us (1985, 83) or when we "momentarily attach a degree of importance" to a standard which we don't think it deserves (133). On Taylor's view, then, if a target of racism doesn't endorse the standard of Whiteness, then she does not feel *genuine* shame.

This suggests rejecting the endorsement requirement so that the dilemma doesn't arise in the first place. Indeed, we may have independent reasons for rejecting this requirement.[25] Perhaps endorsement is required for shame to be *appropriate*, but whether an agent *genuinely* feels shame should be distinguished from whether her shame is *appropriate*.[26] Making this distinction and

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[20]Williams also speaks of *prospective* shame: "An agent will be motivated by prospective shame in the face of people who would be angered by conduct that, in turn, they would avoid for those same reasons." Buss (1999) claims that shame can not only induce different behaviour from us, but also what we recognise as (nonstrategic) reasons.

[21]Thanks to those who have shared experiences like this and for corroborating this desire to hide or disappear more generally.

[22]Note that this last argument about testimony isn't that rejecting the testimony of those who experience racism constitutes *testimonial injustice* which "occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word" (Fricker 2007: 1). This is because the reason for rejecting the testimony isn't *prejudice*, but a commitment to a certain account of shame. I do, however, think that there is an issue of epistemic injustice in the vicinity, which I explore in section 6.

[23]Of course, she need not consciously think of her own racialised identity in terms of non-Whiteness.

[24]This issue of endorsement (sometimes discussed under the label 'heteronomy *versus* autonomy of shame') is complex. For simplicity, I regard the endorsement requirement to be satisfied when the relevant negative self-assessment is endorsed.

[25]See Maibom (2010, sec. 1).

[26]D'Arms and Jacobson (2000) argue that equating *fittingness* of an emotion with its *appropriateness* commits the "moralistic fallacy."

rejecting the endorsement requirement allows us to accommodate the phenomenon of feeling genuine shame on some occasion while at the same time believing that one ought not to feel shame. All that may be required is that the agent is simply gripped—perhaps temporarily—by the relevant standard even though she doesn't endorse it all things considered. Applying this to our cases, we can describe the racist incidents as triggering the targets of racism to feel pulled by the standard of Whiteness and so (momentarily) attaching some normative significance to that standard and thereby (temporarily) experiencing their non-Whiteness as a flaw. We can then describe the targets of racism as feeling genuine cases of shame without (falsely) attributing to them endorsement of the standard of Whiteness.[27]

Rejecting the endorsement requirement helps us escape the dilemma, but a problem still remains. This is because we are still left with the thought that people of colour who feel shame in response to racism do so *because they experience their non-Whiteness as a flaw.* However, this description does not strike me as accurate. That is, even though we no longer face the original dilemma, we face the following dilemma:

Either: *S* does not feel shame in response to racism;
Or: *S* feels shame in response to racism and (temporarily) experiences her non-Whiteness as a flaw.

3.c *Against the (revised) second horn: The standard of Whiteness*

According to the revised second horn, a person of colour who feels shame in response to racism is gripped (at least temporarily) by the standard according to which her non-Whiteness is a flaw. Perhaps this horn can be accepted in some cases. Indeed, the root of some shame is the internalisation of certain racist attitudes.[28] However, I nonetheless reject this revised second horn because I think that it is a mistake to characterise *all* cases of shame experienced in response to racism as involving internalised racism. Hence, the goal of the next section is to identify a different standard that can correctly capture the phenomenology of shame prompted by some (subtler) cases of racism. But this task is difficult: What is the relevant negative self-assessment that prompts the bout of shame in response to racism if it's not the thought that being non-White is a flaw? I propose an account of the shame-response to racism according to which the root of shame is the fact that one's stigmatised racialised identity has been made salient without one's say-so. The root of shame is not always transparent to the subject of shame even when she reflects on her shame experience. So for those who have experienced shame in response to these subtler cases of racism, my hope is that my explanation can provide an "aha" moment.

4. Root of shame: Unavoidable salience of stigmatised racialised identity

Recall Pᴇᴛ which describes the incident where I'm carrying a cardboard petcarrier and I overhear the following conversation:

Son: I wonder what's in that box.
Father: … Her dinner!

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[27] Plausibly, agent must feel *some* pull of the relevant standard for the negative self-assessment to prompt a bout of shame (even if this "pull" does not amount to endorsement). As Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni claim, we can think of shame as "apprehend[ing] a trait or action of ours that we take to exemplify the polar opposite of a *self-relevant value*" (2012, 102; emphasis added).

[28] One could support this by appealing to research that shows that "implicit biases are commonly found … in members of the groups 'targeted' by the biases" (Brownstein and Saul 2016a, 2).

Someone in this situation might feel shame because she has eaten cats or dogs and thinks that this is a bad thing. But let us set this possibility aside. Indeed, I felt shame in response to the remark "Her dinner!", but this shame was neither prompted by the thought about eating cats or dogs nor prompted by the thought that being Asian is a flaw. But the shame did have something to with my racialised identity.

I claim that the root of this kind of shame has to do with the fact that one is seen by the world as someone who is racialised when one's racialised identity is stigmatised. I was a pet owner moving my cat; that was the meaning of that activity, at least to me. But by the remark that I overheard, I was made to realise that I am seen by the world not as a pet owner, but as an Asian person.[29] Of course, there are situations where my being racialised as Asian is an important social and political fact and I do not mean to deny that social reality. But during this incident, I was simply moving my pet and being racialised as Asian wasn't a feature of myself that I was trying to make salient to the world. In addition, being racialised as Asian is stigmatised in our society which means that there is a good reason to want the ability to have some say on whether this feature is made salient. So I propose that my shame was prompted, not by the thought being racialised as Asian is a flaw, but by the fact that I was unable to prevent the salience of my *stigmatised* racialised identity.[30] When one's ability to choose when one's stigmatised racialised identity is made salient is undermined, it can threaten one's sense of agency, prompting a bout of shame.[31]

4.a Velleman's account

My proposal is inspired by Velleman's account of shame. The way into his account is to think about the oft-made claim that exposure lies at the root of shame. Implicit in this is that we feel shame when something has been revealed about us that was unwanted or unchosen. Velleman gives the following example to illustrate:

> Why does my sixteen-year-old son feel shame whenever his peers see him in the company of his parents? I don't think that he is ashamed specifically of us … we're no dorkier than the average mom and dad. The explanation, I think, is that being seen in the company of his parents tends to undermine the self-presentation that he has worked so hard to establish among his peers… . he has tried to present himself as an independent and autonomous individual, and being seen with his parents is a public reminder that he is still in many ways a dependent child. (2001, 44–45)

Velleman's starting point is that we are not fully transparent to each other. This means that we can, and must, choose how we present ourselves to each other. The further step that Velleman takes is to think more generally about the fact that we choose to present ourselves to the world (rather than focusing on the particulars one wants or doesn't want to reveal). In order to participate in the social world, we must each be recognised as a participant "by presenting noises and movements that can be interpreted as the coherent speech and action of a minimally rational agent" (36). So, Velleman claims that we have a fundamental interest in being recognised as eligible for social interaction.

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[29]One might argue that the incident *reduces* me to my racialised identity. However, this depends on what this kind of reduction amounts to. After all, although the racist incident may remind one that one is racialised, being racialised need not involve reduction to the racialised identity. Of course, there may be other shame episodes (prompted by racism or something else) that involve negative self-assessments of whole selves. Accordingly, the claims made in this paper are compatible with pluralism about shame endorsed by Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni (2012).

[30]One might think that what prompts the bout of shame is just the thought that being non-White is stigmatised. But this fact of stigma (or the more general fact of racism) is insufficient. If I recognise that my racialised identity is stigmatised by society because of racism, then there isn't a negative self-assessment or a flaw attributable to me such that it would prompt a bout of shame.

[31]As we shall see in section 5, I am *not* assuming that the kind of agency or control that prompts shame is something that we ought to expect people to have. Indeed, we may want to reject the social normative expectation that we have this ability.

Accordingly, when our particular attempts to self-present in particular ways are thwarted, two things go wrong: (i) there is a mismatch between the image that others have of you and the imagine you *want* others to have of you; and (ii) your ability to self-present—your ability to choose which persona you want to be recognised—is undermined. Hence, on Velleman's view, "shame is the anxious sense of being compromised in one's self-presentation in a way that threatens one's social recognition as a self-presenting person" (50).

4.b My account of shame in response to racism

For Velleman, shame is intimately connected to a minimal kind of agency, namely, the ability to be socially recognised as a self-presenting person. I agree that social recognition of some sort is important in understanding shame, but in attempting to understand the phenomenology of a *particular* kind of shame experience, we need to know more than that one's general ability to self-present has been undermined.[32] Accordingly, I appeal to the fact that in all three cases of racism I provided, the stigmatised racialised identity of each person is made salient even when its salience was unwanted.

Recall that I assume, for the purposes of this paper, that shame necessarily involves a negative self-assessment. I propose that the relevant negative self-assessment in some shame-responses to racism is a special case of the negative self-assessment regarding the inability to self-present proposed by Velleman. More specifically, sometimes, shame is prompted by the target of racism's loss of power over when her stigmatised racialised identity is made salient. In some cases of subtle, interpersonal racism, the target of racism is made to realise that their stigmatised racialised identity has been made salient which can prompt a bout of shame.[33]

Recall that my account isn't intended as an accurate characterisation of *all* shame-responses to racism. In some cases, the shame-response may be prompted by internalised racism or momentarily experiencing one's non-Whiteness as a flaw. However, I think that my proposal captures the phenomenology in *some* cases of shame, especially in response to the kind of cases of racism that is my focus. To see this, recall Fᴀꜱᴛ Fᴏᴏᴅ:

> Peter: Burger King is my favourite. You?
> Omar: Umm … KFC?
> Peter: Of course! You guys love fried chicken!

When Omar tentatively suggests KFC as his favourite fast food, he was simply engaged in identifying and reporting his preferences. Peter's response—given the social background (including operative stereotypes)—makes Omar's Blackness salient even though all that Omar uttered was "KFC." That is, given the stereotype made salient by Peter's remark, Omar is *made* to present as somebody who is racialised as Black. I propose that Omar's shame is prompted by his inability to have a stigmatised feature of himself remain inconspicuous (rather than shame being prompted by his thinking that his Blackness is a flaw).

Suppose that Omar doesn't regard his preference for KFC to be rooted in his racialised identity. Then, given the stereotype in Peter's mind, he is unable to report his actual preference without

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[32]Indeed, although we need to be recognised as "a minimally rational agent" (Velleman 2001, 36), we need more than this: we need to be recognised as occupying an intelligible social position of some sort (Williams 2002, chap. 8.5). Indeed, while I agree with Velleman that one's ability to self-present is, in some sense, more fundamental than one's ability to self-present in a particular way, I disagree that this means that the real root of shame is one's general ability to self-present being undermined rather than a particular self-presentation being thwarted. Thanks to Sally Haslanger for encouraging me to make this disagreement explicit.

[33]Note that the relevant stigmatised racialised identity need not be made salient *explicitly*. For instance, in Wʜᴇʀᴇ Aʀᴇ Yᴏᴜ Fʀᴏᴍ?, Michael doesn't invoke Neetu's racialised identity explicitly. But to understand why Michael wonders where Neetu is "really" from, we need to appeal to her non-Whiteness to which Michael is responding.

making salient his stigmatised racialised identity. That is, he lacks the power to communicate his preference truthfully (since we are supposing that his preference has nothing to do with his racialised identity). Omar could add: "Look, I know that you might think that I like KFC because I'm Black, but that just has nothing to do with it." But notice that even if this qualification could be asserted—and even if Peter would believe it—Omar is still unable to communicate his preference truthfully *without* making salient his stigmatised racialised identity. Indeed, the easiest way for Omar to prevent this racist incident is to choose food that is unconnected to any stereotypes related to his race.[34]

My account which appeals to the loss of power over salience of an aspect of one's stigmatised identity can also capture cases of shame felt in response to "positive" stereotyping. Imagine a Black woman who is dancing at a social event for work and her colleague complements her dancing and attributes her ability as innate to her Blackness. Or imagine an Asian student being asked what he studies and when he answers "mathematics," the interlocutor finds it unsurprising.[35] Although the particular operative stereotypes may be "positive," my account can explain how they can prompt shame by making stigmatised racialised identities salient.

We should note that targets of racism who respond to racism with shame need not be *consciously* ashamed of their inability to choose when their stigmatised racialised identity is made salient. Recall Velleman's sixteen-year-old son: he is not consciously ashamed of his inability to self-present as an independent and autonomous individual. Similarly, shame can be prompted by a racist incident without the target of racism being able to articulate the object of shame. Indeed, this is one of the obstacles to the task of explicating shame-responses.[36] The subjects of shame might not know how to fill in the blank in the sentence "I am ashamed that ___."[37] The subjects may only know that their shame has something to do with race. (They may, even on reflection, think that they must be ashamed of their racialised identity even if it doesn't sound quite right.) My hope is that my proposal that sometimes the best way to fill in the blank is to think that one is ashamed of one's ability to choose when one's stigmatised racialised identity is made salient resonates with those who felt unsure about the exact content of their shame in response to racism.

We should also note that my account is compatible with racialised identity being deeply important to the subject of shame. After all, the importance of a feature doesn't entail that the agent is always happy for that feature to be made salient by others. This can help explain why the salience of one's stigmatised racialised identity does not *always* give rise to shame.[38] This is another advantage over appealing to internalised racism or stigmatisation of one's racialised identity to explain the phenomenology of some shame-response to racism. If I am ashamed that my racialised

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[34]Recall the second earmark of shame. This discussion also suggests that people of colour may feel pressure to lie (including lying by omission) in order to avoid similar situations. This pressure to lie is a distinct kind of harm of racism that my focus brings to the surface.

[35]See also Saray Ayala-López's discussion of positive comments on non-English accents. They argue that these "accent-prompted comments … spoil conversations by derailing them in problematic directions, like *making it salient that the addressee is an outsider*" (2020, 152; my emphasis).

[36]I argue that this lack of transparency gives rise to a new case of hermeneutical injustice (section 6).

[37]My point is different from those being made by Velleman's *inchoate* shame (2001, 47) or Piper's *groundless* shame (1992, 6).

[38]This helps explain a difference between my account and Thomason's. According to Thomason, shame arises due to a "tension between our *self-conception* and our *identity*" (2018, 87) where one's self-conception is "made up of the characteristics that [one] sees as central to [one's] own life, whereas the characteristics that [one] sees as peripheral are part of [one's] identity" (92). But I think this distinction obscures the complicated ways in which various features gain and lose importance and centrality in different contexts. To see, let us suppose that Omar has a self-conception of being Black—he is well-versed in African American literature and history, participates in solidarity movements, and is curious about his Kenyan ancestry. But he could still feel shame in response to the racist incident. Moreover it's not obvious that there is tension between Blackness and a preference for KFC that could explain Omar's shame-response. Furthermore, we can understand Omar's shame-response without knowing about Omar's self-conception and identities. These considerations suggest that the kind of shame-response that I am exploring here isn't well captured by appealing to a tension between self-conception and identity as proposed by Thomason.

identity is stigmatised, this would predict that I am ashamed whenever my racialised identity is made salient. Similarly, being gay may be deeply important to someone (attending gay pride events, speaking out about gay rights) without wanting this aspect to be always spotlighted.

This suggests another advantage of my proposal. By focusing on the ability to choose when a *stigmatised* aspect of one's identity is made salient, it can provide a recipe for accounts of shame caused by other kinds of oppression.[39] For instance, since disability is stigmatised, a disabled person who is unable to choose when that aspect of her identity is made salient may feel disability-shame.[40] My proposal also suggests a *general* account of *oppressive shame*, the root of which is the inability to choose when *any* stigmatised aspect of one's identity is made salient. Further exploration is required to determine whether there is a common phenomenology of oppressive shame or whether different kinds of stigma or oppression render different kinds of shame. But this seems a promising line of avenue for future research to gain a fuller picture of the harms of sexism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia as well as oppression more generally.[41]

5. Appropriateness of the shame-response to racism

Recall that one common retort to a report of shame-response to racism is that the targets of racism have nothing to be ashamed of. This retort often assumes that the content of their shame is their racialised identity. After all, targets of racism should *not* feel ashamed of their racialised identity (even though it's understandable). Indeed, a target of racism who doesn't feel shame—and so is shameless—in response to racism may be laudable.[42] However, if my account of shame is accurate, then sometimes targets of racism feel shame in response to racism not because they are ashamed of their racialised identity but because their ability to choose when their stigmatised racialised identity is made salient has been undermined. In these cases, it's less clear whether the retort is apt: Do targets of racism have something that they should feel ashamed about? This section addresses this question.[43]

On the one hand, we may think that shame-response is appropriate because people of colour have racialised identities which are stigmatised and visible and so can lack control over when their stigmatised identities are salient. Recall that on Velleman's picture, we have a fundamental interest in being recognised as self-presenting person. This might suggest that targets of racism who feel shame need not resist feeling shame; perhaps shame-response is not merely intelligible but appropriate if the status as a self-resenting person has been undermined. However, there are putative counterexamples: consider a student who wants to self-present as diligent despite almost always prioritising recreational activities over their education.[44]

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[39] See, *inter alia*, Bartky (1990), Rukgaber (2016), and Clare (2008). Given intersectionality, the shame of someone who is a woman of colour, or a disabled person who is queer, will require further research (Clare 2010).

[40] Of course, further research is needed to determine whether this is a good view of disability-shame (and *mutatis mutandis* for gender-shame, class-shame, etc.).

[41] Another advantage may be that oppressive shame is compatible with pride and pride movements. If expressions of pride are forceful insistence that being a member of an oppressed group is not a flaw (and a demand for social change), then being proud is *in*compatible with regarding one's own membership in an oppressed group as a flaw. But pride, thus understood, *is* compatible with being ashamed about one's inability to choose when one's stigmatised identity is made salient and wishing one had this ability in our oppressive society.

[42] See Mason (2010) who argues that shamelessness is typically a moral fault and therefore that shame has moral value. I am sympathetic to Marcia Baron (2018) who appeals to what I call oppressive shame (shame felt by victims of domestic violence and rape survivors) to challenge to Mason's argument for the moral value of shame.

[43] Appropriateness of the shame-response is not the only normative question worth exploring. As Calhoun (2004) argues, it could be justifiable to feel shame about one's marginalised identity for distinctively moral and political reasons. In addition, I do not discuss appropriateness of other kinds of shame in response to racism. Note that neither Calhoun (2004) nor Mun (2019) focuses on the kind of shame-response I am discussing.

[44] This student may genuinely feel shame, but given that nondiligence is not *stigmatised* (although disvalued), I think that the phenomenology of her shame is importantly different from the phenomenology of shame experienced by people of colour.

Perhaps shame response prompted by a loss of power over when a *stigmatised* aspect of one's identity is made salient is always appropriate. Given that non-Whiteness is stigmatised, targets of racism have a vested interest in their ability to choose when their non-Whiteness is made salient. That is, the ability to avoid salience of a stigmatised aspect of one's identity is valuable. Hence, one may argue that shame in response to racism is appropriate because the ability to avoid the salience of a *stigmatised* racialised identity has been undermined and because *this* ability is valued by society as well as the subjects of shame. One might be further motivated to claim that shame can be an appropriate response to racism in order to avoid attributing an error to targets of racism. Perhaps it's a cost to a view if it entails that any bout of shame felt in response to racism is inappropriate because it puts the onus on the targets of racism to change to have a more appropriate response to racism.

But these considerations are far from decisive. We should distinguish between the claim that a shame-response is intelligible and the claim that the shame-response is appropriate (Thomason 2018, chap. 5.3). Accordingly, one might claim that it is *understandable* that targets of racism to feel shame in response to racism (because their ability to avoid the salience of their stigmatised racialised identity has, in fact, been undermined), but that is not *appropriate* because it's not their *fault* that they lack this ability. Hence, we might conclude that although shame in response to racism is intelligible, it is inappropriate; after all, the fault lies not with the targets of racism but with society which stigmatises non-Whiteness and the perpetrators of racism who force the salience of stigmatised identities.[45]

Moreover, the claim that the shame-response is inappropriate can be bolstered by questioning the kind of autonomy or agency that is being invoked if the root of shame is the loss of power over salience of our stigmatised identities. After all, we have good reasons for thinking that we do not, in fact, have that kind of power over our self-presentation. First, since racialisation concerns with how our bodies are perceived, we have very little power over the fact of racialisation. Second, we, as individuals at least, cannot control which aspects of our identities are stigmatised. Since the kind of power or control we lack isn't something that we should be expected to have, one might conclude that shame prompted by the absence of this kind of power is inappropriate.

Furthermore, the claim that targets of racism respond understandably, but inappropriately, by feeling shame has explanatory power. It can explain how, despite their emotional processes functioning properly, people of colour living in a racist society, can be inculcated to have tendencies and affective responses that are inappropriate. The idea is that just as a racist society makes it much more likely that we learn to have racist views, a racist society is likely to produce inappropriate emotional responses.[46] Hence, a view according to which targets of racism respond inappropriately by feeling shame can unearth a systematic, psychological harm of inculcating inappropriate emotional responses that is caused by racial oppression.[47]

Whether the kind of shame-response to racism that we have been discussing is appropriate is an issue that requires further exploration. I have tried to capture one distinctive phenomenology of shame experienced in response to racism, thereby making the shame-response understandable, even if, ultimately, it is deemed inappropriate.

6. Shame and harms of racism

I proposed that sometimes a shame-response is prompted by the fact that one's stigmatised racialised identity has been made salient without one's say-so. Suppose that this is a plausible account of the phenomenology of a particular kind of shame-response to racism. Does this yield a

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[45]Indeed, as Martha Nussbaum claims, it is society's responsibility to "remove stigma and hierarchy" (2004, 17).

[46]Thanks to Shyam Nair for this point.

[47]This makes me hesitant to accept that shame, as a category, is morally valuable because of a function that it can sometimes serve in our (moral) education. See also Bero and Webster (forthcoming).

fuller picture of the harms of racism? I think we can extrapolate some harms of racism that have been largely neglected.

First, once we acknowledge that sometimes targets of racism feel shame in response to racism, we see that one harm of racism is the emotional cost of feeling shame. After all, shame is a negative, unpleasant, emotion. This is not to deny that shame can be valuable: given its role in our motivational structure, shame can prompt self-improvement. However, arguably, this benefit isn't applicable to shame experienced in response to racism. It's difficult to see what self-improvements can help avoid future bouts of shame of this kind. One could avoid future instances of shame by either preventing oneself from feeling shame in response to racism or by avoiding situations where one's racialised identity is made salient without one's say-so. Neither seem like genuine self-improvements.

The emotional cost of shame not only includes the occurrent episodes of an unpleasant emotion, but also an ongoing vulnerability to shame. If what sometimes causes shame (as a response to racism) is a certain oppressive social meaning being imposed on someone and the inability to decide when that meaning is made salient, then shame will only be eliminated when racialised identities are not imbued with the oppressive meanings. Hence, shame felt in response to racism can also prompt a feeling of helplessness: one who is made to feel shame may be made to realise that one will be vulnerable to shame-causing racist incidents.[48]

Furthermore, given my account of shame-response to racism, when someone experiences shame in response to racism, the bout of shame is itself *evidence* of her powerlessness (even if the power to choose when a stigmatised racialised identity is made salient is not a power that she ought to expect to have). This is because, given the operative stereotypes associated with stigmatised racialised identities, there is always the possibility of unavoidable salience of stigmatised identities for people of colour. Williams claims that shame can help one understand one's relations to others "because it embodies conceptions of what one is and of how one is related to others" (1993, 94). This suggests that our vulnerability to shame can help cement the idea that our racialised identities are stigmatised and that these stigmatised identities are conceptions through which others relates to us.

Another distinct kind of harm of racism that we have seen is the *cognitive* costs that the targets of racism must bear. When targets of racism feel shame in response to racism, they may feel shame about feeling shame. This second-order shame occurs because in reaching for the object of the first-order shame, one natural candidate is one's racialised identity itself. But this can conflict with their explicit rejection that one's racialised identity is a flaw. Hence, those who feel shame in response to racism are prompted to ask themselves some or all of the following questions: Am I ashamed of my race? Am I a bad person for feeling shame? Is this feeling of shame compatible with the fact that I am (or at least ought to be) proud of my race? Shouldn't I be stronger and have thicker skin and feel angry rather than shame? These questions and experiencing second-order shame prompted by bouts of (first-order) shame are significant cognitive costs of racism. These are especially pronounced when many of us experience racism for the first time as children.

If my account of shame can capture the phenomenology accurately, it may provide some clarity to those who experience shame in response to racism. Moreover, this clarity may make one less susceptible to feeling shame in response to racism. But according to a common and widespread view of shame (as well as many theories of shame), shame experienced in response to racism or other oppressive shame are not deemed to be paradigmatic cases of shame. Indeed, there is significant push-back from some on the very claim that the emotion experienced in response to racism can be regarded as shame. This reveals the existence of a new case of *hermeneutical injustice*, "the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource" (Fricker 2007, 155). If this kind of shame (and oppressive shame, more generally) is experienced only by people of

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[48]Williams claims that this "prospective shame" is a form of fear (1993, 79).

colour (and members of oppressed groups), then there is a gap in our collective understanding. If this gap is what causes targets of racism to be unsure about how to reconcile their emotional response of shame and their considered judgements about their own racialised identities, then, plausibly, this is a form of a structural identity injustice.[49]

In addition, my account can highlight that the target of racism who feels shame in response suffers a *communicative* harm. On my view, the shame-response to racism is prompted by the target of racism's inability to choose when a stigmatised racialised identity is made salient. We have seen that this inability can render a target of racism unable to communicate truthfully: we saw that, in Fᴀꜱᴛ Fᴏᴏᴅ, given the operative stereotype in Peter's mind, Omar's utterance "KFC" couldn't have one of its intended effects (that his preference for KFC has nothing to do with his Blackness). Since one is *perlocutionarily silenced* when one's speech cannot have its intended causal effects (Langton 1993), we can describe Omar as having been perlocutionarily silenced, a distinct harm of racism.

However, not all cases of shame instantiate this kind of silencing. This is because shame can occur where the target of racism is not engaged in any speech act. Recall Pᴇᴛ where I was simply carrying my pet: there was no speech act and hence there is no (perlocutionary) silencing. But we can think of the distinct harm of racism uncovered by my account as the harm of *communicative* or presentation inabilities: Omar couldn't communicate his preference for KFC without making his stigmatised racialised identity salient and I couldn't carry my pet without making my stigmatised racialised identity salient. These communicative inabilities are revealed when we direct our attention to my account of shame felt in response to racism.

7. Concluding remarks

By shifting the focus to the phenomenology of those who are on the receiving ends of subtler cases of racism that arise in interpersonal contexts, we discover that one response to racism is the feeling of shame. I proposed an account of shame that captures the phenomenology of a particular kind of shame-response: the root of this kind of shame is the inability to choose when a stigmatised racialised aspect of our identity is made salient. This account also exposed distinct harms of racism. These include the emotional costs associated with experiencing shame and the cognitive costs associated with processing such shame. Moreover, focusing on this particular phenomenology allows us to appreciate that those who are targets of racism face a novel form of hermeneutical injustice and distinct communicative harms. I hope that this explication of the nature of this kind of shame felt in response to racism resonates with those who have experienced shame in response to racism. I also hope to have contributed to a fuller understanding of the impact of inhabiting an oppressively racialised society.

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[49]The form of hermeneutical injustice I describe here is similar to the kind of epistemic harm of microaggression discussed by Saba Fatima, namely "the inability to generate knowledge claims with epistemic certainty about the nature of one's own uncomfortable experience" (2020: 167).

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