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In these pages . . .

The concept of oedipal shame is not one that has been generally adopted by the psychoanalytic community. In working on my *Disappearing Persons: Shame and Appearance* (SUNY, 2002), I stumbled onto the concept while searching for a way of expressing the relation between shame and the tragic situation in Sophocles. In this respect, the concept is associated directly with the shame of Oedipus, the Oedipus of Sophocles (as distinct from the Oedipus of Freud).

Oedipal shame thus expresses an intractable conflict: Oedipus cannot know his fate, for if he does he is doomed. Yet, his not knowing brings about the very outcome he has tried to avert; his hubris causes plagues and devastation. Over and above specific dynamics of the play, this kind of situation—which depicts humankind as caught up in forces that cannot be understand and if they are will diminish and destroy them—seems particularly important for psychoanalytic practice because human experience is more often wrapped up with failed struggles and inconsolable losses than psychoanalytic theory and practice allow. An awareness of these dimensions of human experience is, I think, usefully associated with shame. It would therefore seem, paradoxically and diabolically, that shame humanizes and dooms at the same time.

Let me briefly comment on the articles in this issue and suggest a few of the ways in which they can be seen to compliment each other in clarifying and deepening the concept of oedipal shame. In my article, "Oedipus and the Oedipal," I take up the question of how distinct the conceptions of Sophocles and Freud are and what these profound differences suggest for psychoanalytic theory and practice. By recasting Oedipus as an illustration of drive theory, Freud (and psychoanalysts since) left out tragedy. Oedipus became the Oedipus of an Oedipus complex that, at least in principle, is resolvable; there can be a postoedipal world. But, such a "beyond Oedipus" goes directly against the "stuckness" and tragic pain and loss of the Sophocles play, leaving out both the inevitability of shame and the conflicts over shame that such inevitability produces; it leaves out, on the one hand, the anger, helplessness, and loss and on the other the awareness of need.

The second article, by Léon Wurmser, "Abyss Calls Out to Abyss," beautifully evokes the emptiness and "doubleness" that makes human life tragic for us all and can so unbearably threaten patients, torturing them with specters of nonbeing, judgments of unavoidable failure, and feelings of being hopelessly riven. In exploring feelings of being double (illustrated by the

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moving case of Karin), Wurmser uses Dostoyevsky's metaphor of being caught between two abysses, one of lofty ideals and the other of foulest degradation.

In the third article, Joseph Adamson takes up Sophoclean themes and characters used by George Eliot in *The Mill on the Floss*, describing with great sophistication the tragedy of shame–rage spirals. Striving desperately after honor can inadvertently lead to unbearable shame, as it does with Ajax of Sophocles and with Maggie in the Eliot novel. Maggie was plagued by "that bitter sense of the irrevocable which was almost an everyday experience of her small soul," in response to which she strove desperately to assert her own dignity and honor. But for her, as for Ajax, "the error that is anguish to its own nobleness" doubled sorrow, bled life of value and joy, and led to the rage and despair of suicide.

Ana Maria Rizzuto's article, "'Is There Such a Thing as Happy Shame?' He Asked" uses clinical material to shed light on shame and contempt. Oedipal shame designates the constellation of feelings of defeat, belittlement, and incipient failure that a child such as Mr. T. appears to have felt with respect to his mother and that he felt doomed to repeat. He tried to comfort her, but failed, and reacted in adult life to this failure by repudiation: No longer the small, ineffective child with a defective widdler, he had become the scornful seducer. The theme of hidden or bypassed shame that comes out in clinical situations as contempt is taken up also by Wurmser and Lansky.

"Oedipal Shame, Rejection, and Adolescent Development," Luigi Caparrotta's article, focuses on the theme of adolescence with its conflicts between idealism and inadequacy, particularly as expressed in clinical material and the film, "The Bicycle Thief."

The two last articles, written by Melvin R. Lansky, turn to the subjects respectively of superego shame conflicts and dream instigation, focusing on how psychoanalytic theory can better account for shame dynamics. In "Shame Conflicts as Dream Instigators," he takes up the issue of how shame, particularly Oedipal shame, can trigger dream wishes, which then drive dream processes (the dream work). In "The 'Incompatible Idea' Revisited," he zeroes in on the theoretical importance of ego–ideal conflicts together with their implications for oedipal shame.

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One theme that traverses the articles in this volume is the hidden nature of shame conflicts. Whether they are "hidden" or whether we as analysts are blind to them is the first question to ask. The answer is probably both. We hide our shame conflicts from others because we want others to be blind to what we cannot tolerate seeing. This leads to a useful consideration concerning the ways in which we work with shame: Namely, countertransference always plays a major role. And, our response as analysts to the

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hiding of shame conflicts in patients is inevitably complicated by both what they want us not to see and by our own human blindness. In the future, it is to be hoped that the countertransferential dimensions of oedipal shame can be more thoroughly described, and that their implications for all working through can be followed up. It seems to me that whatever hides shame conflicts or makes them inaccessible is ipso facto of essential importance in the dynamics of all treatments, both psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic.

The hiddenness of shame conflicts raises the theme of the nature of such conflicts. What these conflicts consist of remains a matter of debate, as do the limits of psychoanalytic interpretation (as distinct from psychoanalytic process). Rizzuto, Lansky, and Caparrotta lean in the direction of resolution. Along with Wurmser and Adamson, I tend to feel that there are basic irreconcilable, intractable, and unacceptable conflicts and needs that make human beings tragic and that are therefore necessarily felt to be shameful. The analytic task at hand, therefore, is to make bearing such suffering a less isolating and "isolative" experience. In this sense "understanding"—if it means analyzing and breaking down conflicts into more intelligible bits or holding out the promise of love or conflict resolution—is less relevant than "recognition," recognition that one's plight is not unique, recognition that it is possible to feel riven and survive, recognition that one's struggles can be seen by others and can strengthen human bonds.

This special issue owes a great deal to many people. Giselle Galdi kindly approached me about putting it together, has supported the project through more months than either one of us thought the project would take, and supplied indispensable combinations of encouragement and friendship. I am also grateful to the contributors, who accepted my sometimes considerable editorial nips, tucks, snips, and suggestions with good grace. Much of what appears here is in one way or another the product of more than two dozen Shame Dynamics workshops at the meetings of the American Psychoanalytic Association. We warmly thank all those who participated.

Benjamin Kilborne
Guest Editor