

## Is Shame a Shame?

Shame is something people the world over experience. Charles Darwin thought it had roots in behaviours in our non-human ancestors. But what is shame, and is it a shame it exists? When should individuals, or societies feel ashamed – and when does shame become counterproductive and make the world a worse rather than a better place?

### 1. Stimulus

In a home for children from very troubled backgrounds, some of the children had no sense of shame. Rather like a toddler throwing a tantrum in a supermarket, they had no idea how their behaviour in public places looked to others and would act very inappropriately. So, the carers decided to introduce to the concept of shame by taking them on the London Underground. In a carriage with lots of passengers, the adults would then start acting in a ridiculous way – singing nursery rhymes very loudly, playfighting with newspapers and eventually swinging from the bars making noises like a monkey. At some point, the children would always beg them to stop.

**What was the idea? Were the young people discovering shame? Should the carers be proud or ashamed of using this tactic?**

### 2. Experience

**What does shame look like?** Act as if you are ashamed of something, for example, breaking something and then lying to cover it up. [Share the things people notice and other behaviours shame can lead to.]

Side mystery - if we want to keep shame secret, why do our blushes broadcast it? (Blushing seems universal across skin types though more obvious with pale skin)

### 3. Concept mapping

Meet the neighbours – **If shame is here, what are the neighbours?** For example, for happiness, its neighbours might be joy, laughter, contentment. (I've been indicating with my hands, almost like tiles in vertical space) – maybe shyness, embarrassment, guilt, fear, pride, being centre of attention, fear, sadness; Then pick some of the most interesting – **What is the fence between shame and embarrassment?**

### 4. Which is better at making people be better – shame or guilt?

[One psychology paper found that shame was self-centred, more likely to lead to anger and avoidance, while guilt was more other-centred, more likely to lead to empathy and making amends]

### 5. What is the right amount of shame?

>>Imagine a world without shame. What would it be like?

>>Think of any book characters who have too much shame (Dobby the house elf?)

>>Is there a right amount of shame – not too much and not too little?

### 6. Does it make sense to feel shame for things your country has done?

"The history of western interference after the second world war in countries throughout the world has been one of unmitigated failure for which we all bear a share of shame" Jane Ghosh, letter to the Guardian re: failure to evacuate all our local supporters from Afghanistan such as guards of our embassy.

### 7. Is shame a shame?