

Tomasz Czub\*

## Shame as a self-conscious emotion and its role in identity formation

**Abstract:** *The paper presents a draft model of the relationship between shame, treated as one of the self-conscious emotions, and the identity formation process. Two main concepts of shame have been discussed here: shame as an adaptive emotion, in line with the evolutionary approach, and as a maladaptive emotion (in contrast to guilt), according to cognitive attribution theory. The main thesis of this paper states that shame has an essential, both constructive and maladaptive, importance for identity development and that its effect is indirect as it works through the mechanisms of emotion regulation. The destructive and disrupting influence of shame is not an immanent feature of this emotion, but it is a consequence of malfunctioning mechanisms of shame regulation. The association of shame with identity formation relates to the exploration dimensions – exploration in breadth, exploration in depth and ruminative exploration, as well as to commitment making and identification with commitment.*

**Key words:** *adolescence, early adulthood, exploration, commitment, identity status, identity development, experience of shame, shame-proneness*

The aim of this paper is to discuss the possibility of using the category of shame, understood as one of the self-conscious emotions, in helping to explain human functioning, especially in regard to the process of identity formation. An analysis of different theoretical accounts of shame draws attention to the considerable differences that exist between them. These differences raise the fundamental question of whether shame can be treated as an adaptive emotion, playing a vital and constructive role in identity development, or as a destructive emotion, which disrupts the process of development including also the sphere of identity formation.

In the article this problem is analyzed with reference to studies on the identity formation process conducted within the neo-eriksonian approach. The main thesis put forward in the present elaboration states that shame has significant importance for the identity formation processes, however, it does not influence these processes directly. An important mediator seem to be the mechanisms of emotion regulation. It has been assumed that the destructive and disrupting influence of shame is not an

immanent feature of this emotion, but rather a consequence of malfunctioning mechanisms of emotion regulation that include the mechanisms of shame regulation.

### Shame and its role in the process of human adaptation to the environment

The feeling of shame is commonly felt and is well known to human beings, thus, at the level of experience, we are all aware of what shame is. Nevertheless, categorical knowledge about this emotion is not that obvious. At the level of a phenomenological description of shame researchers are generally in agreement. However, when we start to compare theoretical accounts of the mechanisms of shame emergence and its influence on human functioning, we are able to notice considerable difference between those accounts.

Authors who have taken up the issue of shame describe experiencing this emotion as highly aversive and painful, and they stress that it pertains to the self (Lynd, 1958; Tomkins, 1963; Lewis, 1971; Tangney, Dearing, 2002; Lewis, 1992; Gilbert, 2007). As a consequence

\* Tomasz Czub; Institute of Psychology, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland; tomasz.czub@amu.edu.pl

*This paper has been prepared as part of the NCN OPUS 2 No. 2011/03/B/HS6/01884 project entitled Mechanisms of identity formation during the transition from adolescence to adulthood: regulative role of the self-awareness emotion for the years 2012 – 2015 (project leader: Professor Anna I. Brzezińska, principle investigator: Tomasz Czub, PhD).*

of experiencing shame the way of experiencing oneself changes. People describe this state in terms of losing respect for oneself, of shaking one's self-esteem, feeling degraded, diminished or humiliated. Experiencing shame includes also a need to hide, disappear, or 'to vanish into thin air'. Such descriptions leave no room for doubt. Shame is perceived as a negative experience that motivates people to get rid of it and to try and avoid experiencing it in the future. The negative affective value of shame and its particular painfulness do not, however, indicate an exclusively non-adaptive value for this emotion.

Two different points of view, concerning the mechanism responsible for experiencing shame, may be distinguished. The first one is based on the evolutionary approach to emotions, and it assumes that it is an inborn and predetermined mechanism (Tomkins, 1963; Barrett, 1995; Fessler, 2007; Gilbert, 2007; Goetz, Keltner, 2007). To put it simpler, in this approach shame is treated as one of the basic or, in other words, independent, emotions (see Ackerman et al., 1998), i.e. such that emerge without the mediation of cognitive evaluation. It is believed that emotions from this category can be activated automatically, and that they occur in the repertoire of a child's reactions during the first year of life.

A different standpoint has been adopted by the authors who represent the second approach, i.e. the cognitive-attributional (Lewis et al., 1989; Tangney, Dearing, 2002; Tracy, Robins, 2007). In this approach it is believed that a necessary condition for shame activation is earlier development of complex cognitive structures and functions, such as the concept of the self, self-awareness, or an ability to evaluate one's behavior with reference to a particular standard. According to Michael Lewis (2008), cognitive competences of this kind can be achieved not earlier than the age of three (or close to this age). Thus, only then can shame occur in the repertoire of a child's emotional reactions.

Juxtaposition of the two approaches reveals the most important difference between the contemporary accounts of shame. The evolutionary approach is connected with the belief that shame has an important adaptive value, and that this very value can explain the common presence of shame in the experience of humans as a species. Silvan Tomkins (1962, 1963) the creator of affect theory, in which affects are understood as inborn and predetermined mechanisms responsible for emotion emergence, claimed that one of these primeval affects is shame / humiliation. Tomkins assumed that every affect realizes a specific adaptive function. Shame was recognized to function as an inhibitor of affects responsible for experiencing positive emotions: interest / arousal or satisfaction / happiness (Tomkins, 1963, p. 122). Summarizing the quite complex theory developed by Tomkins, it can be stated that the task of shame is to block the development of positive emotions that would otherwise motivate us to act in a situation, when an individual notices unexpected information that is disturbing to the development of positive emotions. Tomkins used the following example: we notice from a distance somebody that seems to be a familiar, close to us

person; when we try to attract the attention of this person it turns out that it is a totally different, unknown to us individual and the feeling of shame is activated (Tomkins, 1963, p. 123). The primary adaptive function of shame is, thus, inhibition of positive emotions that would motivate the undertaking of inefficient or inadequate, as in the example above, actions. Other examples of unexpected information that is disturbing to the development of positive emotions may be: a negative evaluation of the results of a behavior in the situation when approval was expected; a sudden loss of openness and interest of another person when maintaining the contact, which is a source of satisfaction, was expected; or understanding that one's own behavior contradicts the desired self-image.

The adaptive value of shame has been defined in a slightly different manner by Paul Gilbert (2007), one of the contemporary authors who represent the evolutionary approach. For him, the starting point is an assumption based on, *inter alia*, the ethological-evolutionary theory of attachment, and on the results of numerous empirical studies concerning the special role of positive emotional relations in man's functioning (*op. cit.*, pp. 283-284). In providing optimal conditions for development in childhood and for success in addressing developmental tasks in adulthood what seems to be of particular significance is fulfillment, according to Gilbert, of the need to be accepted and positively evaluated by others. An important factor that has an influence on achieving this desire, is shame. In the opinion of Gilbert (*op. cit.*, p. 289), the primary function of shame consists of signaling that we are at risk of losing, or we have already lost, the acceptance of other people. Shame primarily emerges in situations when our exposition causes external reactions that indicate that we are considered unattractive to others. A painful shame experience is thus generated in order to hamper behaviors that impede a successful accomplishment of the need to be accepted, which is so important for proper development and adaptation.

However, representatives of the cognitive-attribution approach not only do not mention the adaptive function of shame, but they directly declare that shame has a maladaptive character (Tangney, Stuewig, 2004, p. 329). In this approach shame is usually analyzed in the context of guilt. These two emotions, called "evaluative", have been assigned two opposite meanings. Guilt is recognized to have an adaptive value, whereas shame is considered to be an emotion that has an exclusively destructive impact on man's functioning. Such a way of understanding shame seems to be a consequence of the hypotheses assumed about the mechanisms that activate this emotion. The cognitive-attribution theory assumes that both shame and guilt are generated under the influence of attribution of failure or misfortune in conduct. Whether we will experience shame or guilt depends on what we will focus the negative evaluation in the situation of a failure: on the entire self (e.g. "I have lost, I'm useless"), or only on the ineffectiveness of our behavior in the given situation ("I have lost because didn't practice enough"). Thus, a negative and global evaluation of the self results in shame, whereas concentrating on the

negative aspects of behavior activates guilt (Lewis, 1992; Tangney, Dearing, 2002). In the light of this theory, it seems understandable that shame is contrasted with guilt. In an act of global self-condemnation, which we may experience even in the face of an insignificant failure, it is really hard to notice any adaptive value. Much more adaptive seems to be the fragmental and behavior-oriented evaluation, thanks to which the emotional consequences of failure can be less painful, and which facilitates undertaking corrective actions.

If it were possible to state with certainty that shame emerges only in the manner described by the cognitive-attribution theory, it would probably be pointless to seek for a constructive role of shame in personality development. However, especially in the context of contemporary knowledge about the cerebral mechanisms of emotion activation (e.g. LeDoux, 1998), theories that assume that shame can be triggered by simpler stimuli, without the mediation of the cognitive evaluation processes, cannot be disregarded. In this context the studies that confirm the involvement of the limbic system, especially the amygdala, in the activation of emotional states appear to be important (the results of studies collected and presented by, for instance, LeDoux, 2000; see Phelps, 2005). A lot of evidence suggests that the amygdala is a structure that receives both complex information from cortical structures and less complex information via paths that emerged in the process of evolution earlier than the neocortex. Of particular importance seems to be the direct connection with the thalamus.

In the quoted here, exemplary, neurobiological studies researchers used various brain neuroimaging tools, such as fMRI (Phelps et al., 2001). Also, studies on individuals with brain damage have been conducted. It turned out, for instance, that individuals with hydrocephalus lack insular cortex, i.e. a part of the neocortex responsible for experiencing emotions. The subcortex regions of such individuals, however, remain undamaged, which means that they are able to experience a wide range of emotions (Damasio, 2010). Pointing to the subcortex mechanisms of emotion activation and experiencing, we incline towards the belief that emotions, such as shame and guilt, can be activated without the necessity of mediation by the higher processes of cognitive evaluation. In the context of the opposing standpoints discussed above this means that we accept the point of view that advocates the potential adaptive function of shame.

The role and influence of shame on man's functioning may be analyzed both with reference to shame understood as a current emotional state, and to shame treated as a specific feature of human personality.

The standpoint on how shame influences behavior seems to depend on the assumed concept of shame. The greatest amount of empirical data on the role of shame treated as a state is offered by researchers who conducted their studies within the cognitive-attributional approach. On the basis of experimental studies it has been shown, for instance, that shame activated during an experiment disrupts and weakens the emphatic reactions of investigated individuals towards

other people (Marshall, 1996; in: Tangney, Dearing, 2002); people react more emphatically when they experience guilt as opposed to shame (Tangney et al., 1994; in: Tangney, Dearing, 2002); there is a connection between a currently activated state of shame and the emergence of anger, and under the influence of anger, aggression (Tangney, Dearing, 2002). June Price Tangney and Ronda L. Dearing treat this kind of data as a confirmation of the belief that shame is a destructive emotion.

The proponents of the evolutionary approach, in turn, while not undermining the empirical results discussed above, also analyze other data that allow a more extensive evaluation of the role of shame (Gilbert, 2007; Fessler, 2007). An interesting example seems to be the results of intercultural studies that show that besides undesired social consequences (such as decrease of empathy, or emergence of anger and aggression), shame may lead to the activation of behaviors that are positively evaluated, and aim at an improvement in relations with others (Bagozzi et al., 2003). In the study in question Dutch and Filipino salespersons were presented with scenarios in which they were made to feel shame by their customers. In both groups shame was experienced equally intensively. However, the researchers observed differences in the manner of shame regulation and in the behavior that was a consequence of experiencing this emotion. When experiencing shame, the Dutch would most often withdraw from the conversation with their clients, whereas the Filipinos would intensify their actions connected with maintaining the relation, they would become more polite and try to regain the lost understanding. In another study, conducted by Wallbott and Scherer (1995), inhabitants of 37 countries were asked to describe episodes connected with experiencing shame and guilt. The researchers found that in collectivist cultures shame disrupts people's actions to a lesser extent than in individualist cultures. Thus, the influence of shame on behavior is not unequivocal and it may vary depending on the values and beliefs associated with the given culture.

Shame is also treated as a quite stable individual disposition, referred to as shame-proneness. Individuals prone to shame are particularly susceptible to situations that may potentially evoke shame, and when they find themselves in such situations, they more often than others experience shame (Andrews, 1998). Studies on the links between proneness to shame and behavior have been predominantly conducted within the cognitive-attributional orientation, mainly due to the popularity of the research tool – *Test of Self-Conscious Affect* – developed on the basis of this concept (Tangney et al., 1989, 2000). Therefore, symptoms of the maladaptive value of shame have been particularly well documented.

In a longitudinal study, conducted by Tangney and Dearing (2002, pp. 134-135), the authors have shown that the level of shame-proneness and guilt-proneness observed in children aged 10-11 enabled an explanation of differences in behavior of the same individuals at the age of 18-19. Higher levels of shame proneness indicators in childhood were connected with, inter alia, suspension from school, using different kinds of drugs, drinking alcohol, and suicide

attempts in adolescence. Moreover, individuals more prone to shame less frequently took part in activities for the benefit of local communities and less frequently decided to go to university.

Analogous patterns have been observed in several studies concerning the links between shame, guilt, and empathy. It has been shown that proneness to shame is connected with a lower level of empathy, whereas proneness to guilt correlates positively with empathy (Tangney, 1991, 1995). It has also been observed that shame is negatively, and guilt positively, connected with psychological well-being (Orth, Robins, Soto, 2010). A strong relationship between proneness to shame with a tendency to externalize blame, and anger and aggression proneness, depression, anxiety, or proneness to somatization has been confirmed in several studies (see Tangney, Wagner, Gramzow, 1992; Tangney, 1993; Tangney, 1994; Harder, 1995; Tangney, Burggraf, Wagner, 1995; Orth, Robins, Soto, 2010; Pinot-Gouveia, Matos, 2011).

There is, thus, a lot of empirical evidence that confirms the strong relationship between shame as a state and as a feature, and the occurrence of unfavorable social behavior, maladjustment, and psychological disorders. This data does not mean, though, that shame plays an exclusively negative role in man's functioning.

The main thesis presented in this paper states that the character of influence of shame on a man's functioning depends on the strategies of shame regulation used by the person. The problem of shame regulation has been analyzed almost exclusively theoretically in the literature (Tomkins, 1963; Lewis, 1971; Izard, 1977; Kaufman, 1989; Morrison, 1989; Nathanson, 1992; Schore, 1994). Different authors who undertook this issue proposed their own categories of description and classification of shame regulation strategies. So far no model that would allow for a systematic differentiation and arrangement of these strategies has been developed. The lack of a classification system, based on current knowledge about the mechanisms of emotion regulation, constitutes a significant obstacle for the development of studies concerning the effects of different shame regulation strategies.

The feeling of shame is an aversive experience, and it motivates an individual to get rid of it or to try and avoid it. Regulating shame experiences consists of undertaking various actions that aim at alleviating the current negative feelings and/or preventing experiencing shame in the future. James Gross (1998) based his model of shame regulation mechanisms on a similar differentiation. He introduced a distinction between strategies that are undertaken before emotion activation – i.e. antecedent-focused – and strategies that are implemented as a consequence of the activated emotional reaction, i.e. response-focused. An example of an antecedent-focused strategy of shame regulation may be giving up a way of behaving that the person knows may cause shame. This manner of regulating shame can take different forms. It can consist of adjusting the behavior to the socio-cultural rules and standards that condition social acceptance (adaptive strategy), or in a defensive withdrawal from undertaking goals, challenges,

or social contacts (maladaptive strategies). An example of a response-focused strategy may be openly discussing, in a friendly environment, the situation in which shame has been activated, or simply leaving the situation in which shame has been felt, without denying what happened, and waiting until the emotion disappears on its own (adaptive strategies). Maladaptive response-focused strategies include substitution of shame with anger, the strategy described by many authors (Tomkins, 1963; Lewis, 1971; Kaufman, 1989; Morrison, 1989; Nathanson, 1992; Lewis, 1992).

The fact that the variety of possible shame regulation strategies is so great hinders the formulation of one simple rule describing the role of shame in man's functioning, including the process of identity formation. Verification of the hypotheses about the mediation of mechanisms of emotion regulation between shame and organization of behavior requires the undertaking of systematic studies in this area. In one of the first known to me reports about the mediatory role of emotion regulation, the authors have shown that emotion regulation skills can be treated as a mediatory factor in an explanation of the relationships between proneness to shame and eating disorders in women (Gupta et al., 2008). This mechanism can also be applied to an analysis of the identity formation process.

### Identity formation and its determinants

The notion of identity, utilized in many scientific domains, is understood in many different ways. Within the field of psychology, these differences are visible, for instance, between developmental psychology and social psychology, or between self psychology and narrative psychology. In this paper one of the basic traditions of defining and investigating identity in psychology, originating from the works of Erik H. Erikson (1950, 1968, 1982), has been adopted.

James Marcia (1964; 1966), who was probably the first to try and operationalize the theoretical ideas of Erikson, distinguished two phases of the identity formation process in adolescence and early adulthood. Exploration, the first phase of identity formation, consists in selecting, reconstructing, making changes in the hierarchy, and testing various tasks and life roles. Commitment, the second phase, pertains to personal engagement, which an individual expresses through their beliefs and actions (Kroger, Marcia, 2011).

Marcia introduced four categories of identity, called by him identity statuses. Individuals can be assigned to these categories on the basis of an assessment of the degree of exploration, and the extent and character of undertaken commitments. Two identity statuses, connected with high levels of commitment dimensions, can be distinguished. In the case of achieved identity the commitments are preceded by exploration, whereas in foreclosed identity the commitments are associated with a low level of exploration. The two remaining statuses – moratorium and diffused identity – are characterized by a low level of commitments. Individuals classified as those possessing the

moratorium status undertake exploration activities, whereas people with diffused identity do not engage too intensively in exploration. Exploration actions of individuals with diffused identity are rather weak, chaotic and incoherent, which very often leads to their maladjustment and various disturbances in their development process.

The operationalization of Erikson's idea proposed by Marcia (1966) enabled researchers to undertake systematic studies on identity development in the period of adolescence and early adulthood, and the concept of identity statuses established one of the most important approaches in the contemporary research on identity. Studies on the process of identity development carried out in subsequent years resulted in distinguishing the processes of identity commitments formation and the processes of evaluation of undertaken commitments (Grotevant, 1987; Kerpelman et al., 1997; Bosma, Kunnen, 2001). Researchers have postulated broadening Marcia's static model, which concentrated on the formation of commitments, claiming that the undertaken commitments do not always become a permanent and invariable element of the individual's identity because they are subject to constant reevaluations. Individuals constantly check whether the commitments made by them are still satisfying and fitted to the context in which they live. If the commitments are recognized to be unsatisfactory the process of exploration may be resumed (Luyckx, Schwartz et al., 2008).

Considerations of this kind have resulted in proposing a processual approach in studies on identity. Researchers from the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium have developed The Dual-Cycle Model of Identity Formation that incorporates both the processes of commitments formation (analogous to those described by Marcia) and the processes connected with the evaluation of undertaken commitments (Luyckx, Goossens et al., 2005; Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, 2006; Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Beyers, 2006). The processes of exploration in breadth and commitment making are responsible for commitments formation. Evaluation, on the other hand, is mediated by exploration in depth and identification with

commitments (see Table 1).

While in the majority of approaches exploration is considered to be an adaptive form of behaviour, conducive to making or changing commitments, the authors of this model noticed that there are data that (Kidwell, Dunham, Bacho et al., 1995; Luyckx, Soenens, Goossens, 2006) suggest that exploration may be connected with anxiety and symptoms of depression, and this may mean that exploration has "two faces": (1) reflexive, favorable to the development and identity change, and (2) ruminative, maladaptive form, connected with difficulties in making commitments, uncertainty and identity confusion (Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky et al., 2008; it has also been confirmed in Polish studies: Brzezińska, Piotrowski, Garbarek-Sawicka et al., 2010). A strong ruminative exploration can be an indication of the fact that the person struggles with the crisis of identity deficit described by Baumeister et al. (1985), or with indecisiveness as a stable personality trait (Luyckx et al., 2011). The higher the level of ruminative exploration is the weaker the commitments made by the individual and the lower their identification with them.

Along with the emergence of the processual approach in research on identity development, determinants of this development have started to be treated differently. Stressing the role of evaluation processes in identity formation has been connected with formulating postulates underlining the importance of both external factors – socio-cultural, and internal factors – personality disposition (Brzezińska, Czub, Hejmanowski et al., 2012), or emotional factors, in the process of identity development (Bosma, Kunnen, 2001). Since the 1990's, emotions have started to be recognized as important mechanisms of behavior regulation, playing a significant role also in the process of identity development (Fogel, 1993; Haviland et al., 1994; Lewis, 1995; Magai, McFadden, 1995).

### The role of shame in the process of identity formation

In examining the possibility of explaining identity

Dimensions of identity	Definition
<b>Commitment-formation cycle</b>	
<b>1. exploration in breadth</b>	actions that enable an individual to seek for various alternatives with reference to personal values, aspirations, goals and beliefs, before appropriate decisions and commitments have been made
<b>2. commitment making</b>	taking into consideration different alternatives, making decisions and choices pertaining to issues perceived by the person as important for their development
<b>Commitment-evaluation cycle</b>	
<b>3. exploration in depth</b>	deepened evaluation of the choices already made and connected with them commitments, which enables the person to assess the degree to which the commitments comply with the personal standards and the requirements of the environment
<b>4. identification with commitment</b>	identification with the choices, their internalization, and formation of a sense of confidence that the choices were, or still are appropriate and satisfactory
<b>Problems with formation, re-valuation or revision of existing commitments</b>	
<b>5. ruminative exploration</b>	exploration actions motivated by anxiety experienced by the individual, their fears, and problems with engaging in important, from the developmental point of view, areas that the person is unable to solve; a high level of ruminative exploration may mean that the person has got stuck in the process of exploration, repeatedly returning to familiar, however, maladaptive (about which the person is usually unaware), forms of behaviour or constantly questioning their own decisions.

**Tab. 1. The Dual-Cycle Model of Identity Formation: five identity dimensions**

Source: own elaboration base on the literature (Luyckx et al., 2005; Luyckx et al., 2008)

development mechanisms with the use of the concept of shame, the motivational value of this emotion will be emphasized. Regardless of theoretical differences, shame is considered to be one of the self-evaluative emotions. This means that experiencing shame is connected with a negative evaluation of one's self. Two motivational tendencies can be, thus, deemed natural for shame: a desire to get rid of the unpleasant emotional state, and a tendency to avoid experiencing a similar state in the future. It can be assumed that, due to its motivational value, shame has an influence on the identity formation processes. If we presume that the most important process in identity development is identification with an undertaken commitment, the assumption about participation of the self-evaluative processes and emotions in identity development seems to be fully justified. For, as researchers of identity development assume, referring continually to internal and external standards both at the stage of selecting particular offers and at the stage of testing them, accepting and identifying with one's choices, is an integral element of the identity development processes (Grotevant, 1987).

Shame, as a self-evaluative emotion, is vital for the identity development processes of self-assessment that refer both to internal and external standards. Researchers highlight different aspects of the constantly interweaving processes of evaluating and adjusting the commitments of an individual to the internal and external standards of assessment. Kerpelman et al. (1997; see also Adams, Marshall, 1996) emphasize the role of information and evaluations coming from the "significant others" (parents, teachers, friends, partners in an intimate relationship, spouses). If the way a person perceives themselves is consistent with the information from such individuals (consistency between the current identity status and feedback), the level of exploration remains low. If, on the other hand, there is an inconsistency between these components the person is likely to undertake actions that aim at changing their identity through an intensified exploration. Comparing oneself with external standards or expectations of the significant others is particularly strongly engaged in the process of identity formation in young individuals with different types of disabilities (see Brzezińska, Czub, Czub et al., 2012).

While Kerpelman et al. (1996), and Adams and Marshall (1996) emphasize the importance of the social environment of an individual, relations with relatives, and standards of evaluation located outside of the person, Waterman (1990, 1992) points to the subjectively perceived satisfaction and the degree to which the so far established identity allows the person to fulfill their personal projects in line with their personal standards and, at the same time, to find the right, in the opinion of the person, direction in life.

However, both in the case when identity formation is analyzed from the point of view of standards and expectations formulated by the environment of the person, and when internal motives and standards guiding the formation of identity are emphasized, researchers (see Grotevant, 1987) point to the fact that the level of satisfaction with the established identity is primarily associated with the level of exploration (when satisfaction is low, exploration

remains on a high level). In turn, when the person strongly identifies with the undertaken commitments, the tendency to explore decreases, and identity stabilizes (Bosma, Kunnen, 2001).

The desire to minimize shame experiences results in actions that have an influence on both the intensity of exploration processes, and the durability and strength of commitments undertaken by an individual. It can be presumed that the links between shame and the processes of identity development are not only determined by an intensified proneness to shame of the person (shame as a personality disposition), or the strength of the currently experienced emotion of shame (shame as a state). The relationship between shame and the processes of identity development can be additionally mediated by an important socio-emotional competence that starts to form in childhood, namely, shame regulation competence.

It can also be speculated that optimal conditions for the proper conduct of the identity development processes emerge when the person utilizes adaptive strategies of shame regulation, both antecedent-focused and response-focused. A disruptive influence is to be expected when antecedent-focused and response-focused maladaptive strategies are used. This hypothesis is based on the existence of a capacity to tolerate a subjective shame experience, an idea advocated by various authors (Tomkins, 1963; Izard, 1977; M. Lewis, 1992; Nathanson, 1992; Schore, 1994). The indicated authors assume that in favorable social conditions a child is able to develop a competency to deal with aversive shame experiences. Thanks to this ability, the child becomes able to regulate the aversive shame experiences in an adaptive way. It can be assumed that in cases where adaptive regulation strategies are utilized, shame plays a constructive role in the development of identity. A lack of tolerance of shame, emerging as a result of, for instance, too frequent ridiculing or embarrassing of a child in public situations, humiliating, or disregarding their feelings, may be the source of maladaptive regulation strategies that aim at excluding shame from the personal experience. Thus, it can be expected that using maladaptive regulation strategies is the cause of the disrupting influence of shame on the process of identity development and, sometimes, a delayed transition to adulthood (Brzezińska, Czub, Nowotnik, Rękosiewicz, 2012). Proneness to shame and shame regulation competency are connected both with exploration dimensions (in breadth, in depth, and ruminative) and commitment dimensions (commitment making and identification with commitments). People who are characterized by a high tendency to experience shame and/or regulate shame in a maladaptive way, may be more vulnerable to social evaluation of their actions, and also be more critical about themselves. As a result, they may more frequently experience discrepancies between the possessed identity and, for instance, information from the environment, and engage in actions that aim at diminishing these discrepancies. Taking this into consideration, it could be assumed that the identity of individuals with a high proneness to shame and/or using maladaptive shame regulation strategies will be less stable (a low level of

commitment making and identification with commitments), marked with uncertainty (a high level of ruminative exploration), and constant searching (a high level exploration in breadth, in particular). Studies performed in a similar fields (Brzezińska, Piotrowski, Garberek-Sawicka et al., 2010) demonstrated that emotional reactivity (a dimension of temperament, see Strelau, Zawadzki, 2008), a predisposition to react with strong emotions in a wide range of situations, is predominantly associated with a strong engagement in exploration action, both adaptive (in breadth and in depth) and maladaptive (ruminative).

A combination of a moderate level of proneness to shame with capacities connected with using adaptive shame regulation strategies then can create conditions that enable a constructive participation of shame in the process of identity formation. Tolerated shame can be utilized as an effective indicator of the danger associated with losing acceptance. Under such conditions, shame can aid the development of identity at all its stages; it can take part both in selecting explored roles and in choosing commitments, and in differentiating commitments with which the person is going to identify. At each of these stages shame can be a powerful signal that allows the person to distance themselves from those identity options, the choice of which could endanger maintaining acceptance from others, as well as preserving self-acceptance.

### Conclusion

Studies on the process of identity formation aim at discovering mechanisms that are responsible for the existence of individual differences in respect of one's location on different identity dimensions. So far a number of factors connected with identity, both internal – biological and psychological, and external – social or cultural, have been identified (Galambos, Leadbeater, 2000; Schwartz, 2005). The next step in the development of our knowledge about this subject needs to be discovering the limitations of the existing knowledge by exploring the conditions under which the well-known relationships cease to operate or, conversely, become even more important. In line with the presented model, which now is in the phase of empirical verification, two important determinants of identity formation are, firstly, the proneness to shame that is characteristic to an individual along with the frequency of experiencing shame, and, secondly, the ability to regulate shame. These constitute dimensions that are quite independent of each other. Only by taking into consideration these two variables, will the formulation of a more general and accurate account of the relationships between shame and identity be enabled.

### References

- Abraham, F. D. (1990). *A visual introduction to dynamical systems theory for psychology*. Santa Cruz: Aerial Press.
- Ackerman, B., Abe, J., Izard, C. (1998). Differential emotions theory and emotional development: mindful of modularity. In: M. Mascolo, S. Griffin (Eds.), *What develops in emotional development?* (pp. 85-106). New York: Plenum Press.
- Adams, G. R., Marshall, S. K. (1996). A developmental social psychology of identity: understanding the person-in-context. *Journal of Adolescence*, 19, 429-442. doi: 10.1006/jado.1996.0041
- Andrews, B. (1998). Methodological and definitional issues in shame research. In: P. Gilbert, B. Andrews (Eds.), *Shame. Interpersonal behavior, psychopathology, and culture* (pp. 39-54). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bagozzi, R. P., Verbecke, W., Gavino, J. C. Jr. (2003). Culture moderates the self-regulation of shame and its effects on performance: the case of salespersons in the Netherlands and the Philippines. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88, 219-233. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.88.2.219
- Barrett, K. (1995). A functionalist approach to shame and guilt. In: J. Tangney, K. Fisher (Eds.), *Self-conscious emotions. The psychology of shame, guilt, embarrassment and pride* (pp. 25-63). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Baumeister, R. F., Shapiro, J. P., Tice, D. M. (1985). Two kinds of identity crisis. *Journal of Personality*, 53, 407-424. doi: 10.1111/1467-6494.ep8970281
- Bosma, H. A., Kunnen, S. E. (2001). Determinants and mechanisms in ego identity development: A review and synthesis. *Developmental Review*, 21, 39-66. doi: 10.1006/drev.2000.0514
- Brzezińska, A. I., Czub, T., Czub, M., Kaczan, R., Piotrowski, K., Rękosiewicz, M. (2012). Postponed or delayed adulthood? In: E. Nowak, D. Schrader, B. Zizek (Eds.), *Educating competencies for democracy* (pp. 135-157). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag.
- Brzezińska, A. I., Czub, T., Hejmanowski, Sz., Rękosiewicz, M., Kaczan, R., Piotrowski, K., (2012). Determinants of identity formation during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. *Culture and Education*, 91, 5-27.
- Brzezińska, A. I., Czub, T., Nowotnik, A., Rękosiewicz, M. (2012). Supporting Polish youth in the transition into adulthood. Discussion connected with Youth 2011' Report. *Culture and Education*, 91, 244-257.
- Brzezińska, A. I., Piotrowski, K., Garberek-Sawicka, E., Karowska, K., Muszyńska, K. (2010). Wymiary tożsamości a ich podmiotowe i kontekstowe korelaty [Subjective and contextual correlates of the dimensions of identity]. *Studia Psychologiczne [Psychological Studies]*, 49, 81-93.
- Damasio, A. R. (2010). *Self comes to mind: constructing the conscious mind*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: youth and crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Erikson, E. H. (1982). *The life cycle completed*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Fessler, D. (2007). From appeasement to conformity: evolutionary and cultural perspectives on shame, competition, and cooperation. In: J. Tracy, R. Robins, J. Tangney (Eds.), *The self-conscious emotions. Theory and research* (pp. 174-193). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Fogel, A. (1993). *Developing through relationships: origins of communication, self, and culture*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Fogel, A., King, B., Shanker, S. (Eds.). (2008). *Human development in the twenty-first century. Visionary ideas from systems scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Galambos, N. L., Leadbeater, B. J. (2000). Trends in adolescent research for the new millennium. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 24, 289-294. doi: 10.1080/01650250050118268
- Gilbert, P. (2007). The evolution of shame as marker for relationship security. In: J. Tracy, R. Robins, J. Tangney (Eds.), *The self-conscious emotions. Theory and research* (pp. 283-309). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Goetz, J., Keltner, D. (2007). Shifting meanings of self-conscious emotions across cultures: a social-functional approach. In: J. Tracy, R. Robins, J. Tangney (Eds.), *The self-conscious emotions. Theory and research* (pp. 153-173). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Gross, J. (1998). The emerging field of emotion regulation: an integrative review. *Review of General Psychology*, 2, 271-299. doi: 10.1037/1089-2680.2.3.271

- Grotevant, H. D. (1987). Toward a process model of identity formation. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 2, 203-222. doi: 10.1177/074355488723003
- Gupta, S., Rosenthal, M., Mancini, A., Chaevens, J., Lynch, T. (2008). Emotion regulation skills mediate the effects of shame on eating disorder symptoms in women. *Eating Disorders*, 16, 405-417. doi: 10.1080/10640260802370572
- Harder, D. (1995). Shame and guilt assessment and relationships of shame and guilt proneness to psychopathology. In: J. Tangney, K. Fischer (Eds.), *Self-conscious emotions: The psychology of shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride* (pp. 368-392). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Haviland, J., Davidon, R., Ruetsch, C., Gebelt, J., Lancelot, C. (1994). The place of emotion in identity. *Journal of research in adolescence*, 4, 503-518. doi: 10.1207/s15327795jra0404\_4
- Izard, C. (1977). *Human emotions*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Kaufman, G. (1989). *Psychology of shame*. New York: Springer.
- Kerpelman, J. L., Pittman, J. F., Lamke, L. K. (1997). Toward a microprocess perspective on adolescent identity development: an identity control theory approach. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 12, 325-346. doi: 10.1177/0743554897123002
- Kidwell, J. S., Dunham, R. M., Bacho, R. A., Pastorino, E., Portes, P. R. (1995). Adolescent identity exploration: a test of Erikson's theory of transitional crisis. *Adolescence*, 30, 785-793.
- Kroger, J., Marcia J. E. (2011). The identity statuses: origins, meanings, and interpretations. In: S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, V. L. Vignoles (Eds.), *Handbook of identity theory and research* (pp. 31-53). New York: Springer. doi: 10.1007/978-1-4419-7988-9\_2
- Kunnen, S. (ed.) (2012). *A dynamic systems approach to adolescent development*. New York: Psychology Press.
- LeDoux, J. E. (1998). *The emotional brain*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- LeDoux, J. E. (2000). Emotion circuits in the brain. *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 23, 155-184. doi: 10.1146/annurev.neuro.23.1.155
- Lewis, H. B. (1971). *Shame and guilt in neurosis*. New York: International University Press.
- Lewis, M. D. (1992). *Shame. The exposed self*. New York: The Free Press.
- Lewis, M. D. (1995). Cognition-emotion feedback and the self-organization of developmental paths. *Human Development*, 38, 71-102. doi: 10.1159/000278302
- Lewis, M. D. (2008). The emergence of human emotions. In: M. Lewis, J. Haviland-Jones, L. Barrett (Eds.), *Handbook of emotions* (pp. 304-319). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Lewis, M. D., Sullivan, M., Stanger, C., Weiss, M. (1989). Self development and self-conscious emotions. *Child Development*, 60, 146-156. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.ep7250935
- Luyckx, K., Goossens, L., Soenens, B. (2006). A developmental contextual perspective on identity construction in emerging adulthood: Change dynamics in commitment formation and commitment evaluation. *Developmental Psychology*, 42, 366-380. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.42.2.366
- Luyckx, K., Goossens, L., Soenens, B., Beyers, W. (2006). Unpacking commitment and exploration: validation of an integrative model of adolescent identity formation. *Journal of Adolescence*, 29, 361-378. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2005.03.008
- Luyckx, K., Goossens, L., Soenens, B., Beyers, W., Vansteenkiste, M. (2005). Identity statuses based on 4 rather than 2 identity dimensions: extending and refining Marcia's paradigm. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 34, 605-618. doi: 10.1007/s10964-005-8949-x
- Luyckx, K., Schwartz, S. J., Berzonsky, M. D., Soenens, B., Vansteenkiste, M., Smits, I., Goossens, L. (2008). Capturing ruminative exploration: extending the four-dimensional model of identity formation in late adolescence. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 42, 58-82. doi: 10.1016/j.jrp.2007.04.004
- Luyckx, K., Soenens, B., Goossens, L. (2006). The personality-identity interplay in emerging adult women: convergent findings from complementary analysis. *European Journal of Personality*, 20, 195-215. doi: 10.1002/per.579
- Lynd, H. M. (1958). *On shame and search for identity*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Magai, C., McFadden, S. (1995). *The role of emotions in social and personality development: history, theory, and research*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Marcia, J. E. (1964). *Determination and construct validity of ego identity status* (Ohio State University; unpublished doctoral dissertation).
- Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego-identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3, 551-558. doi: 10.1037/h0023281
- Morrison, A. (1989). *Shame: The underside of narcissism*. Hillsdale, N. J.: Analytic Press.
- Nathanson, D. (1992). *Shame and pride: affect, sex and the birth of self*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Orth, U., Robins, R. W., Soto, C. J. (2010). Tracking the trajectory of shame, guilt, and pride across the lifespan. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 99, 1061-1071. doi: 10.1037/a0021342
- Phelps, E. A. (2005). The interaction of emotion and cognition: insights from studies of the human amygdala. In: L. F. Barrett, P. M. Niedenthal, P. Winkielman (Eds.) *Emotion and consciousness* (pp. 51-66). New York, London: The Guilford Press.
- Phelps, E. A., O'Connor, K. J., Gatenby, J. C., Gore, J. C., Grillon, C., Davis, M. (2001). Activation of the left amygdala to a cognitive representation of fear. *Nature Neuroscience*, 4, 437-441.
- Pinot-Gouveia, J., Matos, M. (2011). Can shame memories become a key to identity? The centrality of shame memories predicts psychopathology. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 25, 281-290. doi: 10.1002/acp.1689
- Piotrowski, K., Brzezińska, A. I. (2011). Identity, self-sufficiency and disability in the context of educational and vocational activity. *Polish Psychological Bulletin*, 3, 160-168. doi: 10.2478/v10059-011-0021-y
- Schore, A. (1994). *Affect regulation and the origin of the self*. Hillsdale: Erlbaum.
- Schwartz, S. J. (2005). A new identity for identity research: recommendations for expanding and refocusing the identity literature. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 20, 293-308. doi: 10.1177/0743558405274890
- Strelau, J., Zawadzki, B. (2008). Psychologia różnic indywidualnych [Psychology of individual differences]. In: J. Strelau, D. Doliński (Eds.), *Psychologia. Podręcznik akademicki [Psychology. Academic Handbook]* (vol. 1, pp. 765-846). Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.
- Tangney, J. (1991). Moral affect: The good, the bad, and the ugly. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 598-607. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.61.4.598
- Tangney, J. (1993). Shame and guilt. In: C. G. Costello (Ed.), *Symptoms of depression* (pp. 161-180). New York: Wiley.
- Tangney, J. (1994). The mixed legacy of the super-ego: Adaptive and maladaptive aspects of shame and guilt. In: J. M. Masling, R. E. Bornstein (Eds.), *Empirical perspectives on object relations theory* (pp. 1-28). Washington: American Psychological Association.
- Tangney, J. (1995). Shame and guilt in interpersonal relationships. In: J. Tangney, K. Fischer (Eds.), *Self-conscious emotions: The psychology of shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride* (pp. 114-139). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Tangney, J., Burggraf, S., Wagner, E. (1995). Shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, and psychological symptoms. In: J. Tangney, K. Fischer (Eds.), *Self-conscious emotions: The psychology of shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride* (pp. 343-367). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Tangney, J., Dearing, R. (2002). *Shame and guilt*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Tangney, J., Dearing, R., Wagner, E., Gramzow, R. (2000). *The Test of Self-Conscious Affect-3 (TOSCA-3)*. Fairfax: George Mason University.
- Tangney, J., Stuewig, J. (2004). A moral emotional perspective on evil persons and evil deeds. In: A. G. Miller (Eds.), *The social psychology of good and evil* (pp. 327-355). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Tangney, J., Wagner, E., Fletcher, C., Gramzow, R. (1992). Shamed into anger?: the relation of shame and guilt to anger and self-reported aggression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 62, 669-675. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.62.4.669
- Tangney, J., Wagner, E., Gramzow, R. (1989). *The Test of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA)*. Fairfax: George Mason University.
- Tangney, J., Wagner, E., Gramzow, R. (1992). Proneness to shame, proneness to guilt, and psychopathology. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 103, 469-478. doi: 10.1037/0021-843X.101.3.469
- Tomkins, S. S. (1963). *Affect, imagery, consciousness. Vol. II: The negative affects*. New York: Springer.
- Tracy, J., Robins, R. (2007). The self in self-conscious emotions: a cognitive appraisal approach. In: J. Tracy, R. Robins, J. Tangney (Eds.), *The self-conscious emotions. Theory and research* (pp. 3-20).



New York: The Guilford Press.

- Van Geert, P. L. C. (1994). *Dynamic systems of development: change between complexity and chaos*. New York: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Vleioras, G., Bosma H. A. (2005). Predicting change in relational identity commitments: exploration and emotions. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 5, 35-56. doi: 10.1207/s1532706xid0501\_3
- Waterman, A. S. (1990). Personal expressiveness: philosophical and psychological foundations. *Journal of Mind and Behavior*, 1, 47-74.
- Waterman, A. S. (1992). Identity as an aspect of optimal psychological functioning. In: G. R. Adams, T. P. Gullotta, R. Montemayor (Eds.), *Adolescent identity formation: advances in adolescent development* (pp. 50-72). Newbury Park: Sage.