Shaming and Stigma

A Study in Social Hierarchy

By

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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I, Euan Russell Allison, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

What is stigma? Do disparate examples of stigma belong to a unified social kind? I propose a novel account which I call the 'Shaming Model': an individual is stigmatized in a community if she is shamed by members of that community, and this is explained by their belief that she has deviated from some social norm and/or standard. This contrasts with the view that stigmas are an aggregate of negative attitudes held about the stigmatized individual. It also forces us to reject certain existing general accounts of the nature of social hierarchy – and revise others – in order to accommodate stigma as a hierarchical phenomenon.

What, if anything, is morally troubling about stigmas as such? A common claim is that stigmatized people are not treated as individuals. I defend a particular interpretation of this idea. When we are stigmatized, and thus stereotyped, this does not merely fail to respect our autonomy. Being stigmatized also threatens to undermine our interests as 'self-presenting' beings, because stigmas are a feature of our (the stigmatized person's) social world as a whole. I argue, on the basis of this account, that some cases of treating as superior can be just as morally troubling as stigma. In a separate chapter, I unpack the relationship between shame, stigma, and a liberal commitment to *anti-stigma*.

Amongst philosophers who object to social hierarchy, several have tried to offer a completely general account of the moral significance of social relations being unequal. I argue that we should reject this strategy for critiquing hierarchies, and for distinguishing between hierarchies which are problematic and those which are unproblematic. Instead, we should pursue a 'Disaggregative Strategy' according to which the essential features of particular kinds of hierarchy (such as stigma) make a large difference to the reasons why hierarchy is problematic (when it is).

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A central aim of this thesis is to provide a descriptive account of stigma. This is almost entirely lacking in contemporary philosophical discussions about the moral and political significance of social hierarchies, including stigmas. The project thus has the potential to significantly improve these debates by providing them with a descriptive foundation.

The accounts of shaming and stigma will be of interest to other academic disciplines, such as sociology and psychology. I intend to use this work to initiate interdisciplinary conversation about the phenomena examined in this thesis, in the expectation that philosophical accounts can be enriched by empirical insights and vice versa. Such benefits within academia can be brought about through presenting these ideas at academic conferences and publishing in philosophy journals – as well as through informal dialogue, especially with academics outside philosophy.

I think that clarifying our understanding of stigma and its normative status is of intrinsic interest, as a widespread and often troubling feature of human life. I hope too that these ideas can be put to some use by activists, therapists, policy makers, and others, who are engaged in the hard work of challenging unjust stigmas. I will open up conversations with these groups through a range of public forums.

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To Holly and Kiki. I share it all with you.

In loving memory of

Carol Allison

1937-2022

Contents

Introduction

> *'My mother went to the church and behind my back was telling everybody I was HIV-positive. And before long the whole church knew. It was embarrassing and people were looking at me and were treating me bad because of my diagnosis. They, themselves handed me a death sentence. I left the church.'*
>
> – Testimony quoted in Fletcher et al. (2016: 352)

Stigma is depressingly familiar, but it also raises difficult philosophical questions. We talk about racial stigma, for example in the United States; anti-gay stigma, perhaps in certain religious sub-communities; or HIV-AIDS stigma variously manifested throughout the world. But what makes all of these instances of *stigma*? That is, what are its unifying features?

There are normative challenges in addition to descriptive ones. Many people are morally troubled by at least some forms of stigma. But we can also be reluctant to condemn the stigmatization of those who have committed grave moral wrongs, for example. What, then, can we say about the normative status of stigma in general?

In philosophy, we might expect these issues to be treated in some depth by so-called 'relational egalitarians'. Stigma, after all, is a paradigmatic case of social hierarchy – which is the main target of their political critique. It is common for relational egalitarians to draw broad distinctions between hierarchies that have do with command, power, and authority on the one hand, and hierarchies that have do with esteem, disesteem, and prestige on the other (e.g., Viehoff (2019)). Stigma presumably belongs to the latter category. But whilst relational egalitarians thus

acknowledge the existence of hierarchies akin to stigma, much of their critical attention has been trained on hierarchies of the first kind.[1]

Why this neglect of hierarchies of the latter kind? In my view, it both fuels and reflects a suspicion that such hierarchies are, generally speaking, less serious. It is natural to think that, as far as political morality is concerned, we are permitted to esteem or disesteem whomever or whatever we like. Why, then, would we find fault in the unequal distributions of pride and shame to which such individual judgements give rise? By contrast, we may think it is never permissible to wield power, at least of a certain arbitrary kind, over another individual.

This line of thought reflects a profound mistake about the structure of stigma that bears significantly on its normative status. According to one dominant picture (e.g., Goffman (1963)), stigmas are distributions of attitudes produced by the mere accumulation of individual judgements of disgust, inferiority, contempt, and so on. On this view, individual acts of shaming, for example, are viewed as belonging to the same phenomenon as stigma itself, only in 'miniature' form. This assimilation encourages the lenient attitude to stigma just mentioned.

But this account misses that stigmas essentially involve social structures. According to my alternative, which I call the 'Shaming Model', an individual is stigmatized in a community if she is

[1] Relational egalitarians have found a wide range of application for their concern with hierarchies of command, power, and authority. This concern has been used to motivate arguments (e.g.,): in favour of (at least certain kinds of) democracy (Kolodny (2014); Lovett (2021)), particular forms of bureaucracy (Anderson (2008)), a social democratic scheme of (sometimes inalienable) rights including property rights (Anderson (2016)), the lifting of certain immigration restrictions (Sharp (2022)); and against dictatorial forms of 'private government' in the workplace (Anderson (2017)). The focus on hierarchies of this kind can also be seen in the abundance of neighbouring literature on non-domination (e.g., Pettit (2012)).

shamed by members of that community, and this is explained by their belief that she has deviated from some social norm and/or standard. At the same time, these social structures admit of a reductionist explanation in terms of a pattern of individual attitudes – for example, social norms may be understood in terms of our conditionalized preferences to conform with certain rules (Bicchieri (2017)). We need not appeal to an irreducible notion of 'social standing', as some theorists of social hierarchy have done (e.g., Anderson (2017)).

The Shaming Model has both descriptive and normative benefits. On the descriptive side, the Shaming Model is able to satisfy some important desiderata on a successful account of stigma. Our account of stigma should explain the distinctive 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure that exists within the stigmatized person's community. I do not mean that the stigmatized person does, or should, accept the stigmatic attitudes that members of the community express about her. But part of what distinguishes incidental acts of derision from those that form part of stigma is precisely that the latter cannot be as easily brushed away – and that the latter are performed by agents who are themselves under some kind of 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure to perform such acts. Relatedly, stigmatized people are vulnerable to experiences of shame – despite often rejecting particular stigmatic assessments that are made of them or the criteria to which such assessments appeal.[2]

In my view, these features of stigma need to be explained in terms of the 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure exerted by the social norms and standards to which acts of shaming that form part of a stigmatic pattern appeal. We will struggle to explain this feature if we understand

[2] See for example Bartky (1990: 93), Calhoun (2004: 135-38), Manion (2003), O'Brien (2020: 549-50), Velleman (2001: 44-47) and Webster (2021).

stigma simply as an accumulation of individual judgements of disgust, inferiority, contempt, and so on.

On the normative side, my account has the virtue of exemplifying a 'Disaggregative Strategy'. Many relational egalitarians seek to provide a wholly general account of the moral significance of social relations being unequal, for example by appealing to the way in which they can disrespect our standing as moral equals (e.g., Viehoff (2019)) or by positing a basic normative complaint that we have against being set in inferior social positions (e.g., Kolodny (2023)). Such accounts face, amongst other things, the difficult task of leaving space for social hierarchies that are, intuitively, not condemned by a deontological principle, for example the constitutively unequal relationship between an academic supervisor and supervisee (see Arneson (2010) for related criticism).

My approach to theorizing the normative status of stigma avoids this problem because it is not committed to the claim that there is a single general explanation why social hierarchy is problematic, when it is. Rather, the essential features of particular kinds of hierarchy (such as stigma) can make a large difference to the reasons why social hierarchy is problematic. Since none of these features are necessarily shared by other forms of social hierarchy, we do not commit ourselves to any claims about the objectionability of hierarchy as such. This, indeed, is the approach taken in the literature on non-domination, where we have well-developed descriptive accounts of a particular way of relating to someone as their inferior (or superior), and the moral import of this relation.

The thesis proceeds as follows. In Chapter One, I first argue against the Shaming Model's main rival, which I call the 'Bad View Model'. According to this model, which I take to be implicit in Goffman's (1963) seminal sociological work on stigma, a person is stigmatized when a critical

mass of people within her community holds a bad view of her. I object that this is neither necessary nor sufficient for stigma. I then set out the Shaming Model and show that it can satisfy a number of desiderata on a successful account of stigma. This is one of the central positive contributions of the thesis.

According to the Shaming Model, there is a constitutive relationship between stigma and shaming (a kind of social act). The nature of shaming is not well understood in philosophy, in comparison to the extensive literature on shame (the emotional state).[3] Some philosophers (e.g., Nussbaum (2004)) suggest that the intent of shaming is to bring about shame in the target of such acts. In Chapter Two, I argue that whilst this is true for some acts of shaming, it is not true for others. Shaming emerges as a heterogenous phenomenon, in which some forms of shaming do not bear this essential connection to an intention to bring about shame in the target. This helps me to separate the kind of shaming that bears a constitutive relation to stigma from other forms of shaming. As we will see in Chapter One, such shaming has the characteristic function of 'shoring up' social norms and standards.

Stigma is a paradigmatic case of social hierarchy. In Chapter Three, I argue that the view of stigma defended in this thesis forces us to reject general accounts of social hierarchy that explain the hierarchical nature of relationships by appealing to the beliefs of the agents who stand in them (e.g., Moutchoulski (2021)). We must instead endorse one of two alternative strategies: appeal to what the agents who stand in them express about one another (e.g., Lippert-Rasmussen (2018)) or appeal to the character of social norms governing interactions between the

[3] For some especially notable contributions on the nature of shame, see Taylor (1985, ch.3) and Velleman (2001). For some rare examples of philosophical work on the nature of shaming, see McDonald (2021) and Thomason (2018, ch.5).

agents (van Wietmarschen (2022)). I argue that existing versions of these strategies are also in need of revision.

This completes Part One of the thesis in which I take up issues broadly related to the nature of stigma. In Part Two, I turn to questions broadly related to its normative status. I thus take the descriptive task of explicating stigma's essential features as conceptually distinct from the task of elaborating what might be morally troubling about stigmatizing people. In particular, I do not think that it is morally problematic to stigmatize people as a matter of definition. It should be remembered, after all, that many people do not find it morally troubling that we stigmatize those who have committed grave moral wrongs, for example. I am not saying they are right about this – but I think this observation about the contested normative status of stigma counts against settling such matters definitionally. If stigma is always morally troubling, that is a substantive conclusion that needs to be argued for. I thus do not think it is a conceptual constraint on an account of stigma that stigma turns out to be always morally troubling.[4] In this thesis I will adhere to an even stronger methodological principle: namely, that our account of the nature of stigma should not be constrained by claims about its normative status. This is to some extent a stipulative move, since 'stigma' may operate as a kind of 'thick' ethical term amongst certain communities of speakers.[5] The justification for this move is that it yields a theoretical pay-off: it will deliver us an account of stigma that is free from ethical intuitions, and which can thus do significant independent work in our normative arguments.

[4] This methodological principle is not always accepted by relational egalitarians. For an explicit rejection, see Viehoff (2019: 11).

[5] On 'thick' ethical concepts, which have both a descriptive and evaluative function, see Williams (1985).

In Chapter Four, I consider some ways of interpreting the popular idea that stigmatized people are not treated as individuals. The 'Eidelson View' claims that stigma, because of its connection to stereotypes, violates an instance of the general requirement to respect autonomy.[6] The Eidelson View rests on the idea that our autonomy confers a special moral status on us – our dignity. On this view, the idea that failing to treat someone as an individual disrespects us is not tied to the idea that such treatment threatens harm. Such treatment is simply inappropriate in light of the special value of autonomy – so even harmless cases of failing to treat someone as an individual can instantiate this wrong.

By contrast, the 'Self-Presentation View' centres the harms to agential capacities which stigma threatens in its account of how stigmatized subjects are wronged. For this reason, it does not need to assume that our autonomy confers a special moral status on us. It is simply bad for us when people fail to treat us as individuals, because this threatens to undermine our exercise of agential capacities. It does so by wresting away from us a significant amount of control over the terms in which we are understood by others (Sangiovanni (2017)).

I argue that even if we are right to think that stigma violates a requirement to respect autonomy, this is insufficient to account for the full weight of the charge that stigmatized people are not treated as individuals. There are parallels here with the argument made against the Bad View Model. Just as a mere accumulation of negative attitudes held about the stigmatized person cannot explain stigma's distinctive 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure, so too the distinctive wrong of stigma cannot be explained in terms of the mere repetition of failures to respect their autonomy (on the part of individual members of the community who shame her). This wrong, unlike the wrongs which may be involved in non-stigmatic shaming practices, is distinctively

[6] For a statement of the requirement to treat persons as individuals along these lines, see Eidelson (2015).

structural. To explain this, we need the Self-Presentation View. This is another central positive contribution of the thesis.

I then address the worry that focusing on our interest in being treated as individuals opens the door to the suggestion that treating as superior can be just as morally troubling as stigma (where the stigmatized person is treated as inferior). The Eidelson View does not have a sufficient reply to this worry. The Self-Presentation View, on the other hand, has a number of compelling things to say. We should not exclude the possibility of a moral symmetry between some cases of stigma and some cases of treating as superior. But insofar as this is a startling conclusion, it can be mitigated by providing a nuanced account of the circumstances in which either phenomenon is detrimental for self-presentation.

In Chapter Five, I problematize a liberal commitment to anti-stigma.[7] The basic challenge is that the grounds that liberals might appeal to as justification for this commitment will support a *weighty* and *universal* objection to stigma. For example, liberals might appeal to the idea that, for the targets of stigma, stigma undermines the social bases of their self-respect.[8] But it seems that all stigmas are vulnerable to this charge. A weighty universal objection to stigma is implausible. First, it generates counterintuitive results. We are not that troubled, after all, by the stigmatization of the socially powerful, for example a sleazy corporate CEO. Second, there is a criticism which is internal to our commitment to anti-stigma. We might think that one important tool for counteracting the stigmatization of Blacks, for example, is to stigmatize the

[7] The discussion in Chapter Four has limited import for this commitment. This is because the value of being treated as an individual plausibly reflects a controversial conception of the good and so is otiose for purposes of political justification. See for example Rawls (2005 [1993]).

[8] Rawls (1999 [1971]) highlights the importance of the social bases of self-respect.

racists. A weighty universal objection to stigma may frustrate the proper aims of anti-stigma itself.

I consider and reject the response that there are forms of stigma that encourage a kind of shame that is not inherently detrimental to self-respect.[9] I suggest that liberals may do better to appeal to the idea that certain kinds of shame are especially enduring, owing to their dependence on one's membership in a socially salient stigmatized class.[10] It is stigmas which encourage shame like this which are the appropriate target of a liberal commitment to anti-stigma.

In Chapter Six, I examine some attempts to provide a completely general account of the moral significance of social relations being unequal, that also enables us to distinguish between social hierarchies which are problematic and those which are unproblematic. According to what I call the 'Moral Equality View', social hierarchies are problematic if and when they treat us as morally unequal in a certain way. I reject this account on the grounds that it is either false or objectionably trivial. According to what I call the 'Basic Complaint View', we have a basic complaint against being set in inferior social positions. I reject this account on the grounds that it is unexplanatory, since the list of factors that undercut such complaints (thus making room for unproblematic social hierarchies) is necessarily *ad hoc*. Since these represent the most prominent options in the literature, we should abandon the attempt to uncover a single general reason why social hierarchy is problematic, when it is. We should instead embrace the 'Disaggregative Strategy'. We can think of the major contributions in Chapters One and Four of the thesis as exemplifying such an approach. Our account of the objectionability of particular kinds of social hierarchy (such as stigma) should be fine-grained, taking account of their essential features,

[9] A kind of shame like this is discussed by Nussbaum (2004).

[10] I draw here on feminist work on shame (Bartky (1990)).

which can make a large difference to the reasons why certain kinds of social hierarchy are problematic – and others are not.

I have tried to write the chapters that make up Part Two so that they are as free-standing as possible – not presupposing acquaintance with the particular account of stigma developed in Part One of the thesis. Nonetheless, it should be clear how this new understanding of the nature of stigma enriches our understanding of its normative status. In Part Two I rely on there being a particular kind of relationship between stigma, shaming, and social structures. I also draw heavily on the idea that stigma is a pervasive feature of the social world of a stigmatized person, that it involves a binary opposition between those who are taken to have violated a social norm and/or standard and those who are not, and that stigma is liable to produce shame. These ideas are only properly defended in Part One.

PART ONE: The Nature of Stigma

Chapter One: Stigma, The Shaming Model

1. Introduction

> *'Say if I walked out of class because I could feel myself going into a panic attack, I'd get screamed at by the teacher. There'd be other kids out bunking class and if they saw me having a panic attack, they'd throw stuff at me. They'd throw bottles at me. They'd throw chewing gum at me. Throw their drinks at me.'*
>
> – Dexter, 17, London (Testimony quoted in YMCA (2016: 33))

Dexter is stigmatized for their mental health difficulties within their school community. But what does this consist in? When we 'zoom-out' from the particulars of this example, what are the general features of stigma?

A natural starting point is the 'Bad View Model'. Most of us are the targets of unfavourable attitudes held by at least some other people. What distinguishes the stigmatized person, on this view, is a critical mass of such opinion in some community to which she belongs. Stigmatic attitudes may also have a particular content – perhaps the stigmatized person is thought of as an 'inferior being'. But the basic idea remains the same: we get stigma by multiplying instances, within some community, of people holding a bad view of an individual (perhaps as a member of some group they hold a bad view towards in general).[11]

[11] Kolodny has a parallel view about social inequality. He claims that a kind of social inequality 'seems to have to do with… Some having attributes (for example, race, lineage, wealth, perceived divine favor) that generally attract greater *consideration* than the corresponding attributes of others' (2014: 295-96, emphasis original).

I argue that the Bad View Model is false. First, it is not necessary for an individual to be stigmatized within some community that its members hold any particularly negative attitudes about her. Second, such attitudes are not sufficient either. A mere distribution of attitudes will not explain distinctive features of stigma. Stigma exerts a kind of 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure in the stigmatized person's community. I do not mean that the stigmatized person does, or should, accept the stigmatic attitudes that members of the community express about her. But part of what distinguishes incidental acts of derision from those that form part of stigma is that the latter cannot be as easily brushed away – and that the latter are performed by agents who are themselves under some kind of 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure to perform such acts.[12, 13] Relatedly, stigmatized people are vulnerable to shame – despite often rejecting particular stigmatic assessments of themselves or the criteria to which such assessments appeal.[14,

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Though he does not say this, it is easy to imagine that Kolodny would interpret stigma as a social inequality of this kind. It seems the most likely candidate of the three kinds of social inequality mentioned – the others are 'Some having greater relative *power* […] over others' and 'Some having greater relative *de facto authority* […] over others' (ibid., emphasis original).

[12] Again, I do not mean we grant stigmatic assessments – or requirements to express them – the kind of authority we would grant to them if we thought they were correct. It would be more accurate to say that we see them as embodying social expectations.

[13] A proponent of the Bad View Model might argue that since their view is that stigmas are constituted by a critical mass of people holding a bad view of an individual (rather than by anything 'incidental') they can capture some of the pressure that is brought to bear on the stigmatized person – namely, a kind of psychological pressure to internalize the attitude that others hold about her. This is true, but for reasons explained in Section 3 of this chapter, I do not think the appeal to internalization is sufficient to capture the distinctive 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure that stigma exerts on stigmatized people.

[14] See footnote 2 in the Introduction to this thesis for references.

[15] To explain this, we must think of stigma not as an aggregate of unfavourable attitudes held about the stigmatized person, but rather as belonging to a social structure in which people's attitudes are in various ways interdependent.

Thus, I also advance an alternative account of stigma that explains these distinctive features of stigma – the 'Shaming Model'. An individual is stigmatized in a community if she is shamed by members of that community, and this is explained by their belief that she has deviated from some social norm and/or standard.

I begin by reconstructing Goffman's (1963) account of stigma. This is for several reasons. First, his view instantiates the Bad View Model. I think this is, pretheoretically, a natural way to understand stigma.[16] Second, Goffman's view is flexible and can accommodate plausible claims about 'passing' and stigma's relativity to social groups. Any account of stigma, including the Shaming Model, needs to accommodate these. Finally, the view is popular. As one author put it more than 40 years after the publication of Goffman's book: 'Even today, virtually all social scientists accept the broad definition of stigma developed through his work' (Lenhardt (2004: 817)).

In section 3 I set out the objections to the Bad View Model. I then offer the Shaming Model as an alternative (sections 5 and 6). Along the way, I provide an account of the characteristic

[15] These features are similar to those van Wietmarschen (2022: 922-23) takes as constraints on a general account of social hierarchy.

[16] There may also be theory-based reasons to favour accounts of this kind. If we agree with Kolodny (2014: 295) that some hierarchies simply consist in some people having greater relative power over others, we might be inclined to think of hierarchies like stigma in a similarly distributional spirit, i.e., certain positive or negative attitudes accrue to some people as the targets of such attitudes more than others.

functions of shaming (section 4) and address shaming and stigma's relationship to attributions of responsibility (sections 4 and 6).

2. Goffman

Stigma is a paradigmatic case of social hierarchy.[17] Stigmatized people relate to some others as their social inferiors. There are many contingent features associated with particular stigmas. For example, the consequences of 'fat stigma' include that 'Fat students are less likely to attend college because their high-school counsellors offer them less encouragement compared to their thinner peers, and their families tend to offer them less financial support for higher-education pursuits' (Nath (2019: 577)). These features can be of the utmost moral importance. But we must set them aside in order to address stigma's essential features.

Goffman claims that 'a stigma… is really a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype' (1963: 14). What is meant by 'stereotype'? They are 'the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories' (ibid: 11).[18] A social identity is thus imputed to us in a given context on the

[17] We sometimes use 'stigma' to refer only to a stigmatized *trait*. I will also use it to refer to the mechanisms of stigmatizing persons – also 'stigmatization'. I do not offer an account of stigma in the previous sense. Those attracted to Goffman's account might focus on the 'T' element in some of the Goffman-inspired analyses below. We often talk about an *act* being stigmatizing – which is again not my focus here (see Garfinkel (1956) for relevant discussion). See the endnote to this chapter for further remarks on stigmatizing acts.

[18] There is much recent philosophical work on psychological mechanisms such as implicit bias that often underwrite group generalization. See Beeghly and Madva (2020). My focus at this point is the role of stereotypes themselves in constructing stigma, not the psychological mechanisms underwriting them, whether explicit prejudice or implicit bias or whatever else.

basis of such expectations (ibid: 12). Stigma involves the deviation of some feature of ours (which may also be socially constructed, e.g., our race[19]) from this identity.

Goffman's use of 'stereotype' does not precisely track its ordinary usage today. Take the stigmatization of Blacks in American society viewed as a whole. For Goffman, this is understood in terms of their deviation from a stereotype of Americans *as white* – the default state imputed to Americans. Though we are familiar with other concepts that cover similar territory, e.g., the 'white gaze' (see Yancy (2008)), it is perhaps not so common to talk in terms of 'stereotypes' here. A more common use of 'stereotype', which does accord with Goffman's account, would for example pick out more particular social expectations placed upon Blacks in certain contexts. Take the expectation that Blacks should be particularly deferential to whites when occupying customer service roles.[20] Being taken to deviate from this expectation may certainly incur stigma – and of course the expectation itself is presumably tied to some more general stigmatization of Blacks.

This last remark connects to another way in which Goffman's notion of 'stereotype' departs from ordinary usage. We talk, for example, about the stereotype of Black women as aggressive. But it is being taken to conform with that 'stereotype', rather than deviation from it, which we more often associate with stigma. The more general category of pejorative 'stereotypes' thus

[19] See Ásta (2018).

[20] An illustrative example from Malcolm X's autobiography: 'It didn't take me a week to learn that all you had to do was give white people a show and they'd buy anything you offered them. It was like popping your shoeshine rag. The dining-car waiters and Pullman porters knew it too, and they faked their Uncle Tomming to get bigger tips. We were in that world of Negroes who are both servants and psychologists, aware that white people are so obsessed with their own importance that they will pay liberally, even dearly, for the impression of being catered to and entertained' (2001 [1965]: 161).

present a challenge for Goffman's account if we are to understand deviation (or being taken to deviate) from a stereotype as both necessary and sufficient for stigma. Following Goffman's usage, then, we must say there is no stereotype of Black women as aggressive unless deviation from that expectation would in some sense be viewed as undesirable. The stigmatization of Black women that we often associate with (what we call) the aggressive 'stereotype' would have to be unpacked in other terms – for example, those pejorative attitudes are quite plausibly associated with some more general stigmatization of Black women.

Goffman's account instantiates the Bad View Model. This is because he appears to explain the mechanisms of 'categorization' involved in stereotypes by appeal to the way individuals 'buy-in' to the representations in question. He says, '*By definition*, of course, we believe the stigmatized person is not quite human' (1963: 15, my emphasis) and that we believe they are 'of a less desirable kind – in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak' (ibid: 12).[21] The 'buy-in' can also extend to the stigmatized person herself: 'The stigmatized

[21] Goffman is offering a view about the distinctive and inferiorizing content of stigmatic attitudes: 'not all undesirable attributes are at issue, but only those which are incongruous with our stereotype of what a given type of individual should be' (1963: 13). This claim about stigma's content suggests we should carefully separate stigmatization from a neighbouring phenomenon – call it 'marginalization'. Whilst a person can be marginalized without the imputation of any kind of violation, this is not so for stigmatization. Perhaps a helpful example is working class identity in Britain. It is possible (though I am not committed to this interpretation) that working class people are not stigmatized relative to the political community as a whole. They certainly occupy a *low* social position along the dimension of class – but this need not involve the idea that there is anything *wrong* with those so situated. They may just occupy a different and lower social position. It does not follow from this that working class people are not stigmatized relative to some sub-communities (for example, elite universities) – see discussion in main text below. But in such cases, they very much are

individual tends to hold the same beliefs about identity that we do; this is a pivotal fact' (ibid: 17). So, it seems that stereotypes consist of nothing more than the readiness of large number of people in the community to assess others, and perhaps themselves, against certain expectations – they think that people should conform to the relevant stereotypes, in the strong sense that they think these are good expectations to hold them to, and so form negative attitudes towards those who they believe fail to conform. This is perhaps not the only way to construe the account – in truth, it is difficult to pin down Goffman's notion of a stereotype. But this is certainly one way to do so and interpreting it this way helps us to flesh-out the Bad View Model, which I criticize in the next section.

Let us put Goffman's account in more formal terms so that we may develop its core elements. 'A' stands for a person, 'G' for a community to which A belongs, and 'T' for some set of traits.[22]

Goffman stigma

A is stigmatized in G if, and only if:

(1) A possesses T;

(2) It follows from A possessing T that A deviates from the stereotypes available to A in G.

A noteworthy feature of the view thus stated is that both people who are (in Goffman's terminology (ibid: 14)) 'discredited' and people who are merely 'discreditable' are stigmatized. If A possesses T, and it follows from this that A deviates from the stereotypes available to A in G,

thought to have committed a violation in virtue of their presence in a context where they are held not to belong.

[22] This can include the trait of being taken to possess some trait(s). Relatedly, I take 'traits' to include acts performed by a person. This is unconventional in, for example, literature on discrimination.

A is stigmatized whether or not people know that A possesses T – that is, whether or not A 'passes' as conforming to the relevant stereotypes.

Merely discreditable individuals do not escape all costs associated with stigma. A faces costs on account of deviating from the stereotypes available to A in G, that is in virtue of possessing T, even if members of G do not believe (because they do not know that A possesses T) that A deviates from the relevant stereotypes. As Goffman notes, for the merely discreditable person too, 'Shame becomes a central possibility, arising from the individual's perception of one of [her] own attributes as being a defiling thing to possess and one [she] can readily see [herself] not possessing' (ibid: 18). The prospect of discrediting itself, manifest in the kinds of attitudes held about discredited people (and those 'like them') in the community, and even potentially by the discreditable person herself, can be shame inducing.[23]

Despite this, it is not clear that people who pass as conforming to the relevant stereotypes are in fact stigmatized. Intuitions are fuzzy – this is to some extent a stipulative move. But the fact that stigmatization involves publicly recognized standings of inferiority gives us some reason not to count individuals who pass as conforming to the relevant stereotypes as in fact stigmatized. If

[23] How does Goffman explain the stigmatized person's vulnerability to shame? Since his account exemplifies the Bad View Model, a salient possibility is that the stigmatized person herself is simply one more person who takes a bad view of her. This is internalization of the stereotype – because she 'buys-in' to it, she judges herself negatively for deviating from it and is thus vulnerable to shame. This story will differ slightly depending on your preferred account of shame – but internalization is surely part of any complete account of the stigmatized person's vulnerability to shame. (It will feature less prominently if we accept an account of shame that takes the beliefs that other people hold about a person to figure in her experiences of shame in a particularly direct way (see Calhoun (2004) and O'Brien (2020)). Still, I doubt it can provide the whole explanation – and on this count the Bad View Model is found wanting in section 3.

members of G do not know that A possesses T, and so do not know that A deviates from the stereotypes available to A in G on account of possessing T, then A cannot have a public standing that makes reference to A's possession of T.[24] If we accept this reasoning, a simple amendment suggests itself.

*Goffman stigma**

A is stigmatized in G if, and only if:

(1*) A is taken to possess T by members of G;

(2) It follows from A possessing T that A deviates from the stereotypes available to A in G.

Condition (1*) should not be read as requiring that all members of G take A to possess T. We must work with the intuitive idea that 'enough' members of G take A to possess T, or that members of G 'often' take A to possess T when they encounter A. We should not try to be more precise.

Finally, we should note that A is stigmatized *relative to* G – some group to which she belongs (Goffman (1963: 13)). This allows for the possibility that whilst A is stigmatized relative to G, she may not be stigmatized relative to some other community or (communities) to which she belongs, call them 'G', G"…'. This is illustrated by an example of Goffman's involving 'the prostitute who, although adjusted to her urban round and the contacts she routinely has in it,

[24] This helps with a problem case. Why, for example, if nose-picking is taken to be deviant behaviour, would we not count 'nose-pickers' as stigmatized? But that stretches the concept of stigma too far. There are many strategies of response. We might appeal to a 'severity' threshold. But I think a better response would be to simply admit the possibility that the example draws our attention to, whilst at the same time noticing that it is very easy to 'pass' as conforming to the relevant stereotypes in this case – so there are very few stigmatized 'nose-pickers'.

fears to 'bump into' a man from her home town… In this case her closet is as big as her beat, and she is the skeleton that resides in it' (ibid: 99-100). The sex worker is not discredited or even discreditable in her life in the city – she conforms to some stereotype available to her within that community. But she also belongs to another community – in her home town – in which all possible ways for her to conform to a stereotype in her community include that she is not a sex worker. Discrediting there remains possible.

Can A be stigmatized relative to any G? Goffman sometimes appears highly permissive about what counts as stigma (e.g., (ibid: 153)). So, there is some indirect evidence for interpreting his account as answering in the affirmative.

Still, our ordinary concept of stigma yields counterexamples to this claim. Suppose G is an office that A only attends once a month as part of A's job. Suppose further that A is taken to possess T by members of G, and that A consequently is taken to deviate from the stereotypes available to A in G. Finally, suppose the stereotypes that are available to A in G are highly local relative to the rest of A's social world – there are no similar stereotypes operative in the rest of the communities to which A belongs (G', G"…) that take A's possession of T to be discrediting. I think we would be reluctant to grant that A is stigmatized relative to G on account of being taken to possess T. A is merely in bad standing in G.

It is no accident that the kinds of social identities that we often cite as examples of stigmatized classes are categories that have a degree of salience in many contexts, e.g. racial, gender, and religious identities, sexual orientations, having a disability and so on.[25] This is because it is a

[25] This is not to deny that I can sometimes, in all my idiosyncrasy, be stigmatized simply as a rogue individual in my community.

necessary condition for A to be stigmatized relative to G that G comprises a large enough part of A's social world.[26] Or to be more precise, that there is some set of communities to which A belongs (G, G'…) that comprises a large enough part of A's social world. A can then be stigmatized relative to each of the communities belonging to this set (relative to G, relative to G'…) in case there is some T that is similarly discrediting for A across the members of the set. Compare a national political community, which comprises a large enough part of A's social world on its own, with a set of smaller (sub-) communities to which A belongs (a school, a workplace, a sports club…) which, taken together, comprise a large enough part of her social world. A could then be stigmatized for her racial identity, say, relative to the national political community if there are stereotypes operative at that level which take A's racial identity to be discrediting. A could also be discredited relative to each of the smaller communities to which A belongs if there are stereotypes that operate independently in A's school, workplace, sports club and so on, that all take A's racial identity to be similarly discrediting. When I use 'G' in formulating accounts of stigma henceforth, I refer to a community to which A belongs that satisfies the condition above.[27]

This appeal to the idea of 'a large enough part of A's social world' allows for two possibilities. First, A can be stigmatized relative to G even if there are some other (sub-) communities to which A belongs, such as a friendship group, workplace, ethnic enclave and so on (G", G'"…) in

[26] I have a broadly 'frequentist' notion in mind – whether G counts as a 'large enough' part of A's social world is a matter of how often she interacts with others in G.

[27] I find some support in Viehoff's claim that 'social status hierarchies' (including stigmas, presumably) are 'a feature of a society as a whole, rather than of a particular relationship' – though, Viehoff allows that a 'high school' (or even a 'friendship') may count as a 'society in the relevant sense' (2019: 12-13). I think this last remark can be interpreted charitably by appealing to some of the resources I develop here. See footnote 112 in Chapter Three of this thesis.

which the T which is discrediting for A in G is not here discrediting for A. Second, A can be stigmatized within a friendship group, workplace, ethnic enclave and so on, when the T that is discrediting for A within such communities is not discrediting for A within some wider community (G'), a national political one, say, to which A belongs.

Borderline cases are possible. There are cases (like the office example) where the contexts in which T is discrediting for A are too fleeting or spontaneously entered into for A to plausibly count as stigmatized in that context on account of being taken to possess T. Equally, whilst within a racist society members of certain racial groups may find some respite amongst each other from stereotypes that are operative in the wider political community, those stereotypes often still loom large enough in their social world that this is a paradigmatic case of stigma. Suppose, however, some quirk of mine is discrediting within my family network. Is this a possible case of stigma? It depends on how large a part of my social world this family network comprises. Equally, if the quirk is discrediting within some wider community, but admired within the family network, the question of whether I am stigmatized within the larger community rests partly on how significant a presence that wider community exerts in my social world. Thus, greater insularity both reduces the risk of stigma within some wider community and increases the risk within the sub-community itself.

I doubt we can decide borderline cases. But this is not a problem. Vagueness may be a feature of the phenomenon itself.[28] What we can say is that there is a range of cases that clearly count as

[28] See van Wietmarschen (2022: 931).

stigmas, and within that range those cases in which A's possession of T is discrediting in larger parts of A's social world strike us as more deeply hierarchical.[29]

3. Against the Bad View Model

Goffman's account is flexible enough to accommodate some plausible claims about stigma. But, as an exemplar of the Bad View Model, it is vulnerable to serious objections. On Goffman's account, there are a set of stereotypes available to A in G. This just amounts to the claim that members of G expect A to conform with a set of expectations, and thus stand ready to form a series of dehumanizing beliefs about A if she deviates from these expectations. The stigmatization of A in G then simply involves the forming of such dehumanizing beliefs, on account of A being taken to deviate from the stereotypes available to A in G.

The first objection to make against this account is that it is not necessary for A to be stigmatized relative to G that members of G hold any particularly negative beliefs about A. It is enough that they express the bad view of A, even if most members of G do not 'buy-in' to the relevant judgments about how members of G like A ought to be.

[29] A stigma can be more deeply hierarchical in another dimension too: namely, how far below the 'normals' the stigmatized are socially situated. This will depend on how discrediting T is. On the Bad View Model, this is a matter of just how badly people are judged for being taken to fail to conform to the relevant stereotypes. On the Shaming Model, this is a matter of how stringent the social norms and standards that the stigmatized person is taken to have violated are.

An example may help.[30] Suppose there is a social norm in a community that requires males to beat their female partners. And suppose further that males who openly defy this norm are subject to derision by their peers. It is still possible that very few males actually conform with the norm. Indeed, it is possible that many of them think it is a bad norm. The pressure to express negative judgements about group members who openly deviate from the norm, then, would not come from a sincere conviction that they merit such judgements. Rather, it would come from a desire to uphold appearances, believing they too would be subject to treatment of this kind if their lack of commitment to the norm were known. In this case, most males would be ignorant of their peers' lack of commitment to the norm and record of nonconformity in private. This ignorance allows for a pattern of males insincerely expressing negative judgements about their peers who openly defy the norm. The intuition I am pressing is that the lack of sincere negative evaluations of such people does not mean they are not stigmatized.

In light of this argument, it may still be sufficient for A to be stigmatized in G that members of G hold a bad view of A. But I reject this too. First, it is hard to imagine a community in which such beliefs are pervasive and yet are given little or no expression. It is harder still to uncover any firm intuitions about whether this would count as stigma. This is particularly so since stigma involves publicly recognized standings of inferiority. This requires at least some coordination and expression of the attitudes in question. But if paradigmatic cases of stigma involve members of G giving expression to a bad view of A, then why retain any direct focus on their negative judgements about A? Perhaps members of G really do hold a bad view of A, and people like A. Or maybe they do not – and simply act is if they do for some other reason.

[30] This is adapted from an example discussed, for different reasons, by Bicchieri (2017: 96). See Anderson (2000: 182) for a structurally similar case.

There is a deeper reason to hold, against Goffman, that members of G possessing certain dehumanizing beliefs about A is not sufficient to account for the stigmatization of A in G. Stigma exerts a distinctive 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure in the stigmatized person's community. The widely accepted association between being a stigmatized person and a vulnerability to shame is strong evidence for this claim. The Bad View Model cannot explain this feature of stigma.

Goffman shows some sensitivity to this feature of stigma when he notes that stereotypes are 'righteously presented demands' (1963: 12).[31] We might wonder why his view cannot accommodate this datum. After all, it is fairly plausible empirical assumption, which has done some work in contemporary political philosophy, that our self-esteem usually depends upon the good view that our peers take of us.[32] So, when a bad view of a person is pervasive in her community, she is vulnerable to internalizing that attitude, often resulting in shame.

This is correct. But it cannot do all of the work of explaining the 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure that a stigmatized person comes under. Internalization is part of the explanation why stigmatized individuals are vulnerable to shame. But much contemporary philosophy of shame also begins from the assumption that some stigmatized individuals experience shame associated with their stigma despite not accepting the stigmatic attitudes in question – or even the criteria on which these attitudes are based.[33]

[31] At least if we assume that for demands to register *as demands* they must have some 'pull' with the agents to whom they are issued.

[32] See Rawls (1999 [1971]: 386-91) and Scanlon (2018: 35-38).

[33] See footnote 2 in the Introduction to this thesis for references.

A possible response is that all the Bad View Model needs here is a revised account of shame, so that it is better placed to accommodate experiences of shame where the agent does not judge herself negatively.[34] I do not rule out a resolution of this kind. But since I do not want to rest my account on any controversial claims about the nature of shame, it is worth pursuing an alternative model of stigma, to see whether it performs better at explaining this datum in a way which is ecumenical between competing accounts of shame. Another reason for holding that this reply is insufficient is that stigmas do not only exert 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure on the stigmatized person – a kind of pressure is also brought to bear on the other members of her community, who are usually expected to respond to the stigmatized individual in some way or another. The appeal to internalization does not contribute anything to understanding this aspect of the distinctive 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure that stigmas exert.[35]

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[34] Calhoun (2004) and O'Brien (2020) defend an account of shame that takes the beliefs that other people hold about a person to figure in her experiences of shame in a particularly direct way. Webster uses Velleman's (2001) account of shame to explain experiences of shame in response to racism as 'prompted by [the target's] inability to choose when her stigmatised racialised identity is made salient' (2021: 535-36). See also Velleman (2001: 45-47). For accounts which hold that a person experiences shame only if she makes a negative evaluation of herself, see O'Hear (1977); Rawls (1999: 388-91); and Taylor (1985, ch.3).

[35] On an alternative reading of Goffman, we might understand stereotypes in terms of social norms and standards. For reasons that will become clear, this would give his view the resources to respond to the present worry. Still, I do not think this would entirely vindicate his view (even if it were the correct interpretation). This is because Goffman does at least seem to characterize stereotypes in terms of the way that individuals in the community 'buy-in' to certain representations of people – notably, of the person who deviates from the stereotypes available to her as in some way defective. But, as we have just seen, it is not necessary (and probably not sufficient either) for A to be stigmatized relative to G that members of G hold any particularly negative beliefs about A. See footnote 45 later in this chapter for discussion of accounts of social norms that also require a certain kind of 'buy-in' from members of the community. See also footnote 100 in Chapter Three of this thesis.

These criticisms not only show that we must reject the Bad View Model, but also point to a way forward. If stigma is not explained by an aggregate of individual beliefs, and our account of stigma must supply some resources for explaining the 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure that attaches to it, then we will need to appeal instead to a phenomenon that is both complex, and in a certain sense weighty. I suggest that a kind of social structure fits the bill. An individual is stigmatized in a community if she is shamed by members of that community, and this is explained by their belief that she has deviated from some social norm and/or standard. Social norms and standards are themselves understood in terms of individual attitudes, but not as a mere accumulation of them. Rather, the relevant attitudes are in various ways interdependent, involving conditionalized preferences to conform with rules.

4. Shaming

Before describing this account in more detail, we must say more about its key component: shaming. Shaming involves 'the communication of a negative evaluation of a person' (McDonald (2021: 139)).[36] The evaluation is *of a person* – not merely of some act of hers. The

[36] For similar remarks see Billingham and Parr (2020: 1000) in connection with 'public shaming' and Thomason's idea that 'shaming occurs when others try to make prominent some feature of the shamed person sometimes for her own self-awareness but mostly for others to see… In order to shame someone, her flaw or offense must be pointed out to others (2018: 181).' By introducing an audience as essential, the latter remark goes beyond the essential point that shaming communicates a negative evaluation of a person. Much work on shaming penalties in the law focuses on the communicative aspect of such penalties – for example, Kahan (1996) praises their 'condemnatory' force and Massaro (1997: 649) notices that they express 'disgust'. We often need to glean contextual meaning in order to establish whether the relevant evaluation has been

target is presented as shameful – that (as Williams says about the emotion of shame) it would be appropriate for the target to feel that her 'whole being' is 'diminished or lessened' (1993: 89).[37] In this way, we are able to account for some of the sense that a shamed person (and indeed a stigmatized one) is 'marked' by the evaluation of her. This also accounts for some of the difference between shaming and blaming – when I blame someone, I may only communicate that she should feel guilty about some act of hers.[38] I will continue to talk about shaming as 'expressing negative evaluations of persons' – but the reader should take this as referring to the more specific form of evaluation outlined here.

Shaming has the characteristic function of 'shoring up' social norms and standards. In order to serve this function, it must have a certain expressive content.[39] Shaming serves to 'shore up' social norms and standards by expressing that the target has violated the norms and/or standards in question.[40] To be clear, this is not a claim about all shaming. Some social acts may

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expressed. The expressive acts will not necessarily be verbal – and their expressive content will not necessarily be conveyed intentionally. See Anderson and Pildes (2000).

[37] See also Nussbaum: 'Shame, as is generally agreed by those who analyze it, pertains to the whole self, rather than to a specific act of the self' (2004: 184). Nussbaum says similar things about *shaming* elsewhere (ibid: 230). For criticism, see Flanagan (2021: 139-40).

[38] Of course, when shaming is occasioned by a wrongful act, it may communicate that a person should feel both shame and guilt.

[39] By ascribing characteristic functions to acts of shaming, I do not mean that all such acts with that function actually have some hand in shoring up norms and standards. Rather, it is both necessary and sufficient that they are the kind of act whose performance *generally* or *usually* or *on the whole* shores up social norms and standards. Though we are good at making these judgements in practice, providing a deeper explanation of them is more elusive. I do not attempt one here.

[40] Shaming thus has a binary quality of the kind Tilly (1998) takes to be characteristic of 'categorical inequality'. The same is true, on my view, of stigma.

count as shaming mainly because they involve an intention to induce shame in the target, even when they possess no broader social function.[41] I set aside such shaming in order to focus on the kind that is key to the explanation of stigma.[42]

The claim that at least some shaming has the function of *enforcing social norms* has a firm footing in the literature.[43] McDonald suggests that some shaming sanctions us 'with the weight of the shamer's own reproach and the… reproach of the masses' (2021: 151). Simply finding myself an object of disapprobation can be enough to hurt me – perhaps even give rise to shame.[44] This gives the audience a reason to refrain from violating norms backed by such sanctions. In order to make salient such reasons the act needs to have a certain expressive content. This is the

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[41] Some writers withhold the title 'shaming' from such acts, preferring instead 'invitations to shame' (see Thomason (2018: 198-81) and McDonald (2021: 141-43)). The terminological differences need not distract us.

[42] I expand on this below. In brief: the wider social functions of the relevant kinds of shaming are essential to explaining the 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure that stigma exerts in the stigmatized person's community. By contrast, shaming that simply aims to induce shame in the target lends itself to being occasioned in highly incidental and bespoke ways that typically do not carry the distinctive force of stigma. The kind of shaming that interests us here may, or may not, also aim at inducing shame in the target. In Chapter Two of this thesis, I discuss in greater detail the various kinds of shaming.

[43] See Billingham and Parr (2020); Jacquet (2016: 13); and McDonald (2021: 151-54). See also Manne (2019), who argues that misogyny – some of which involves shaming – 'polices' patriarchal norms. The literature on shaming penalties in the law also deals with shaming as a mechanism for enforcing *legal* norms. A crucial disagreement is over their effectiveness in this regard. See Massaro (1991; 1997).

[44] This does not commit us to Nussbaum's view that humiliation, which she thinks is closely related to shaming, 'does not always lead to actual shame, but that is its intent' (2004: 203-204). It only commits us to the idea that there is some, not wholly contingent, connection between being subjected to acts of shaming and a vulnerability to shame. One resource from this chapter which we might appeal to here is simply the claim that the shamer presents her target *as shameful*. See Bartky (1990).

significance of the point that shaming expresses that the target has fallen foul of (in this case) a social norm – that is part of how it can serve the function of enforcing that very norm.

This mechanism depends partly for its success on members of the community endorsing the norms that are enforced by such means. Such endorsement may be necessary to induce certain negative self-assessments or other painful attitudinal responses.[45] But shaming can also serve to emphasize how transgression will harm our reputation. This, as well as being important in its

[45] Billingham and Parr note: 'Members of the group generally take the norms to be authoritative for them. They accept or internalize these norms, such that they consider themselves duty-bound to comply with them and are likely to feel guilt or shame if they violate them' (2020: 999). If this is correct, we need not worry in general that members of the community may not endorse the social norms that are enforced by acts of shaming. The claim, however, rests on a particular conception of social norms (see for example Hart (2012 [1961]) who argues that in order to make sense of social *rules* as imposing a kind of 'obligation' we have to suppose that enough people in the community take up 'the internal point of view' with respect to those rules – a kind of 'endorsement' of them). It does not follow from the account of social norms defended by Bicchieri (2017) and van Wietmarschen (2021a). According to such views, it is possible that a social norm can be 'operative' in a community despite the fact that no members endorse it. It would suffice that enough members of that community prefer to conform with a certain rule, conditional on their beliefs (which they in fact have) that sufficiently many other members of the community will also conform with it and believe they ought to conform with it. That the second of these beliefs is false does not affect the claim that the social norm is 'operative' in the community. This is connected to the argument made against Goffman in section 3, that no particularly negative attitudes about the stigmatized person are necessary to account for stigma – and this point extends to the stigmatized person (and so, on my view, *shamed* person) herself. To what extent is the threat of shame, as a sanctioning mechanism of shaming, compromised by this finding? As I mentioned in the previous footnote, I think it is of some significance that the shamer presents her target as shameful. I provide some further resources for making sense of the shame of stigmatized subjects in section 5 of this chapter. See footnote 100 in Chapter Three of this thesis for related discussion.

own right, can affect how people interact with us in various detrimental ways. This kind of sanctioning does not similarly depend on our endorsement of the norms.

Billingham and Parr claim that: '… public criticism can increase our common knowledge of (a) what the norm is; (b) what it demands in particular situations; and (c) when it has been violated. In these ways, public criticism enables us collectively to reaffirm our endorsement of the norm, and of the values it promotes or respects' (2020: 1000). This indicates that shaming has an *informational* role as well as a sanctioning one – and that the transmission of such information can itself have a hand in bringing it about that social norms are more likely to be followed. The quotation also hints at the possibility that shaming can function as a kind of manifestation, even ritual *celebration*, of our ideals that invites the audience to rejoice and take pride in them. We could continue to talk about such mechanisms as enforcing social norms, in some extended sense of 'enforce'. But since 'enforcement' may imply a closer connection to sanctioning than is intended, I prefer to say that such shaming 'shores up' social norms.

The preceding discussion reveals that there are no essential mechanisms by which shaming functions to shore up social norms. Rather, shaming can induce a range of cognitive changes (forming new beliefs – or recalling old ones – about the norms and how they interact with our interests) or affective changes (fear, shame, pride) in the audience – and any of these can help to shore up social norms.

Should we stop here? Why not think that shoring up social norms is *the* characteristic function of shaming?[46] For one thing, it is not always obvious that the main relation in which shaming stands to social norms is one of shoring up. Rather, shaming is often what the norms require.

[46] C.f. Billingham and Parr (2020).

Consider this example from Dumont's study of the Indian caste-system:

> 'In the north-west of India, men of similar status are wont to meet around a hookah (…) which is smoked in turn… a cloth is interposed between lips and mouthpiece… Higher castes share the pipe with almost all castes excluding, apart from the Untouchables (…), only four other castes… In some cases, a different cloth must be placed between the pipe and the lips of the smoker.' (1980 [1966]: 84)

On one intelligible interpretation (no doubt there are others), the following of rules around smoking shames those with certain caste identities (as well as those people deemed 'untouchable'). Notably, we might think they shame members of those castes who members of higher castes do not share the pipe with – perhaps communicating the message that such sharing would 'pollute' members of higher castes. For similar reasons, the practices may shame the members of those castes for whom a different cloth is deemed necessary. Certainly, this reading is imaginable.[47]

What is notable for our purposes is that such shaming would not be a response to any infraction of social norms around smoking. Such shaming would occur even if the norms were adhered to perfectly. Such shaming is what the norms require. It is perhaps possible to expand the meaning of 'shoring up' social norms to accommodate this. If shaming is what the norms require, we may say that it 'shores up' those very norms in virtue of being a case of continued conformity with them – though this seems a stretch.

There is in any case another decisive reason to reject the view that the characteristic functions of shaming are exhausted by their role in shoring up social norms: some shaming would not even

[47] I am not committed to any particular reading of this example. Perhaps adherence to these norms does not shame members of certain castes – it may simply connote the absence of a kind of esteem.

make sense if this were the case. Shaming, like stigma, does not simply present the target as 'bad' – but rather as having violated some expectation.[48] This is straightforward when the agent is targeted for (alleged) transgression of some norm. But in the case above no norm has been violated – nor does anyone think this has occurred. Everybody knows that the shaming itself is simply more norm-required behaviour.[49]

What, then, is the violation that the shamed person is taken to have committed? Any plausible interpretation will allow that they are shamed (if indeed they are shamed) *for their caste identities*. Might we then say that they do, after all, violate a norm – namely, a norm prohibiting belonging to their castes? This also seems a stretch. There is, plausibly, a conceptual connection between the idea of a norm and attributions of responsibility: if I take someone to have violated a norm, this implies that I take them to be responsible for having done so. But caste identities are usually unchosen features of persons – not something they can be held responsible for. Perhaps we could say that the people who engage in this practice simply have incoherent beliefs about the

[48] I take this to follow from the claim made earlier that the shamer indicates that it would appropriate for the target to feel that her whole being is lessened or diminished. The idea of violating an expectation is also a key feature of the examples of shaming discussed so far that shore up social norms. This too gives us some reason to expect further cases of shaming to replicate this feature. Manne (2019: 53-54) claims that misogyny, which serves to 'police' patriarchal norms, can be visited upon people who do not actually deviate from patriarchal norms nor are taken to have done so. For the reason mentioned here, we should not understand such forms of misogyny as involving shaming – they are simply acts of terrorism.

[49] Here is a way of connecting this point with the one about responsibility below. It seems there could be an intelligible social norm that simply said, 'Shame this person'. But a norm that simply said, 'Blame this person', does not seem intelligible. This is because in order to blame someone we need to ascribe some kind of responsibility to them. But some forms of shaming plausibly are a species of blaming (see McDonald (2021)).

things people are responsible for. But, whilst this may sometimes be the case, it seems an uncharitable interpretation of such practices in general.[50]

So, we must concede that some shaming does not have the function of shoring up social norms, but rather of shoring up *social standards*. Social standards, like social norms, are a kind of abstract object. Like social norms, they are rules that we can conform or fail to conform with, which exert a kind of 'pressure' when they are present in a community. But unlike social norms, taking someone to have violated a social standard does not imply that we take them to be responsible for the violation. This tracks our ordinary usage of 'standard' as in 'beauty standard'. There are many 'beauty norms' – people are held responsible for 'upholding appearances'. But there are also features of people that are just deemed 'ugly', that nobody believes they can do anything

[50] This discussion owes heavily to McDonald (2021: 143-45). McDonald argues that shaming comes in 'agential' and 'non-agential' forms. The latter enforces 'social standards' and does not involve holding a subject responsible – more on this in a moment. We 'non-agentially' shame a target by expressing 'objective' attitudes such as disgust and contempt. (Thomason also mentions ridicule in connection with shaming (2018:180).) These involve, in some ways, not engaging with a person in their capacity as an agent (2021: 150). (It should be noted, however, that shaming, unlike some of attitudes which might be expressed in shaming, e.g., disgust, does limit its objects to agents.) When we 'agentially' shame a target, by contrast, we express 'reactive' attitudes, that are responses to a person's will, and which thus involve the imputation of responsibility to the target. Such shaming enforces social norms. One quibble I have with McDonald is that she only mentions 'non-agential' shaming in connection with hierarchy (ibid: 153-55). But, as the next chapter will illustrate, a person can be stigmatized (and hence inferiorized) when they are taken to have violated a *norm*. McDonald also draws a distinction between shaming and the (I take it) hierarchical act type of 'hate speech'. Shaming, she claims, is unlike hate speech in that 'I can non-agentially shame someone for something very specific, like a scar (ibid: 148, fn44).' I submit that if the characteristic functions of shaming are to shore up social norms and standards, then the focus of our shaming cannot be so specific that we cannot point to a social norm or standard that might be enforced by our performing the act.

about (being 'too short' or 'too tall' might be examples). People who have such features are held to violate a 'beauty standard' – a rule that prohibits possession of these features.[51]

How might we understand the role of shaming in shoring up social standards? It follows from what we have said already that such shaming does not work by *sanctioning* people who violate the standards. As McDonald writes: 'A person watching a peer being shamed for being disabled will not think 'I had better avoid being disabled'' (2021: 151). Still, everything which we said about the *informational* and *celebratory* roles of shaming in relation to social norms seems to hold true also for the relationship between shaming and social standards.[52] Shaming in response to being taken to have committed a standard violation can make those standards salient to the community. It may even serve to invite the audience to rejoice and take pride in those very standards. In both cases, shaming serves these functions in part as result of its expressive content: it expresses that the target has violated the standard.

[51] We need a more detailed account of social standards. I do not commit to one here, but they might be modelled on existing accounts of social norms. In the spirit of Bicchieri (2017), we could think of a 'beauty standard' pertaining to height as follows: there is a rule against being 'too tall', and sufficiently many people in a community prefer to conform with it (prefer not to be 'too tall'), conditional upon their expectation that sufficiently many other people in the community will conform with it (that is, the belief that there are sufficiently many people who are not in fact 'too tall' by this measure) and believe they ought to conform with it (that there are sufficiently many people who believe members of the community ought not to be 'too tall'). The 'sufficiently many' clause that attaches to the 'empirical' expectations here may not be a majoritarian one. It is a well-known fact about many 'beauty standards' that most people violate them.

[52] This is roughly McDonald's thought too: both 'agential' and 'non-agential' shaming can serve to 'warn the audience about the target' and 'reinforce social meanings' (2021: 151-53).

Shaming can perform functions relating to social norms and standards together. The shaming of a person for being disabled might remind us of ableist standards – but they might also remind us of ableist norms governing interactions between disabled and non-disabled people. Likewise, shaming that sanctions violations of those norms can also remind us of ableist standards.[53]

5. The Shaming Model: First Pass

We return now to elaborating an account of stigma in terms of shaming. Of course, we can have shaming without stigmatization.[54] This can happen if the social group in which such shaming

[53] So, we should not think of McDonald's (2021) distinction between 'agential' and 'non-agential' shaming as involving mutually exclusive categories. There may, however, be some temptation to say that all shaming is really about standards. This stems for the thought that communicating that someone has violated a norm is not yet to shame them. Blaming also does this. So, we need to appeal to the idea that shaming expresses a negative evaluation not merely of the act performed by the target, but of the target *herself* to the effect that it would be appropriate for her to feel that (as we put it in an earlier discussion) her whole being is lessened or diminished. We might want to say that when we appeal to such 'ought-to-bes' we are dealing with standards rather than norms. (McDonald comes close to making the claim about 'ought-to-bes' – but appeals to other resources to draw the distinction between shaming and blaming (ibid: 152-53).) So even when shaming is occasioned by norm violations, we would say that it counts *as shaming* in virtue of drawing attention to standard violations. Thus, the somewhat mysterious distinction between evaluating the act of a person and evaluating the person herself gets unpacked in terms of the distinction between evaluating relative to a norm and evaluating relative to a standard. This solution is unsatisfactory. Some 'ought-to-bes', such as the expectation to be a virtuous person, concern matters that we are appropriately held responsible for, and so relate to norms rather than standards (given the conceptual connections that exist here). Notice, Goffman's 'stereotypes' (1963) involve judgements about how members of certain kinds ought to be, but concern both chosen and unchosen features of persons.

[54] Braithwaite (1989) draws this distinction in the context of shaming penalties in the law.

occurs does not have the properties of a social group (or set of social groups) that a person can be stigmatized relative to. And it can happen if such shaming is too infrequent to constitute much of a pattern. Stigma is a certain pattern of shaming A in G.[55]

Let us develop our explanation of how the Shaming Model accounts for the 'normative' pressure that stigma may exert in the stigmatized person's community. In my view, this 'normative' force that stigma possesses is accounted for by the way in which the pattern of shaming A in G is explained by a particular connection to social norms. We still need to unpack this connection. But we can already see how the explanation gets going. One of the characteristic functions of shaming is to shore up social norms. So, shaming itself, when it is tethered to social norms in a community, receives a kind of 'authority' from the 'authority' of the social norms that it seeks to shore up. On my account, stigma is constitutively related to shaming, so can avail itself of the same resources.

According to one proposal, social norms are rules requiring certain behaviours and attitudes that sufficiently many people in a community[56] prefer to conform with conditional upon their belief, first, that sufficiently many other people in their community will conform with them too; and, second, their belief that sufficiently many other people in their community believe they ought to conform with them.[57] Imagine a community in which there is a social norm that people do not sell sex. In this community sufficiently many people prefer that they not sell sex, conditional

[55] I again need to appeal to some vague, but intuitive, notions to capture the sort of pattern that obtains in G – that 'enough' members of G shame A, or that members of G 'often' shame A.

[56] We cannot be more precise.

[57] See Bicchieri (2017) and van Wietmarschen (2021a). Bicchieri separates the expectations on which the preference to follow the rule is conditional into 'empirical' and 'normative' expectations (respectively in the statement of the view above).

upon their belief that sufficiently many other people in their community will also not sell sex, and their belief that sufficiently many other people in their community believe that members should not sell sex.

Given the normative expectations that people have, when a social norm is 'operative' as opposed to 'latent' in a social context[58], being taken to have violated the norm is predictably met with the expression of disapproval.[59] Because sufficiently many members of the community believe that members believe they ought to conform with the rule, there is already some incentive to engage in practices that shore it up, for example through expressions of disapproval that purport to demonstrate one's commitment to the rule. Often, these expressions of disapproval are shaming. Importantly, such expressions of disapproval may or may not be genuine. A social norm can be operative in a community, generating these incentives to shame, even when the relevant normative expectations are false – when, that is, contrary to our belief, sufficiently many people within the community do not believe that members of the community ought to conform with the rule.[60] The Shaming Model can thus explain, unlike the Bad View Model, how a person could be stigmatized within a community, even when people within that community do not hold any particularly negative attitudes towards her.

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[58] This is van Wietmarschen's (2022: 923) terminology – replacing Bicchieri's (2017) talk of 'followed' and merely 'existing' social norms – to mark the difference between cases where empirical and normative expectations are both satisfied (and social norms are 'operative') and cases in which this is not the case (and they are merely 'latent'). I will be referring entirely to operative social norms henceforth.

[59] There is no stigma if there is believed to be full conformity with the rule.

[60] See section 3 of this chapter for a relevant example. For relevant discussion, see also footnote 45 – and footnote 100 in Chapter Three of this thesis.

The shaming to which stigmatized people are subject accounts for the hierarchical nature of stigma. Shaming expresses that the shamed person has fallen foul of a social norm. This explanation of stigma's hierarchical nature deepens our understanding of the stigmatized person's vulnerability to shame – another place in which the Bad View Model was found wanting. A stigmatized person may internalize certain stigmatic attitudes, perhaps on account of their pervasiveness within the community. But such 'buy-in' to stigmatic attitudes is not necessary for stigma – and this is no less true of the stigmatized person herself. What might explain her continued vulnerability to shame, despite rejecting the stigmatic attitudes in question – and even the criteria on which they are based? Part of the story, on my view, appeals to the fact that the stigmatized person is, or at least is taken to be, in violation of a social norm. Such norms carry a kind of 'weight' that is independent of the agent's assessment of whether she has good reasons to conform with them. Thus, violation (and perhaps even merely being taken to have committed a violation) can induce the kind of shame occasioned by falling short of some norm – even if we reject the content of that very norm.[61]

Here is a first pass at a more formal account of stigma. 'S' designates a set of social norms.

Stigma

A is stigmatized in G if, and only if:

(1) Members of G believe that A has violated S;

(2) Members of G shame A;

(3) (2) is explained by (1).

[61] To anticipate, I think the same account works in the case of violations of social standards.

This account is flexible enough to cover cases in which shaming that is consequent upon being taken to have committed a norm violation either is or is not itself required by social norms. Consider a case in which A is a wheelchair user and S is a set of rules in G about how wheelchair users should conduct themselves in relation to non-wheelchair users (e.g., not demanding 'special treatment'). Suppose A is taken to have violated S by members of G. There may be another set of social norms, call it 'S". S' could require (at least some) members of G to shame A. Equally, such sanctioning may not itself be norm-required, but simply a predictable consequence of being taken to have failed to comply with S. Recall, sufficiently many members of G believe that members believe they ought to conform with the rule, and so there is already some incentive to engage in practices that shore it up. In either case, the relation to social norms captures the distinctive pressure that is brought to bear on members of the stigmatized person's community to respond to her in some way or another.

That the account allows for either possibility conforms with our intuitions about paradigmatic cases of stigma. The social norms of G may even be hostile to the shaming of A – it might be a violation of social norms to shame wheelchair users. But insofar as such shaming occurs, and it serves to shore up ableist norms, this does not disqualify the pattern as a case of stigma.

6. The Shaming Model: Amendment

What about stigmas where no norm violation is even thought to have taken place? Take 'period stigma'. On one interpretation of this phenomenon, nobody diverges from expectations laid down for them. People who have periods go to great lengths to conceal evidence of them.[62] Other members of the community (and perhaps also people who have periods) enact 'disgust

[62] See McDonald (2021: 144).

scripts' about the idea of menstrual bleeding – shaming people who have periods. The shaming is not meant to sanction those who have deviated from a rule. The shaming itself is simply more norm-required behaviour. The formulation *Stigma* cannot explain this.

This suggests that an amendment is needed to accommodate the wider class of cases in which A is not shamed by members of G for violating S, but rather where the expectation is that A will be shamed for being a certain kind of member of G and doing exactly what is expected of such members.[63] This may be the right characterization for many stigmatized occupations, subordinate caste identities, and so on.

To put the point another way, shaming shores up both social norms and standards. But so far, our account of *stigma* has only mentioned social norms. It thus does not yet have the resources to account for a kind of pressure that may be exerted by stigma which is 'evaluative' rather than 'normative' and which does not involve attributing responsibility to its targets (e.g., for having periods). 'E' designates a set of social standards in the formulation below.

*Stigma**

A is stigmatized in G if, and only if:

(1*) Members of G believe that A has violated S *and/or* believe that A has violated E;

(2) Members of G shame A;

[63] This highlights further resources for explaining the stigmatized person's vulnerability to shame: just as there can be norms that directly prescribe the shaming of certain individuals by others, so too there can be norms directly prescribing shame-faced behaviour, or even shame itself. Again, a certain 'force' possessed by these requirements can float free from the agent's assessment of whether a negative evaluation of herself is merited.

(3) (2) is explained by (1*).[64, 65]

The formulation *Stigma** explains the stigma in the example of the wheelchair user in the same way as *Stigma*. (2) is explained by (1*) when the shaming of A (the wheelchair user) by members of G is a predictable consequence of their belief that A has violated S (a norm requiring that they not demand 'special treatment' from non-wheelchair users). (2) is also explained by (1*) when such shaming is itself a norm-required response to such violations. Both explanations may hold in a given case – so the stigma may be overdetermined.

But unlike *Stigma*, the formulation *Stigma** can explain the example of period stigma on the suggested reading, where no norm violation is even thought to have taken place. One possibility here is that (2) is explained by (1*) in the following way. There are a set of social norms (again, call them 'S") that require (at least some) members of G to shame those who violate a social

[64] This account has the result that those who 'pass' as conforming to social norms and standards, though they in fact do not conform to them, are not stigmatized (though they may well be vulnerable to stigma and suffer harms on account of this). This is because it is a condition of being stigmatized within a community that members of the community believe that one has violated a social norm and/or standard (whether one has in fact violated them or not).

[65] The Shaming Model dispenses with the idea of a 'stereotype' from Goffman's (1963) account, focusing instead on social norms and standards. We might still wonder how stigma, on my view, is related to the ordinary notion of a stereotype (as opposed to Goffman's technical notion). There could be many complicated connections between stereotypes and social norms and/or standards in any given case. For example, some stereotypes attaching to a group may give rise to social norms that require its members to conform with them (the expectation that Blacks should be especially deferential to whites when occupying customer service roles may be a relevant example). In other cases, a group may be stereotyped *as liable to commit* social norm violations (the stereotype of Black women as aggressive may fall into this category). I do not have a general account of these interrelations.

standard against having periods (E). The pattern of shaming A in G is thus explained by the belief on the part of members of G that she has violated E (she is taken to have periods). Because they believe she has violated E, they also believe that that are required by social norms (S') to shame her (without thereby attributing responsibility to her for the violation).

Another possibility is this. Just as shaming can be a predictable consequence of being taken to have failed to comply with a social norm, without itself being norm-required, so too shaming can be a predictable consequence of being taken to have violated a social standard. So, suppose there are no social norms requiring (at least some) members of G to shame those who violate a social standard against having periods (E). Members of G might still shame someone (A) who they take to violate the standard. This would be a predictable consequence of such a belief, assuming that the operative standards within a community are underwritten by certain kinds of social expectation, which again accounts for the distinctive pressure that is brought to bear on members of the stigmatized person's community to respond to her in some way or another.[66] So (2) would still be explained by (1*), and the case would still count as stigma on my view – which is, intuitively, the correct result.

Again, this explanation of (2) by (1*) may coexist with the previous one, so that the stigma is overdetermined. And further overdetermination may occur when an individual is stigmatized simultaneously on account of being taken to violate social norms *and* standards, which may well be connected to each other.

[66] But notice, because we are dealing with standards here, when we believe that members of the community believe that members ought to conform with the standard, this is not to suggest that they hold people responsible for failing to conform with it.

7. Conclusion

This view of stigma is complex. But that is as we should expect. A mere distribution of negative beliefs about a person is not necessary for stigma and cannot account for the 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure that stigma exerts. We must appeal instead to social structures. These, like much of fabric of our social worlds, are complicated indeed.

8. Endnote to Chapter One: Stigmatizing Acts

According to the view defended in this chapter, a person is stigmatized when they are the target of a certain pattern of shaming acts which is explained by a particular relation to social structures within the stigmatized person's community. I have said nothing so far about the nature of individual stigmatizing acts.[67] The task of explaining the nature of such acts differs from the task of explaining the nature of *shaming* acts. After all, not all shaming acts are stigmatizing ones.[68]

In seeking to give an account of stigmatizing acts we could say, very simply, that stigmatizing acts are distinguished from shaming acts in general by the fact that shaming acts which are also stigmatizing contribute to a pattern of shaming that is constitutive of someone having the social standing of a stigmatized person. I think this is probably a necessary condition for a shaming act to also count as a stigmatizing one. But I am not quite sure that it is sufficient. It might also be

[67] We might also *say* that a person 'is stigmatized' when referring specifically to the fact that they are the target of individual stigmatizing acts. But, again, the task of explaining this phenomenon has not been my focus here – throughout, I have taken 'is stigmatized' to refer to a kind of inferior social standing possessed by a person, which is not reducible to being the target of any particular social act considered on its own.

[68] For a distinction of roughly this kind, see Braithwaite (1989), Nussbaum (2004, ch.4), and Thomason (2018, ch.5).

necessary, to put it very roughly, that the shaming acts in question are *severe* enough. So, on this view we can contribute to a pattern of shaming that is constitutive of someone having the social standing of a stigmatized person, by *mildly* shaming them, without counting as *stigmatizing* them in virtue of performing that specific act.[69]

I will not attempt to fully specify the necessary and sufficient conditions for a shaming act to also count as a stigmatizing one – but the preceding sets out the general shape that I think the account should take. We first specify what stigma is, understood as a kind of inferior social standing possessed by a person, and then we explain what stigmatizing acts are (largely) in terms of their contribution to the possession of that standing.

It might be asked whether this gets things the wrong way round. Perhaps we should have started with a free-standing account of stigmatizing acts, and then explained the social standing of being stigmatized (largely) in terms of being the target of such acts.

There is an everyday way of talking that encourages the view that hierarchical social acts are basic units in our interpersonal lives. We routinely use expressions such as 'I was *put down* by her' or 'She really *bigged me up*' – and we seem to know what this means in a way which is not hostage to an understanding of what it is to occupy a certain kind of position within a social structure. If

[69] One virtue of this account is that it makes room conceptually both for the claim that it is seriously morally wrong to perform stigmatizing acts and for the claim that lots of acts which are only moderately problematic on their own can contribute to the seriously harmful consequence of someone having the social standing of a stigmatized person. For related discussion, see McTernan (2018) on 'microaggressions'. I have relegated this point to a footnote since I want to stick to the methodological principle that claims about the normative status of shaming, stigma, stigmatizing acts, and so on, do not constrain an account of their nature.

there are acts of this general kind, then this offers some indirect support for the alternative strategy.

Certainly, such expressions seem to point to a kind of social *magnitude*.[70] But whatever exactly this involves, I think we do well to distinguish between such magnitudes and the idea of *hierarchy proper*, which we mean to invoke when we label an act 'stigmatic'. I think it makes sense to say that I can be 'put down' by you in an off-chance intellectual discussion between us, without this implying that I now have an inferior social standing to you. I am not convinced that the linguistic data lends any support to the view that acts which we perform to manipulate (or reinforce) one another's social standings are in some sense more fundamental than (or at least not derived from) an account of the social standings which they manipulate (or reinforce).

Aside from this general point, some philosophers gesture at an account of stigmatizing acts which does not, on the face of it, seem to depend on a prior specification of what it is to have the social standing of a stigmatized person. For example, Thomason says: 'Stigmatizing is similar to shaming, but is primarily designed to call attention to a trait or misdeed that then subsequently marks that person as a member of some (usually marginalized) group' (2018: 182).

On this account, the idea of a *group* is key to distinguishing stigmatizing acts from shaming acts in general.[71] Certainly, the idea of a group does seem important in distinguishing the case of an

[70] See O'Brien (2020; 2022).

[71] Of course, if 'group' here is simply shorthand for the idea of a *stigmatized* group, then Thomason's account of stigmatizing acts does depend on a prior specification of what it is to have to social standing of a stigmatized person (as a member of a stigmatized group). To test the merits of the general approach scrutinized in this endnote, I assume that this is not what Thomason has in mind.

ordinary norm-violator, who we often shame but perhaps do not commit stigmatizing acts against (think of a someone who skips the grocery line queue), from the case of a stigmatized *criminal*, whose legal norm-violations mark her as belonging to a group to which certain salient stereotypes attach. We are not inclined to think of some violations as placing a person within a social group (in any robust sense) – and perhaps it is an inclination to do so which separates shaming acts which are stigmatizing from those which are simply shaming.

An initial problem with Thomason's view is that she seems narrowly concerned with acts that have a dynamic relation to people's social standing: they involve the '*manipulation* of someone's social status (2018: 183, my emphasis)' by placing them within (or perhaps 'outing' them as belonging) to a salient social group. Some instances of stigmatizing acts certainly do this.[72] But in other cases a stigmatizing act simply reinforces the community's awareness of one's putative belonging to a social group, where one is already widely taken to belong to that group. This omission, however, seems to be a quirk of Thomason's view rather than something central to the attempt to understand the nature stigmatizing acts in a way which is not derivative from an account of what it is to have the social standing of a stigmatized person.

A bigger problem is that it is simply not a requirement on stigmatizing acts that they place us within a group. People are, of course, often stigmatized *as* a disabled person, or *as* transgender,

[72] See Garfinkel (1956). Such acts contribute to someone possessing the social standing of a stigmatized person in a way that goes beyond counting themselves as shaming acts that form part of the pattern that is constitutive of one's possessing that standing. By drawing attention to, and perhaps also bringing about, some putative norm or standard violation on the part of the target, they make the target vulnerable to shaming by others. Such acts thus have some role in explaining the pattern of shaming as a whole. Both kinds of contribution explain why acts of this kind count as stigmatizing according to the rough account sketched earlier in this endnote.

or *as* Asian, and so on. This is no accident since, as I mentioned in the main body of this chapter, such group-based identities often have a degree of salience across many contexts. But this is not to deny the claim that I can sometimes simply, in all my idiosyncrasy, be stigmatized as a rogue individual in my community. The appeal to the idea of a group fails to distinguish between shaming acts in general and those which are stigmatizing. Absent some more promising alternative, we should agree that this distinction must be drawn by appealing to a prior account of what it is to possess the social standing of a stigmatized person.

Chapter Two: On Shaming

1. Introduction

In English we have both the word 'shame' that refers to an emotional state and the word 'shaming' that refers to a kind of social act. It seems that the phenomena to which these words refer are related in some way – though exactly how they are related is less clear.

For one thing, the word 'shaming' has by now developed an extremely broad range of application. At least in the culture with which I am familiar, it can be used felicitously to describe just about any public act of criticism. This seems to pull in the direction of positing only a very weak connection between shame and shaming.

Of course, we should not be too interested in drawing distinctions in the use of words – but rather in making sense of the social phenomena to which such words might be referring. Thus, there is certainly a philosophical temptation to ask why a particular act of public criticism counts as shaming and not merely as public criticism. This seems to pull in the opposite direction – a close conceptual connection between shaming and shame is needed in order to draw such distinctions.

In the previous chapter, I presented an account of shaming that appealed to the characteristic functions of such acts: they 'shore up' social norms and standards. We might wonder: where is the *shame* in this account of shaming? This question also bears crucially on the relation between stigma and the inducement of shame in stigmatized agents. This is because, according to the Shaming Model, we need an account of shaming in order to elucidate the concept of stigma.

As I suggested in the previous chapter, shaming acts are related to shame in the following way: the shamer communicates that it would be apt for the target to feel shame. This allows us to distinguish shaming from many other acts of public criticism. In this respect, my account concedes some ground to the view that there must be some kind of conceptual connection between shame and shaming.

In this chapter, however, I will argue against there being another (perhaps even closer) connection between shame and shaming. In my view, shaming acts need not involve an intention on the part of the shamer to induce shame in the target. To the extent that this move expands the range of acts that count as shaming acts, my conception of shaming shares in some of the broadness of the popular usage of 'shaming'.

The plan is as follows. In the next section, I will make this case by drawing a distinction between two kinds of shaming: *directed* shaming and *performative* shaming. You are trying to shame someone in the directed sense when you attempt to bring about shame in them – and you successfully shame them if you do in fact make them feel ashamed. Performative shaming on the other hand does not depend fundamentally upon an intention to bring about shame in the person(s) towards whom the act is directed. Such social acts should rather be explained largely by reference to their characteristic social functions – namely, shoring up social norms and standards. Social acts can perform such functions independently of whether they bring about shame in their target. This helps clarify the relationship between stigma and shaming on my account. Shaming emerges as a heterogenous phenomenon. Only some kinds of shaming – namely performative shaming – are constitutively related to stigma.

In section 3 I address another issue raised by my characterization of acts of (performative) shaming as having the characteristic functions of shoring up social norms and standards: what about acts of shaming that seek to undermine, change, or create social norms and standards? I explain how my account can make room for such acts. In the final section, I discuss the case for using alternative terminologies to carve out the various kinds of social act discussed here.

Before beginning, it is worth making a brief methodological remark. There is a body of social scientific research which shows that our emotional vocabulary and scripts for emotional enactment are culturally variable.[73] This might seem to narrow the interest of my project here insofar as it begins from parochial understandings of our emotional life. To some extent, I am willing to embrace the charge of parochialism, whatever limitations that brings with it. At the same time, I would note that some of the functions of shaming that I appeal to are quite general, e.g., shoring up social norms and social standards. It would not surprise me if we found mechanisms for carrying out these functions across many cultural boundaries. If we are worried about parochialism, this might expand the interest of the project somewhat.

2. Two Kinds of Shaming

Consider these examples:

Immoral friend: You are having a private conversation with a friend. She reveals to you the details of her immoral plan to scam a co-worker. You remonstrate with your friend. You tell her that you think less of her for forming this plan; you invoke how her parents would view the plan; you compare the plan to those of disreputable people; you appeal to ideals that you believe your friend endorses. Your friend is unmoved.

[73] See for example Briggs (1970), Lutz (1988) and Wikan (1990). See Flanagan (2021) for a normative application of these findings. I am also informed by Jonas Held that there is no simple translation of 'shaming' into German.

Malcolm X: Malcolm X is appearing on a panel at an American university.[74] A panel member is criticising Malcolm in front of the live audience for his claim that America is racist. He uses phrases such as 'divisive demagogue' and 'reverse racist'. Malcolm is unmoved – as the panel member knew he would be.

In both cases, an agent engages in an act of shaming. In both cases, the act fails to produce shame in its target. But in one case this fact renders it a failed shaming – in the other it does not.

Consider *Immoral friend.* Let us stipulate that it is an essential part of your intention to make your friend feel shame. You want her to stop her plan in its tracks and you believe that if you can get her to feel shame about it then she will not see it through. Your friend does not feel shame and so your aim is frustrated. In virtue of this, we can say that your shaming of your friend did not succeed.

Compare *Malcom X.* The panel member knew that he would not get Malcom to feel shame: Malcolm does not respect the panel member, nor the values of the oppressor that he appeals to in his attack. The panel member challenges Malcolm anyway. Is he trying to bring about shame in Malcom – albeit knowing he will fail? Maybe. If he were, then that kind of shaming would be frustrated in just the way it is in *Immoral friend.* But the crucial point is this: there is another sense in which the panel member is trying to shame Malcom that does not depend on any such intention of his to make Malcolm feel shame. And whether that social act succeeds does not depend on Malcolm having such feelings – indeed, from the perspective of such a social act, it might actually help if he can be portrayed as shameless.

How might we characterize the function of such an act? The following story would provide an intelligible account of why the panel member does what he does knowing full well that he will

[74] The example is adapted from an encounter described in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*: '… he was trying to *eat me up!*' (2001 [1965]: 391-92, emphasis original).

not get Malcolm to feel shame. True, Malcom will not be knocked off the course of advocating for Black Americans. But there are a lot of people who might be receptive to Malcolm's message that can yet be dissuaded. So maybe the panel member is not really concerned about Malcolm's response to his challenge. He is more interested in how the audience will understand it. (The act can be, I would like to say, wholly *performative* – in the sense of being unconcerned with its uptake by the person(s) to whom it is nominally *directed*.) Perhaps he hopes they take away something like the following message: 'You want to join with Malcolm? Fine. But then we, the American establishment, will scorn you – just like we are doing to Malcolm'.[75]

The upshot of this initial discussion is that we must reject a naïve attempt to explain shaming the social act in terms of shame the emotional state. That view says: acts of shaming are just those acts which try to bring about shame in their target; they succeed when the target actually feels shame as a result.[76] This would parallel our treatment of behaviour that attempts to bring about

[75] The panel member could also just be pandering to the audience – if we assume they are in some way positively disposed towards the manner in which he is challenging Malcolm.

[76] This point is echoed by Thomason's (2018) distinction between 'invitations to shame' and 'shaming'. The former is an intentional act which tries to bring about shame in the target (ibid: 179). The latter 'holds up flaws and misdeeds for public view… [and] does not always aim at inspiring the same self-awareness that invitations to shame do (ibid: 180-81).' This approximates the distinction that I draw between directed and performative shaming. Jacquet (2016: 13) and McDonald (2021: 135) also reject the naïve account of shaming – as do Billingham and Parr (2020: 999) in their discussion of 'public shaming'. Similarly, in the literature on shaming penalties in the law, the naïve account is rejected by Garvey (1998: 750) and Massaro (1997: 672). The naïve account is, however, not wholly without adherents. O'Brien may be committed to it when she says that shaming acts 'have as their function making their targets feel socially diminished' (2022: 256), given that she also endorses a 'social diminution' model of shame (2020). Another defender of the naïve view appears to be Nussbaum when she says that humiliation, which she takes to be closely related to shaming, 'does not always lead to actual shame, but that is its intent' (2004: 203-204). I do not myself offer a full account of

anger (deliberate angering) for example. But whilst this is an adequate account of some shaming acts (and, I will argue, of one dimension of others) it cannot be a full account of shaming. That is because we want to say that some shaming acts, like the one in *Malcolm X*, can succeed without bringing about shame in their target. We cannot insulate ourselves from all successful shaming acts simply by being immune to shame.

We are now in a position to draw the fundamental distinction in shaming acts. First, we have *directed* shaming (as in *Immoral friend*). You are trying to shame someone in this sense when you attempt to bring about shame in them – and you successfully shame them if you do in fact make them feel ashamed.

Performative shaming on the other hand does not depend fundamentally upon an intention to bring about shame in the target. Such social acts should rather be explained largely by reference to their characteristic social functions. In the previous chapter I developed the view that these functions consist in the shoring up of social norms and standards. I will not add to that discussion here. The important point for our purposes now is that the example of *Malcolm X* shows that such functions can (at least in principle) be successfully enacted by shaming acts, independently of whether those shaming acts bring about shame in the target. And even when such acts do not bring about shame in the target, they may be perfectly successful *as shaming acts*. Performative shaming and directed shaming are thus conceptually distinct activities.

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humiliation or distinguish it from shaming (or indeed from shame). Margalit (1998) offers a highly worked out account of humiliation – though he builds much more normative content into the idea of humiliation than I think should be included in an account of either shaming or humiliation (tying it conceptually for example, to notions of respect). The boundaries between shaming and humiliation are bound to be fuzzy, and I think Nussbaum might ultimately be right that the difference between the two boils down to whether a shaming is 'severe enough' to also count as humiliation (2004: 203).

There are a number of important points to make in filling out the distinction we have just drawn. First, we should concede that directed shaming and performative shaming do have something in common. In the previous chapter I suggested that shaming involves, as McDonald puts it, 'the communication of a negative evaluation of a person' (2021: 139).[77] When we shame someone we express, at least, that we disapprove of some feature of theirs or something they have done.[78] These remarks hold true for both directed and performative shaming.

We should also recall at this point that I can, of course, communicate a negative evaluation of my friend's immoral plan without shaming her. I could just tell her that I think the plan is wrong – and that may not be a shaming act. We can put the point this way: I may have only communicated that it would be appropriate for my friend to feel guilty about her plan. But in order to shame her, I need to communicate that *shame* would be apt for her.[79] These remarks

[77] Notice that an upshot of the communicative aspect of shaming acts is that a neurosurgeon who manipulates your brain chemicals to make you feel shame does not thereby shame you.

[78] It is not a requirement of shaming, however, that the negative evaluations expressed are actually or sincerely held by the shamer.

[79] I want to remain neutral where possible about the correct model for thinking about shame the emotional state. I only note here that there would be a tempting symmetry between the view that in shaming one presents the target as shameful by expressing certain negative evaluations of her, and the view that shame itself incorporates certain negative evaluations. A view of shame that has this feature may claim that one experiences shame only if one forms a certain negative evaluation of oneself (see footnote 34 in Chapter One of this thesis for references). Or such a view might deny that shame involves negative self-evaluations but claim that shame instead involves the perception of being negatively evaluated by others (see Calhoun (2004) and O'Brien (2020)). It is less clear to me what the connection would be between expressing certain negative evaluations of a person and presenting her as shameful if shame does not essentially incorporate evaluations (see Velleman (2001)).

also hold true for both directed and performative shaming. For this reason, shaming of all kinds bears some conceptual connection to shame – and we can use these resources to distinguish between shaming and neighbouring forms of criticism. As in the previous chapter of this thesis, I will continue to talk about shaming as 'expressing negative evaluations of persons' – but the reader should take this as referring to the more specific form of evaluation outlined here.

What else distinguishes shaming acts from other acts that communicate negative evaluations of people? The answer depends on the kind of shaming that we are dealing with. Fixing our attention on directed shaming for the moment, we should notice that these acts involve an intention to make the target feel shame. We can of course accidentally make someone feel shame too – and there are practically no limits to what might bring about such feelings in people. But that is not directed shaming.[80] So that might be another reason why expressing a negative evaluation of my friend's immoral plan may not count as shaming: I may not intend to make her feel shame.

Of course, the fact that I do not intend to make the target feel shame does not mean that I cannot be engaged in any kind of shaming. I may still be engaged in a performative shaming. It is a notable fact about such acts of shaming, I would suggest, that whilst they depend for their success on the enactment of certain characteristic functions, they do not necessarily involve an intention on the part of the shamer that the shaming enact these functions.[81] Of course, in *Malcolm X* we can entertain the idea that the panel member has something like the intention of dissuading other Americans from joining with Malcolm's cause. But the intuition that the example involves shaming does not really depend on that. We could just as easily imagine that

[80] Thomason (2018: 179) notices this distinction.

[81] Thomason seems to agree that there are aspects of some shaming that can be unintentional (2018: 182-84).

the panel member does not care at all about whether his act succeeds in driving other Americans away from the movement that Malcolm represents. He might only care about doing what his university sponsors expect of him. For all that, we may still want to say that he shames Malcom.[82]

Thus, an act of performative shaming is constituted (in part) by the fact that it has the characteristic function of shoring up social norms and/or standards – and it succeeds by virtue of serving this function. How, in this context, should we understand the idea that an act possesses a certain function independently of whether the actor intends it to have that function? A plausible suggestion is that an act can be said to possess this function when it constitutes a kind of act whose performance *generally* or *usually* or *on the whole* shores up social norms and/or standards. Though we are good at making these judgements in practice, providing a deeper explanation of them is more elusive. I do not attempt one here.

A further distinguishing feature of performative shaming follows from the claim about its characteristic social functions. Whilst all shaming involves the communication of a negative evaluation of a person, when we performatively shame a person there is an even more specific content to the negative evaluations that we express about her – she is cast as having fallen foul of some social (as opposed to personal) norm and/or standard. This is because, as I argued in the previous chapter, such acts of shaming serve their function (at least in part) by

[82] There is an analogy of sorts to be made here with the act of speaking. There are certain things we can do which will count as speaking whatever our intentions are: we just need to produce the right kinds of noise in the right contexts. Similarly with performative shaming, the communication of a negative evaluation of a person that possesses certain characteristic functions will count as shaming whatever I thought I was doing and whatever my reasons for doing this were.

communicating such evaluations to the target and/or others. This distinguishes acts of performative shaming not only from many other acts that communicate negative evaluations of people, but also from (some) acts of directed shaming – occasions for shame are often idiosyncratic, so I can seek to induce shame in you via evaluations that are highly bespoke (i.e., not tethered to some wider social norm and/or standard).

Another key point to make in developing this account of shaming as a heterogenous phenomenon is that one and the same social act is often both a directed shaming and a performative shaming. Indeed, it can be the case that directed shaming is an essential route by which an act serves the characteristic functions of performative shaming. For example, one way in which we can shore up a social norm is by making salient the costs of deviating from it. And one way of doing this is to offer up a 'cowerer' – some putative norm-violator who we have successfully shamed (in the directed sense).[83]

Finally, we must emphasize, as a consequence of our discussion, that 'shaming' is quite a *thick* description of a social act.[84, 85] To describe an act in this way is already to indicate that it has certain rich meanings within our interpersonal lives. There are of course many thinner

[83] Inducing 'cowering' may in any case serve the aim of enforcing social norms by causing the cowed person herself to shrink and flee the public space in shame. And insofar as this is an aim of the shamer's, the characteristic functions of performative shaming are ones she consciously intends to carry out.

[84] It is by no means the thickest possible description of a social act, though. Consider, for example, *roasting* – which seems to be a kind of shaming that bears the right sort of connection to humour. See Anderson (2020) on the ethics of roasting.

[85] This paragraph is heavily indebted to O'Brien (2022: 261-63). Here, I simply map the same Rylean-terminology (also discussed in Sibley (1971)) onto the act-descriptor 'shaming' that O'Brien uses to elucidate the category 'sneer'. 'Thick' has a slightly different sense here than earlier parts of the thesis, e.g., footnote 5.

descriptions that we could use to pick out the same acts that constitute something as a shaming – perhaps we might focus on certain bodily motions and the production of certain noises (e.g., rolling of eyes, snorting). But though these acts thinly described are what constitute an act of shaming on a particular occasion, none of them are essential to its constitution *as a shaming*. Different bodily motions and noises produced may do just as well (e.g., spitting, tutting). So too, the same bodily motions and noises produced need not always constitute an act as a shaming – in a different context, they may be part of a game we are playing where the bodily motions and noises in question are assigned a non-shaming function (e.g., to indicate that one has completed a task within the game). Shaming is, in this sense, *polymorphous*. We should also note that 'shaming' refers to *multiple activities*. That is simply the key point we must take from this section: 'shaming' may pick out either a performative shaming and/or a directed shaming and these activities are not equivalent to each other.

Let me close this section by setting out, without further comment, some slightly more formal definitions of directed and performative shaming.

Directed Shaming

A shames B in the directed sense if, and only if:

(1) A communicates a negative evaluation of B;

(2) A intends that B experiences shame *in the right way* as a result of this communicative act.[86]

[86] I have included 'in the right way' here to rule out so-called 'deviant causal chains'. In order for an act of directed shaming to succeed the shamed person must actually experience shame which is caused (and intended to be caused) in the right way by the shamer's communicative act. I will not elaborate further on how we should understand the idea of 'in the right way' here. Cf. Davidson (2001) on how belief and desire must cause a bodily movement 'in the right way' for it to count as an action.

Performative Shaming

A shames B in the performative sense if, and only if:

(1) A communicates a negative evaluation of B involving the idea that B has violated some social norm and/or standard;

(2) This communicative act possesses the characteristic function of shoring up social norms and/or standards.

3. Disruptive Shaming

The characteristic functions of performative shaming, I have claimed, are the *shoring up* of social norms and social standards. But it might be asked whether shaming of a 'performative' kind is ever deployed in the service of undermining, changing, or creating social norms and standards.[87]

I do not think my account rules this out (though I will not venture a full account of how such a mechanism might succeed). A useful route to seeing this is by comparing Williams' discussion of *proleptic blame* (1995). On Williams' account of having a reason, a person has a reason if and only if the consideration is appropriately related to some element that is already in her 'subjective motivational set'. This includes her desires, commitments, preferences, and so on. She can also be said to have a reason if the consideration is appropriately related to some element which

[87] There is no problem on my view in allowing that *directed* shaming can be enlisted for this purpose. Purposefully eliciting shame about our current norms and standards, perhaps because we can show them to be in tension with some other ideals which we hold dear, does indeed seem a possible way to induce changes in norms and standards (see Jacquet (2016), Lebron (2013), Manion (2002: 83), and O'Hear (1997: 79)). This is no doubt a difficult strategy insofar as it depends upon getting people with high social status, who have a large role in shaping these norms and standards, to feel shame.

could be acquired by a process of rational deliberation (where this is given a broadly 'Humean' interpretation) from her existing subjective motivational set. This picture raises the question of whether some of our blaming practices are unintelligible. Suppose we blame a person for acting cruelly towards animals. It is a live possibility, given Williams' account of having a reason, that this person in fact has no reason to refrain from cruelty towards animals. This will be the case if there is no element in her subjective motivational set, or one she could acquire by a process of rational deliberation from her existing set, that would motivate her to refrain from such behaviour. In this case, blame seems out of place.

Williams, however, rejects this conclusion. This is because, he claims, blaming someone, even if she in fact has no reason to refrain from the act you are blaming her for, can end up *giving her a reason* to refrain from the act. This can happen if we assume that the agent cares about our opinion of her. Since she does not want to be the object of our blame, she can come to acquire a motivation (and hence a reason) to refrain from the acts that we blame her for.

My suggestion is that a kind of 'performative' shaming could have a similarly proleptic structure. In such acts, people simply begin acting in ways that would be licensed *if there were* alternative social norms and/or standards. For example, in a radical act of defiance, the 'cowerer' who is offered up in a performative shaming may refuse to cower. In effect, this person holds up some personal norm – that people ought not to be cowed in such situations – as a candidate for a new social norm. This may also be understood as an attempt to *shame her shamers*. If there is the right kind of uptake – if the attitudes of the audience shift to produce the candidate social norm – then the act will succeed.[88] It is a kind of 'performative' shaming in the sense that there *are now* social norms in place to be shored up by acts of that kind. On the other hand, if no such uptake

[88] See Bicchieri (2017, ch.5) on the role of 'trendsetters' in social norm change.

occurs, then this will simply have been a failed shaming. A possibility that lies in between is that the shaming succeeds in garnering enough uptake in an audience that it produces a sub-group with its own distinctive social norms and/or standards, but without disrupting the social norms and standards in the wider community.[89] My view can allow for all these possibilities without substantive revision.

4. Differing Terminologies

Throughout the literature, we find different terminologies for discussing the phenomena before us. For example, some writers refer to certain acts that fall under my heading of 'directed shaming' as merely 'invitations to shame', preferring to reserve the term 'shaming' for acts that have a certain kind of public function. On my view, an act that counts as a directed shaming need not have a public function unless it is also a performative shaming (and so also possesses the characteristic function of shoring up social norms and/or standards). A shaming can just be about getting you to feel shame and no more. I think that my terminology better tracks ordinary usage. But insofar as these differences in terminology are a stipulative matter, as I largely take them to be, they should not distract us here.

Do these differing terminologies ever reflect substantive disagreement over the phenomena in question? A recent argument from McDonald (2021) may seem to suggest so. McDonald wants to make space for what she calls 'private shaming', where only the shamer and the target are present to the act, despite the fact that shaming necessarily, on her view, possesses public

[89] See Brennan and Pettit (2004: 225-6) on the mechanisms of 'countercultural' group formation. See also Massaro (1991: 1919) for concerns that shaming penalties that seek to enforce legal norms may push offenders into 'subcultures' that do not accept those norms.

functions.[90] The fix, McDonald suggests, is that a genuine shaming can be private (in the above sense), but it 'must *invoke* the judgement of an audience real or imagined (ibid: 142, emphasis original)'.[91] On the resulting view, *Immoral friend* may only count as an attempted shaming because I invoke, for example, how your parents would view the act. On my account, that is inessential.

[90] 'Private shaming' may already seem to be a misnomer. Insofar as 'private' is supposed to indicate the absence of an audience, we should remind ourselves that in the cases McDonald mentions there are least *two people* present – the shamer and her target. Thanks to Lucy O'Brien for this point. Relatedly, McDonald is skeptical about the possibility of what she calls 'secret shaming', where the would-be target is unaware of the would-be shaming: '… it is less clear that I could secretly shame you (2021: 139)'. I think this is a mistake. I might announce to friends that I am ignoring you for some alleged transgression of a social norm and/or standard – thereby communicating a negative evaluation of you – and this might possess the characteristic function of shoring up norms and/or standards (e.g., because such acts make salient the costs of deviating from some norm) even though you are completely oblivious to this (because, for example, I do not speak to you much anyway). Kahan and Posner (1999: 369) also make this mistake.

[91] McDonald (2021) also appeals to the essentially public character of shaming to distinguish forms of shaming that sanction norm violations, and thus impute responsibility to their targets, from *blaming*. Whilst the former is a species of blaming, blaming in general is not necessarily audience-involving. I am not sure about this way of carving out a distinction between blaming and shaming of this kind. It is not clear to me that shaming, even of the kind that sanctions norm violations, needs to involve an audience. Why think that when I sanction you for a norm violation in private (and without invoking an imagined audience) that this is necessarily blaming and not shaming? Perhaps a better strategy, mentioned already, is to hold that the evaluations involved in shaming take the whole person as their primary object, whilst the evaluations involved in blame focus on particular acts. I do not here offer a full account of blame or blaming or (relatedly) guilt. For recent accounts of blame, see Fricker (2016) and Shoemaker and Vargas (2021).

Against the view that we could simply bracket off all cases of 'private shaming' as some other kind of act, perhaps as 'invitations to shame', McDonald writes:

> 'Even if one accepts that not all actions involving shame are shaming acts, one may nonetheless maintain that a mother can privately period-shame her daughter, *in addition to* inviting her to feel shame. Moreover, to deny that shaming can occur in private would be to dismiss people's actual usage and understanding of the concept of shaming.' (ibid: 142, emphasis original)

This suggests that McDonald's underlying concern, in dividing up the conceptual landscape as she does, is simply to accommodate some linguistic data: we are happy to *say* that the mother shames her daughter. But if this is all that is ultimately motivating the move, then my terminology performs equally well. The mother shames her daughter (in the directed sense) just because she tries to make her feel shame – whether she invokes an imagined audience or not. It is then a further question whether the act also serves the public function of shoring up social norms and/or standards – and so also counts as a performative shaming.[92] Insofar as McDonald's use of 'invitations to shame' and 'shaming' is simply meant to mark this same distinction, there is only a verbal disagreement between us.

The only other rationale I can think of for preferring McDonald's usage is the philosophical desire for a unified account of shaming, where shaming refers to just one kind of thing with a single unifying function.[93] This desire seems to me misplaced and is in my view (*pace* McDonald) actually more likely to distort our ordinary usage of 'shaming'.

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[92] It is not clear to me what the idea of an 'imagined audience' contributes to the possession of such functions. Perhaps the idea is simply, as I have suggested, that the target is presented as having fallen short of a *social* norm and/or standard as opposed to a *personal* one – but my instinct, which I have followed in the main text, is that McDonald intends something more than this.

[93] If this were part of McDonald's motivations, which I do not think it is, her account does not make good on it, since she goes on to distinguish between 'agential' shaming, that has the function of enforcing social norms,

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have clarified a number of issues surrounding the conception of shaming that I appeal to in my account of stigma. I have drawn a distinction between *directed* and *performative* shaming. You are trying to shame someone in the directed sense when you attempt to bring about shame in them – and you successfully shame them if you do in fact make them feel ashamed. By contrast, performative shaming is distinguished by its characteristic function of shoring up social norms and standards. Only the latter kind of shaming is constitutively linked to stigma. I have also shown that this account of performative shaming is not in tension with the view that some related kinds of shaming serve to undermine, change, or create social norms and standards. Finally, I have argued that some apparently substantive disputes with other authors arising from my conception of shaming are in fact merely verbal in nature.

and 'non-agential' shaming, that has the function of enforcing social standards – though she does claims that both reinforce 'social meanings' (2021: 152-54).

Chapter Three: Existing Accounts of Social Hierarchy Compared

1. Introduction

Stigma is a paradigmatic case of social hierarchy. The stigmatized person relates to some others as their social inferior. This should be explained by the essential features of the phenomenon. The Shaming Model articulates just such essential features. According to the Shaming Model, an individual is stigmatized in a community if she is shamed by members of that community, and this is explained by their belief that she has deviated from some social norm and/or standard. It is the shaming to which stigmatized people are subject which accounts for the valences of the social hierarchies that stigma instantiates. Shaming expresses the idea that the shamed person has fallen foul of a social norm and/or standard.

There have been a number of recent attempts to characterize the nature of hierarchical or unequal social relations generally. Some of these attempts have come from so-called 'relational' or 'social' egalitarians, who hold that (at least some) such relations are intrinsically objectionable.[94] In keeping with the strategy pursued so far, I set aside those normative concerns for now in order to focus on the purely descriptive task of giving an account of the relations in question.[95]

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[94] For more detailed discussion of these views, see Chapter Six of this thesis.

[95] Lippert-Rasmusseun (2018: 63-69) suggests that claims about people relating as equals must always be tethered to some dimension in which they relate as equals. So, we get the general schema: 'X and Y relate as equals in terms of Z'. *Social standing* and *moral standing* are possible dimensions that could fill-in for 'Z' – and as Lippert-Rasmussen notes, it is at least conceptually possible (and probably is the case in fact) that X and Y can

It should be noted at this point that not all philosophers of social hierarchy offer a fully unified account of the phenomenon, preferring instead a more piecemeal approach. Kolodny for example holds that:

> '… Loman's standing in a relation of inferiority to Hyman consists in one or several of the following… Hyman's enjoying an untempered "asymmetry of power over Loman"… an untempered "asymmetry of de facto authority" over Loman… an untempered "asymmetry of power in comparison with" Loman… an untempered "asymmetry of authority in comparison with" Loman… an untempered "umerited disparity of regard"…' (2023: 91-93).[96, 97]

relate unequally in terms of social standing but continue to relate as moral equals. (This point will be of some significance in Chapter Six of this thesis.) When I say that stigma is a paradigmatic case of social hierarchy, I take myself to be making a claim about how people relate in terms of social standing. So, this is the dimension that I will focus on throughout. This is tied to the methodological point in the main text: whilst we are also (in some sense) making a descriptive claim when we say that X and Y relate unequally in terms of moral standing, its normative consequences might be taken as definitional. For example, we might think it is by definition morally troubling for people to relate *as if they were* morally unequal, given that they are *in fact* morally equal. On the notion of basic moral equality, see for example Arneson (2014), Carter (2011), McMahan (2008), Waldron (2017), and Williams (1973). By contrast, I think it is clearly a substantive question (not one settled by the meaning of the concepts involved) whether it is morally troubling to relate unequally in terms of social standing.

[96] It is not entirely correct to say that Kolodny does not think of social hierarchies as forming a unified category. Amongst other things, he says that all of them are 'targets of complaints on behalf of those set in the inferior position' (2023: 95). But of course, this is to appeal to normative considerations – which I wish to keep separate from the task of specifying the nature of hierarchical social relations.

[97] But note, a 'disparity of regard' may be associated with an unequal distribution of power or authority, and separating these forms of social inequality will often be impossible in practice (see also Anderson (2017: 4)).

But whether we precede in this piecemeal fashion, or by providing a fully unified account, I take it as a criterion of success for such views that they are able to explain why paradigmatic cases of social hierarchy – such as stigma – are hierarchical.[98]

How do existing accounts of social hierarchy fare at accommodating stigma, as understood by the Shaming Model? In this chapter I examine three dominant strategies for conceptualizing hierarchical social relationships.[99] The first strategy seeks to explain the hierarchical nature of

[98] Anderson, like Kolodny, offers a piecemeal approach: 'In a hierarchy of authority, occupants of higher rank get to order subordinates around… In a hierarchy of esteem, occupants of higher rank despise those of inferior rank and extract tokens of deferential honour from them… In a hierarchy of standing, the interests of those of higher rank *count* in the eyes of others, whereas the interests of inferiors do not…' (2017: 3-4, emphasis original). Elsewhere, Anderson explicitly identifies stigmatization as a 'hierarchy of esteem' (2008: 144). In further work still, she characterizes 'group stigmatization' as one of many forms of group inequality and claims that 'unequal relations among people (that is, modes of social hierarchy), as manifested in these interactions, are proper objects of direct normative assessment in a theory of justice' (2010a: 15-16). This list of forms of group inequality differs from the list of 'types or dimensions' of social hierarchy set out above. Owing to the interpretative difficulties this raises, I leave Anderson's account aside in the discussion that follows. I note only that if, on Anderson's account, we should understand stigma as a hierarchy of esteem (in the terms above), then her account is vulnerable to the objection raised against 'Belief Strategies' below – the members of the stigmatized person's community need not hold any particularly negative beliefs about her, let alone 'despise' her.

[99] Some writers discussed here do not specifically set out an account of social inequality, but rather an account of social *equality* from which I have attempted to extract an account of its opposite (for example, Lippert-Rasmussen (2018)). I think this is a reasonable strategy to adopt with respect to the views discussed here. In other cases, this may not be so. For example, in seeking to characterize an egalitarian relationship, Scheffler defends the *egalitarian deliberative constraint*: 'each person accepts that the other person's equally important interests – understood broadly to include the person's needs, values, and preferences – should play an equally

such relationships by appeal to the *beliefs* of the agents who stand in them. I argue that insights from my discussion of stigma suggest we should reject this strategy outright (section 2). The second strategy seeks to explain the hierarchical nature of such relationships by appeal to what the agents who stand in them *express* about one another. A third strategy appeals to the character of *social norms* governing interactions between the agents. Both views seem plausible strategies for accommodating stigma as a hierarchical phenomenon. In my view, stigmatized subjects are the targets of a certain pattern of expressive acts – acts which (at least in some cases) serve to shore up social norms in their community. Despite this, I argue that promising versions of both accounts are in need of substantial revision in order to accommodate stigmas as a hierarchical phenomenon (sections 3 and 4). I do not take a stand here on which strategy is ultimately preferable as an account of social hierarchy.

2. Belief Strategies

'Belief Strategies' hold that an appeal to the beliefs of the agents who stand in hierarchical social relations is at least necessary in order to explain the hierarchical nature of those relations. This may not be sufficient on its own. An appeal to other features of the relationship, such as what the agents express about one another may also be necessary. For example, Fourie writes:

> 'While the aspect of evaluation, and not mere differentiation per se, is a necessary component, on its own it is insufficient to delineate social inequality… The actual

significant role in influencing decisions made within the context of the relationship. Moreover, each person has a normally effective disposition to treat the other's interests accordingly' (2015: 25). It is of course possible to construct a view on which any deviation from this ideal constitutes a social hierarchy. But it is not clear that Scheffler is committed to such a position, especially since 'the deliberative constraint is only one dimension of the broader relational ideal, the ideal of a relationship among equals' (ibid: 40). We do better, in this case at least, to treat Scheffler as not offering a position on the nature of social hierarchies (in part, or in general).

> expression of the evaluation… is thus an essential part of what makes the relationship one of inferiority and superiority' (2012: 113).

But since Fourie holds that an appeal to the beliefs – positive or negative evaluations of others – held by the agents who stand in hierarchical social relations is necessary to explain the hierarchical nature of those relations, her view nonetheless counts as a 'Belief Strategy' in my terminology.

The discussion of stigma in Chapter One of this thesis raises a fatal challenge for Belief Strategies. There can be, I have argued, examples of stigma – and hence of social hierarchy – in which members of the community do not hold any particularly negative beliefs about the stigmatized person.

Let us remind ourselves of the example. Suppose there is a social norm in a community that requires males to beat their female partners. And suppose further that males who openly defy this norm are subject to derision by their peers. It is still possible that very few males actually conform with the norm. Indeed, it is possible that many of them think it is a bad norm.[100] The pressure to express negative judgements about group members who openly deviate from the norm, then, would not come from a sincere conviction that they merit such judgements. Rather,

[100] See footnote 45 in Chapter One of this thesis for discussion of how a norm can persist despite a lack of 'buy-in' from members of the community. On some accounts of social norms, there need only be a very weak sense in which members of the community buy-into those norms. They need only, for example, use the rule as a standard of evaluation. This need not involve engaging in moralized assessments, endorsing the pattern of norm-required behaviour, or even assessing particular instances of behaviour as good (or bad) *because* in (or not in) conformity with such a pattern. It also need not involve thinking that the rule itself is good (see Kaplan (2023)). I mean to deny that even this very weak form of 'buy-in' is necessary for a social norm to exist. The actions of those in the present example could be, so-to-speak, 'all for show'.

it would come from a desire to uphold appearances, believing they too would be subject to treatment of this kind if their lack of commitment to the norm were known. In this case, most males would be ignorant of their peers' lack of commitment to the norm and record of nonconformity in private. This ignorance allows for a pattern of males insincerely expressing negative judgements about their peers who openly defy the norm – potentially stigmatizing them.

As a proponent of the Belief Strategy, Fourie is committed to the view that merely expressing that someone is inferior, in the absence of any underlying commitment to those attitudes, would be insufficient for social inequality. Cases such as the one just mentioned constitute straightforward counterexamples to this view.

At a first pass, Motchoulski also seems to offer a version of the Belief Strategy. On his view, 'inequalities of status' are unpacked entirely in terms of individual attitudes since 'status relations are individual beliefs regarding how estimable a given individual is compared to others' (2021: 623). Motchoulski is, however, alive to the threat of counterexamples like the one just mentioned – and he offers some resources for navigating them:

> 'If everyone believes that everyone else believes that Alfie is more esteemed than Beatrice, then even if no one holds the first order belief that Alfie is more esteemed than Beatrice, there will nevertheless be a status distinction between Alfie and Beatrice (*insofar as individuals express these second order beliefs*)' (2021: 630, my emphasis).

So, to map this picture onto the previous example, this counts as an example of social hierarchy if the males falsely hold the belief that everyone else thinks that males who fail to beat their female partners are inferior – and express this belief.

But this does not get the example quite right. In the original example, what the males express is not their sincere belief that other people think that males who fail to beat their female partners

are inferior – but the insincere view that such males are inferior.[101] To be sure, the fact that they express this view is explained (at least in part) by the second order belief to which Motchoulski appeals. But it is the expression of the first order belief which seems to matter in this case.

We must then concede that there can be cases of social hierarchy in which the forms of expression which are necessary to constitute the hierarchical nature of the relation are not matched by endorsement of the views expressed. Of course, some beliefs on the part of the agents will be necessary to explain why they engage in these forms of expression. But this seems to be a trivial point – we will need to appeal to beliefs to explain any action. In seeking to assimilate the sorts of cases discussed above to the Belief Strategy, we have moved quite far from the view that social hierarchies are explained (at least in part) by positive or negative evaluations of others. It seems we would do better at this point to reject Belief Strategies altogether.[102]

3. Expression Strategies

'Expression Strategies' deny that it is necessary to appeal to the beliefs of the agents who stand in hierarchical social relations in order to explain the hierarchical nature of those relations. Rather, it is sufficient (and perhaps necessary) to appeal to what the agents who stand in them express about one another. This is a more natural way of capturing the example discussed in the previous section. What seems significant for the possibility that the males who openly defy the

[101] Van Wietmarschen's (2022) view, discussed below, is well-placed to handle a similar point – that a social hierarchy can obtain even if agents do not have beliefs to the effect that some are more valuable than others, but when they simply value some more than others.

[102] Lestas's conception of 'rank-status' (2023: 330-32) also seems to be a version of the Belief Strategy. It is vulnerable to much the same arguments pressed here.

norm of beating their female partners are inferiorized is that their peers express that they are so. My view of stigma also has affinities with this general strategy since it locates the valences of such hierarchies in acts of shaming which express that the targets have fallen foul of some social norm and/or standard.

Let us examine some ways of cashing-out this general account of social hierarchy.

(i) Lippert-Rasmussen

Lippert-Rasmussen claims:

> 'X and Y are social equals if, and only if, the same basic normative rules and axiological principles apply to them and if, in accordance with those rules and principles, X and Y are equally important in whatever respects are fundamentally socially significant (other than the fact that people relate to one another as social equals).' (2018: 83)

On Lippert-Rasmussen's account, it is a sufficient condition of relating unequally that our treatment of one another expresses that we have unequal standing.[103] We thus get the result that people relate unequally when their treatment of each other fails to express that they are equals in the sense just described.

On the face of it, there seem to be a range of stigmas in which 'the same basic normative rules' do not apply to everyone. Lippert-Rasmussen's account seems to capture such cases through appeal to this notion. For example, many cases of stigma serve to shore up social norms which

[103] Lippert-Rasmussen takes both belief and expression to be relevant to the constitution of hierarchical relations: 'relating as equals has two components: a behavioural component – how one treats another – and an attitudinal component – how one regards another' (2018: 71). Unlike proponents of Belief Strategies, however, Lippert-Rasmussen affirms that either treating or regarding as unequal would be sufficient for unequally relating (ibid: 71). A salient dimension in which we can treat another as an equal or unequal is by expressing, through our treatment of them, that they are our equal or unequal (ibid: 77).

arbitrarily place very different requirements on agents' behaviour – e.g., a Black person is expected to act deferentially towards a white person, but not vice versa. Of course, not all stigmas are like this. Sometimes agents are stigmatized in virtue of being taken to violate a norm which applies equally to everyone, e.g., 'Do not be a sex worker'. In such cases, the same basic normative rules seem to apply to everyone. Still, the first part of Lippert-Rasmussen's account seems to be doing some real work in capturing cases of social hierarchy.

This turns out, however, to be merely an appearance. This is because we can simply reinterpret cases in which it seems the same basic normative rules do not apply so that they in fact do. We can achieve this by recasting the norms in question (e.g., that Black people behave in such-and-such a way, and that white people behave in such-and-such a way) as involving a single norm with 'complex content'.[104] Such a norm applies to everyone, but then requires different behaviour depending on the particular characteristics that a person possesses ('for everyone: if you are Black do such-and-such; if you are white do such-and such').[105] In this way, the first part of Lippert-Rasmussen's account fails to pick out even those cases of social hierarchy which it seems it ought to.

What this shows is that all the work in Lippert-Rasmussen's account is actually being done by the other condition that needs to be satisfied in order that X and Y count as treating each other as social equals. X and Y's treatment of one another in accordance with the basic normative rules must also express that they are equally important in whatever respects are fundamentally socially significant. But this raises another problem: we simply do not have a guide to what is 'fundamentally socially significant'.

[104] See van Wietmarschen (forthcoming: 9-13).

[105] Lippert Rasmussen himself makes a version of this point (2018: 80).

In fairness to Lippert-Rasmussen, this is by design – he wants his account to be ecumenical between competing views about fundamental importance, whether of social importance (in the case of relating as equals in terms of social standing) or of moral importance (in the case of relating as moral equals) (2018: 81). Still, there is a significant difference between the moral and social case – whilst we have well-worked accounts of fundamental moral importance, we lack anything comparable in the social case. Thus, appealing to 'fundamental social importance' here sounds too close to a redescription of our original problem: what is involved in relating as socially unequal? Lippert-Rasmussen's account does not progress our understanding.

(ii) Kolodny

Kolodny offers the different suggestion that (one kind of) hierarchy obtains when we exhibit lesser *consideration* for some people than for others (2023: 108-114). Consideration has a practical or expressive dimension for Kolodny (ibid: 113), making his view a version of the Expression Strategy.[106]

Kolodny takes a range of responses to fall under 'consideration', e.g., recognizing people as moral agents, trusting them by default, and so on. Such responses are unified by, amongst other things, the fact that 'Insofar as a person "merits" consideration, it is, for the most part, simply in

[106] This is so even if, as I understand Kolodny's view, it is not the expressive significance of unequal consideration which accounts for hierarchy. When, for example, we treat some with politeness but not others, that is enough for hierarchy, whether or not that expresses that some are inferior and some superior (which it probably also does). It is simply the fact that more of a particular kind of response accrues to one person than another which explains the hierarchy.

virtue of being a person. Accordingly, most *disparities* in consideration of persons will be *unmerited*" (ibid: 113, emphasis original).

Recall that Kolodny's account of social hierarchy is piecemeal – the appeal to consideration is not meant to capture all kinds of social hierarchy (over even all kinds of 'disparity of regard'). But can it at least provide an explanation of why *stigma* is hierarchical? On my view, stigma depends on a pattern of shaming some people more than others. So, in order to reconcile this account of stigma with Kolodny's account, we could simply hold that *not*-shaming is a kind of consideration for persons. In the case of stigma, this form of consideration is distributed unequally.

The difficulty with this suggestion is that shaming, if it is merited at all, can be merited in virtue of acts that a person is responsible for, namely having violated some norm. Those norms may be substantively good. So, conversely, we might reject the view that *not* being shamed is something that is owed to us 'simply in virtue of being a person'. Rather, it is owed to us in virtue of not violating (good) norms. In response, we might simply hold that shaming, as opposed to blaming, is *never* merited. It would of course then trivially follow that any disparity in shaming is unmerited. Certainly, some philosophers come close to adopting such a view of shaming.[107] But it is, at the very least, a controversial view about the ethics of shaming – and we should be able to agree about the hierarchical nature of stigma without taking a stand on it.[108] The theoretical cost of the proposed reconciliation is too high.

[107] See Nussbaum (2004).

[108] There is a risk, with respect to this strategy, of muddying the separation I have tried to draw between the descriptive task of specifying the nature of social hierarchy, and the normative task of explaining what, if anything, is wrong with it.

(iii) Viehoff

Viehoff's (2019) argues that 'social status hierarchy' is constituted by unequal distributions of advantages and disadvantages (which may simply be the expression of positive or negative evaluations, such as in praising or shaming) that are *socially justified* by the putative *moral inferiority* of some people.[109, 110] The 'social justification' of an act is not (or at least not wholly) a matter of

[109] I set aside Viehoff's claim about the particular content of the social justification that exists for social status hierarchies. We should note that Viehoff explicitly rejects the separation (which I have tried to make) between the descriptive task of specify the nature of unequal social relations, and the normative task of explaining (for example) what, if anything, is wrong about them: 'part of what seems to unify different instances of [social status hierarchy] is that we view them as morally problematic; and we would expect this to matter for our analysis of the phenomenon's core features' (2019: 11). So, for Viehoff, it is a virtue of his descriptive account of social status hierarchies, as socially justified by the putative moral inferiority of some people, that it explains why social status hierarchies are morally problematic – since, in his view, it is morally problematic to justify a social practice in this way. I return to these ideas in Chapter Six of this thesis. For now, I simply note without argument that I do not find it plausible that all *social* hierarchies treat some people as *morally* inferior.

[110] Schemmel (2012) also offers an account that appeals to the expression of the judgement that subordinated individuals are morally inferior, though his discussion has a largely institutional focus. In particular, he says: 'According to these material attitudes [of hostility, contempt, and neglect expressed by institutions] unjustly treated persons are assigned differential moral status by institutions… social hierarchies are instantiated or made possible by such implicit judgements of worth… (ibid: 134)'. This institutional focus makes the account unsuitable as an analysis of social hierarchies in general. Of course, Schemmel does not make any claim to the contrary – and indeed later suggests that social egalitarians might hold that '*individuals* should display attitudes of benevolence and fraternity (or sorority) towards each other both in public and private life, and institutions should express equivalent collective attitudes' (ibid: 142, my emphasis). This presumably concedes that there are forms of social hierarchy that are 'instantiated or made possible' by the attitudes expressed by individuals as well as institutions.

the actual beliefs of the community in which such distributions obtain. Rather, it is gleaned by an 'interpretative exercise that requires judgments about the normative basis on which society endorses particular social norms' (ibid: 18). Social justification thus seems to be a matter of the kind of justification that is expressed through certain distributions of advantages and disadvantages that are required by the social norms of the community. Viehoff's view is thus a version of the Expressive Strategy: in order to explain what is hierarchical about social status hierarchies, it appeals to what the agents who stand in such relations express about each other through the distribution of advantages and disadvantages.

Viehoff argues that the social justification of this distribution does not appeal directly to particular characteristics that might warrant them, but rather to a 'status' that is in turn conferred by more particular characteristics (ibid: 15). He offers the following example to illustrate this point, which is worth quoting at length:

> 'Imagine, for instance, that each term the school publishes a complete ranking of all students' academic performance. So everyone knows where they are vis-à-vis anyone else when it comes to academic standing. And imagine too that there is a social norm in the school that students are expected to care about, and admire, academic success, and express that admiration toward those who do well. The social life of this high school, though it sustains inequality, need nonetheless not instantiate status hierarchies… while social norms require responding in certain ways to other students' academic performance, the link between that performance and the appropriate response is sufficiently close that we don't think of it as involving a more general judgement about the person that exceeds the specific quality at issue. (Matters would have been different if, for instance, the higher-ranked students had been entitled not to receive warm words, but to be obeyed, or to have their belongings carried around by their fellow students.)' (ibid: 14-16)

When someone is stigmatized, members of her community shame her, and this is explained by their belief that she has fallen foul of a social norm and/or standard. In the spirit of Viehoff's account, we can think of *being shamed* as the disadvantage which is unequally distributed here. On this view of social status hierarchies, it must also be the case that the responses which constitute the disadvantages are a response to the 'whole person', as opposed to merely being a response to

some act of hers, for example. I have argued in previous chapters that shaming has this feature. So far, so good.

It does not seem, however, that in order to think of shaming as a fitting response to a person we must always attribute a 'status' to the shamed person that goes beyond specific acts or traits that we ascribe to her. We might think that shaming can sometimes be a directly fitting response to grossly immoral behaviour. But for Viehoff, the attribution of a further status, that exceeds the particular behaviour at issue, is an ineliminable step in establishing that the pattern of shaming constitutes a social status hierarchy. In my view, shaming people for grossly immoral behaviour could be stigmatic, and hence hierarchical, without ascribing such a status. So not all stigmas can be accommodated as hierarchical by Viehoff's account.

A possible response here would be to insist that ascribing the relevant 'status' to a person is simply the same thing as one's actions constituting a response to a 'whole person'. And I have already conceded that shaming has this feature. If this is the right way to interpret Viehoff's account, then the present objection falls away.

But I do not think this is in fact what Viehoff has in mind. The quoted passage above suggests that the reason why carrying the belongings of one's fellow student involves the attribution of a further 'status', whilst warm words does not, is not simply that the former (but not the latter) is a response to the 'whole person'. The point seems to be, rather, that warm words, unlike carrying someone's belongings, can actually be a fitting response to academic success.

If that is right, then the obvious way in which to accommodate stigmas of the kind just discussed within Viehoff's account of social status hierarchies would be to deny that shaming can ever be a directly fitting response to any particular behaviour or trait that we ascribe to a person, such as

grossly immoral behaviour. Shaming (and thus stigma) always involves the at least tacit imputation of a further status to an individual which elicits the response.

Whether we agree with this point or not (and it strikes me as somewhat counterintuitive), we should again note that it is a substantive position about the ethics of shaming. Intuitively, we should be able to agree about the hierarchical nature of stigma without taking a stand on it. The theoretical cost of the proposed reconciliation is, once more, too high.

(iv) Kolodny and Viehoff: A Common Fix

The accounts offered by Kolodny and Viehoff suffer from a common defect: both accounts appeal to heavily *normativized* conceptions of the forms of expression that constitute hierarchical social relations. Kolodny's view draws on a notion of consideration according to which it is a response owed to us simply as persons. On Viehoff's account, the kinds of expression that constitute social hierarchies must be a response to a 'status' – where the latter notion is unpacked by appealing to the fittingness of the responses in question. In both cases, the appeal to a normativized conception of the forms of expression that constitute hierarchical social relations means that defenders of these views will need to make overly controversial claims about the ethics of shaming in order to accommodate stigma as a form of social hierarchy. This diagnosis invites a solution: *de*-normativize the Expression Strategy.

As a first pass, we might claim that the expression of any negative judgement whatsoever, or at least those that concern the 'whole person', is sufficient for social hierarchy.[111] Whilst such a

[111] A view of this kind might be attributed to Kolodny (2023: 106-108), though several qualifications are needed. First, in the relevant section Kolodny talks about disparities in *esteem* – so we would need to explicitly

view could certainly accommodate stigma as a form of social hierarchy, it simply is not plausible that we get a hierarchy whenever some people express certain negative judgments about others. Of course, we could hold, consistently with the view just described, that the more pronounced hierarchies are those that involve lots of people expressing the relevant judgements about the subordinated individual. Nonetheless, the view is at least committed to saying that a kind of 'mini-hierarchy' obtains given any expression of inferiority – which does not seem right at all.

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add *disesteem* as an item in order to capture stigma. Second, Kolodny says that 'such esteem can be focused on the quality or achievement itself. It need not spread to the person as a whole' (ibid: 107). We might push back against this. Since one's standing in a social hierarchy is an attribute of a person, and not of particular features of hers, it is only whole-person evaluations which can make the possession of such a standing possible. But we do not need to settle this here. We can simply note that it is only those cases that do involve expressing an evaluation of the person as a whole which will be relevant to the examination of stigma. This is because shaming (which is essential for stigma) involves whole-person evaluations. Third, Kolodny appears to be talking about the attitude of esteem itself. For reasons articulated already, we need to shift our focus to the expression of relevant attitudes. Finally, Kolodny claims that it is only *unmerited* disparities of esteem that constitute hierarchical relations. We must treat this as a mistake – and as another example of Kolodny's overly normativized conception of the forms of expression that constitute hierarchical social relations. This is because, as I have suggested already, it is at the very least contestable whether the shaming of people who have committed serious crimes, for example, is an unmerited kind of disesteem, given their violation of substantively good legal norms. But presumably people who disagree about this can nonetheless agree that, if certain other conditions are satisfied, such shamed criminals can occupy inferior social positions as stigmatized subjects. I should note that it is not entirely clear to me whether Kolodny thinks that a social hierarchy of a kind might exist even if the disparities of esteem are merited. Of course, if they did, they would not belong to the category of 'relations of inferiority' that Kolodny seeks to characterize – since these are unified, amongst other things, by their prima facie objectionability (see footnote 96 in this chapter). In any case, the view that I discuss in the main text allows that hierarchy can exist because of either merited or unmerited disesteem.

To illustrate, in Chapter One of this thesis I discussed the example of an individual who irregularly (perhaps once a month) attends an office as part of her job and is shamed in that work environment for perceived violation of some norm that exists there. I claimed that we should not think of this individual as stigmatized relative to the office. Of course, the current general view of social hierarchy does not commit us to this view – it could simply say that she occupies a low position in some other kind of hierarchy in the office even if she is not stigmatized. Still, I doubt this is a very plausible claim to make either. If you are not convinced, you can make the interactions in question even more fleeting. What if she drops by this office only once a year to deliver some contracts? We might still insist that a hierarchy obtains, only a very inconsequential one. But I think it is far more natural to admit that interactions of this kind simply are not possible sites for hierarchical relations in the first place.

A possible fix would be to adopt some version of Viehoff's restriction that social status hierarchies are 'a feature of a society as whole, rather than of a particular relationship' (2019: 12).[112]

[112] Viehoff also says that a 'high school' (or even a 'friendship') may count as a 'society in the relevant sense' (2019: 13). One suggestion I have for making sense of these remarks is to interpret them through the lens of my suggestion in Chapter One of this thesis that the community (or communities) which a stigmatized person is stigmatized relative to must form a large enough part of her social world. More generally, we could hold that the community (or communities) which an inferiorized person is inferirorized relative to must form a large enough part of her social world. This provides conditions that any collective must satisfy to count as a 'society in the relevant sense'. Notice that this is a claim about the conditions for hierarchy to obtain in the first place, not a claim about when it is morally troubling. For the claim that social hierarchies are, at least usually, morally troubling when they are a feature of 'society as a whole', see Moutchoulski (2021: 625; 639-40) and Kolodny (2023: 98-99).

This would rule out the possibility of 'mini-hierarchies'.[113] But I am not aware of anyone that defends a conjunction of the de-normativized Expression Strategy with this claim – and I will not take a definitive stand on the merits of this view here.[114] I do note, however, that as a version of the Expression Strategy it has some appeal in light of the account of stigma defended in this thesis: stigmatized subjects are the targets of a certain pattern of expressive acts, and the valences of such hierarchies are explained by those shaming acts.

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[113] Van Wietmarschen's (2022) view, discussed below, avoids positing some cases of 'mini-hierarchy' because it does not hold that simply any case of valuing some people more than others is sufficient for hierarchy. The complexes of attitude and behaviour that constitute such valuing must also be required by the social norms of the community. This restriction on its own, however, is not sufficient to rule out some of the examples of 'mini-hierarchy' mentioned in the main text, since there can (at least in theory) be social norms governing quite fleeting communities of individuals. I should take this opportunity to note that the relationship between relevant forms shaming on the one hand, and social norms and standards on the other, also imposes some constraints on the patterns of shaming that qualify as stigmas on my account. To see this, consider that someone might object that my account of stigma over-generates in apparently trivial cases where people are shamed, e.g., for having musical tases that are deemed 'uncool'. One possible way to mitigate this worry is to notice that there are rarely fully-fledged social norms and/or standards (as opposed to what Bicchieri calls 'customs' or 'descriptive norms' (2017, ch.1)) concerning one's musical preferences that such shaming could be understood as shoring up. This seems true at least when we move beyond sub-communities that may often fail, in any case, to satisfy other conditions for stigma (i.e., constituting a 'large enough' part of one's social world).

[114] One potential problem is that the proposed restriction may be *too* restrictive to accommodate some cases of social hierarchy, besides stigmas. For a relevant example, see discussion in Chapter Six of this thesis of the constitutively unequal relationship between academic supervisor and supervisee. Social Norms Strategies may be able to handle such cases (see discussion in footnote 203 in Chapter Six of this thesis). They can do so whilst still ruling out some cases of 'mini-hierarchies', as discussed in the previous footnote.

4. Social Norm Strategies

Finally, consider *Social Norm Strategies*. On this view, in order to explain the hierarchical nature of a social relation, we must appeal to the character of the social norms governing interactions between the agents who stand in these relations. This seems a promising way of accommodating stigmas within a general account of social hierarchy since, on my view, the acts of shaming which constitute stigmas serve to shore up social norms (at least some of the time).

The Social Norms Strategy is defended by van Wietmarschen (2022). On his account, neither the beliefs that people hold about inferiorized individuals (or indeed about socially superior individuals), nor what is expressed about them, explains hierarchical social orderings.[115] Rather, 'a social position A is "higher than" or "above" social position B if and only if, for the participants in the relevant social network, when they display the norm-required complexes of attitude and behaviour they thereby and to that extent value the occupants of A more than the occupants of B' (ibid: 925). For van Wietmarschen, valuing someone can come apart from a corresponding belief about their value.[116] Valuing someone simply involves exhibiting a certain complex of attitude and behaviour towards her that would be fitting if she in fact possesses a certain value. It is thus possible, for example, that when I shame a person, I value her less than some individuals who I do not shame, even if I do not believe she is less valuable than them. Perhaps something like this is going on in the cases of stigma that presented a challenge for the Belief Strategy (recall, the males deride those who openly defy the norm of beating their female partners even though they do not sincerely evaluate such defiance negatively).

[115] Unless, that is, we think that valuing is an entirely expressive matter. For relevant discussion see Anderson (1993).

[116] For an opposing view, see Scheffler (2011).

Van Wietmarschen outlines several criteria that a general account of social hierarchy should satisfy (ibid: 922-23). The responsiveness of his view to these shows that it is in many ways a good fit for accommodating stigma as a form of social hierarchy. For example, van Wietmarshchen claims that 'the incidents of the different social positions in social hierarchies characteristically include distinctive requirements or normative expectations' (ibid: 922). This is straightforwardly explained on his account by the role that social norms play in constituting hierarchical relations: if A is superior to B, then the complex of attitude and behaviour that explains this is actually commanded by social norms in a community to which both A and B belong. Similarly, I have suggested that in order to understand stigma, we must account for the 'normative' or 'evaluative' pressure that it exerts in the stigmatized person's community – and that this should be accounted for by the way in which social norms and/or standards figure in the explanation of the pattern of shaming to which a stigmatized person is subject.

Van Wietmarschen also claims that 'our navigation of various social hierarchies is commonly associated with strong motivations and emotions' (ibid: 923). In order to explain this, he appeals to the importance we place on being valued by others – on his view, our place in social hierarchies is (partly) explained by differences in how people value us. Relatedly, I have drawn attention to the stigmatized person's vulnerability to shame and sought to explain this, at least in part, by appeal to the 'authority' that the shaming of the stigmatized person receives from the social norms and/or standards that such shaming shores up.

This account of social hierarchy offers a good explanation of the hierarchical nature of a range of stigmas. These are cases in which a person is shamed by members of her community, and this explained (perhaps amongst other things) by the fact that such shaming is commanded by social norms in the community. I have suggested that this may be the right way to characterize many

stigmatized occupations, caste identities, and so on. Plausibly, when the members of a community shame some people and not others, they thereby and to that extent value the people who they shame less than the people who they do not shame.

Whilst such disparities in shaming will be present in any case of stigma, stigmas may lack the specific connection to social norms that van Wietmarschen argues is distinctive of social hierarchy. His account thus misses some cases of stigma. The examples I have in mind are those in which the shaming of the stigmatized person is not itself commanded by social norms in her community but is rather a predictable consequence of her perceived deviation from social norms and/or standards in the community.[117] Take the example of a wheelchair user who is perceived to violate some ableist social norm (say, not to demand 'special treatment'). She may consequently be shamed by members of her community. Such shaming need not be required by social norms – and, indeed, most members of the community might openly disapprove of such sanctioning. Still, in my view, this does not disqualify the case as an example of stigma. The shaming of the wheelchair user is still explained by social norms in her community – it is a predictable consequence of perceived deviation from the ableist norm. That is a sufficient connection to social norms for stigma, and thus social hierarchy, on my view.

For van Wietmarschen, by contrast, if A is socially superior to B, then the complex of attitude and behaviour that explains this must actually be commanded by social norms. In my example, the shaming is not required by social norms. So, this alone will not explain why there is a hierarchy. This, of course, does not mean that van Wietmarschen's account must insist that

[117] Only if it is a response to perceived deviation from *norms* would such shaming be intelligible as a sanction. In the discussion and restatement of van Wietmarschen's account below, I gloss over some of the complexities introduced by the distinction between norms and standards.

there is no social hierarchy in the example just given. The ableist norm may itself account for its presence. Plausibly, when members of the community conform with this norm, exhibiting a certain complex of attitude and behaviour, they thereby and to that extent value able-bodied people more than wheelchair users. If so, then there is a hierarchy in which wheelchair users occupy an inferior position.

This seems plausible – but it is only a partial fix to the challenge. This is because it does seem plausible that the pattern of shaming alone would be sufficient to generate a hierarchy. To bring this out, consider a different case. Suppose there is a norm that simply requires everyone *not* to be a sex worker. When some people are taken to deviate from this norm, they may be shamed and indeed stigmatized (as a sanction), even if such shaming is not itself required by social norms. But when people simply comply with the norm against sex work itself, the members of the community do not thereby and to that extent (at least in any obvious way) value any individual above others – everyone simply engages in the same abstaining behaviour. Van Wietmarschen's account does not have the resources to account for the hierarchy when people are sanctioned in certain ways for violating a norm like this – but where such sanctioning is not itself required by social norms.

I have suggested that the Social Norms Strategy is an initially plausible strategy for accommodating stigma as a hierarchical phenomenon. Perhaps then van Wietmarschen's account can be amended to avoid the present worry. The basic insight here is that van Wietmarschen's account runs into trouble because the connection to social norms which is distinctive of hierarchy is specified too *tightly*. We need to *loosen* this connection. As a first pass:

> Social position A is 'higher than' or 'above' social position B if and only if, for the participants in the relevant social network, when they display the norm-required complexes of attitude and behaviour – *or sanction deviation from norms* – they thereby and to that extent value the occupants of A more than the occupants of B.

This view can accommodate the counterexample just raised. Although the shaming of those who violate the norm against sex work is not itself commanded by social norms, it does sanction deviation from that social norm. Plausibly, such behaviour amounts to valuing those who are shamed less than those who are not shamed.

I again do not offer a full examination of the merits of this revised proposal here. But I do put it forward as a candidate view, along with a suitably modified version of the Expression Strategy, which can accommodate stigma as a hierarchical phenomenon.

5. Conclusion

Stigma is a paradigmatic case of social hierarchy. I have argued that the view of stigma defended in this thesis forces us to reject general accounts of social hierarchy that explain the hierarchical nature of relationships by appealing to the beliefs of the agents who stand in them. We must instead endorse one of two alternative strategies: appeal to what the agents who stand in them express about one another or to the character of social norms governing interactions between the agents. I have argued that existing versions of these strategies are also in need of revision.

PART TWO: The Normative Status of Stigma

Chapter Four: Stigma, Stereotype, and Self-Presentation

1. Introduction

> *'And I always feel this with straight people – that whenever they're being nice to me, pleasant to me, all the time really, underneath they're only assessing me as a criminal and nothing else'.*
>
> – Testimony cited in Goffman (1963: 25)

It is a familiar claim that stigma wrongs us, in part, because stigmatized subjects are not treated *as individuals*. This chapter aims to clarify that objection.

In philosophical literature, there are at least two complaints raised about stigma that have some claim as interpretations of the popular idea. First, there is the idea that the injunction to treat persons as individuals is an instance of the broader requirement to respect their autonomy.[118] Stigma, because of its connection to stereotypes, violates such a requirement.[119] Our capacity for autonomy confers on us a kind of dignity that commands certain forms of respect. When we

[118] For a survey of interpretations of the requirement to treat persons as individuals, see Beeghly (2018).

[119] Henceforth I mean 'stereotypes' in the ordinary sense (a kind of generalization on the basis of group membership), not in the special sense deployed in Goffman's (1963) account of stigma, which I discussed in Chapter One. I am not convinced that stigma is always related in any significant way to stereotypes – amongst other things, I think you can sometimes, in all your idiosyncrasy, be stigmatized as a rogue individual within your community. Still, stereotypes seem to be involved in a sufficiently wide range of stigmas that it is an interesting question to consider how their role in stigma affects its normative status. Following Beeghly (2015), I intend this account of stereotypes to be purely descriptive – that is, the account does not close off definitionally any questions about the normative status of stereotypes and their deployment.

stigmatize a person and thus apply stereotypes to her, we fail to demonstrate one such form of respect for her autonomy, and so undermine her dignity in a particular way. I will focus on Eidelson's (2015) construal of the requirement to treat persons as individuals, which has this general form. Call this the 'Eidelson View'.

A second idea focuses on harms that stigma threatens, in virtue of failures to treat us as individuals. According to this second view, stigma threatens harm by inhibiting the functioning of certain morally important capacities – notably, our capacity to *self-present*.[120] By this is meant our ability to construct a public persona for ourselves. Self-presentation is thus, in one sense, the activity of shaping an identity as an individual. Stigma frustrates our ability to realize this capacity because it wrests away from us significant amounts of control over the terms in which we are understood by others. Call this the 'Self-Presentation View'.

The Eidelson View rests on the idea that our autonomy confers a special moral status on us – our dignity. On this view, the idea that failing to treat someone as an individual disrespects us is not tied to the idea that such treatment threatens harm. Such treatment is simply inappropriate in light of the special value of autonomy – so even harmless cases of failing to treat someone as an individual can instantiate this wrong. By contrast, the Self-Presentation View centres the harms to agential capacities which stigma threatens in its account of how stigmatized subjects are wronged. For this reason, it does not need to assume that our autonomy confers a special moral

[120] For sociological work on self-presentation see Goffman (1959). The importance of our exercising this capacity has been applied in a range of contexts in moral and political philosophy. For example, Basu (2022) uses it to explain the value of forgetting. Rini and Cohen cover related ground with respect to the harms of 'deepfakes', particularly in their discussion of the threat of 'panoptic gaslighting' (2022: 153-57).

status on us. It is simply bad for us when people fail to treat us as individuals, because this threatens to undermine our exercise of agential capacities.[121]

I will argue that the Eidelson View is insufficient as an interpretation of the wrong that stigma instantiates in virtue of failures to treat us as individuals. I do not reject the idea that part of what is involved in treating persons as individuals is adhering to a requirement to respect their autonomy. I will suggest, rather, that even if we are right to think that stigma violates such a requirement, this will not account for the full weight of the charge that stigmatized subjects are not treated as individuals. The particular requirement to respect our autonomy is violated in many situations that do not involve stigma. But stigma distinctively threatens our agency. To explain this, we need the Self-Presentation View.

I will then use this account to address a worry about the complaint that stigmatized subjects are not treated as individuals. The worry is that by making much of this concern, we create space for the suggestion that treating someone as superior can be just as morally troubling as stigma. The concern with being treated as an individual is not tethered to a concern with being recognized in either positively or negatively valanced terms. It is simply a concern with being recognized as an individual. There is then no reason to assume that treating someone as superior poses less risk to such recognition than treating them as inferior. Yet common-sense baulks at this result.[122]

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[121] This framing mirrors Sangiovanni's (2017) opposition between 'dignitarian' accounts (which he rejects) and the 'negative conception' (which he favours) – though Sangiovanni goes further than me by denying that individuals have dignity in the sense described here.

[122] Sangiovanni (2017: 103) accepts the 'common-sense' view that it is (usually) worse to be stigmatized than to be treated as superior, at least with respect to cases of *inappropriately* stigmatizing and treating as superior.

The Eidelson View picks out stereotyping as the morally troubling feature of stigma. Thus, its proponents are committed to a symmetrical assessment of cases of treating as superior that involve stereotyping. They can appeal to consequences that are usually associated with being treated as superior, compared to those associated with stigma, in order to explain why it is in general much worse to be stigmatized. But this comes at the cost of playing down the significance of being treated as an individual in our overall judgement that stigma is morally troubling. So, the objection is fatal for the Eidelson View – its proponents must 'give up the game' on the importance of the charge that stigmatized subjects are not treated as individuals, which is the intuitively significant charge it was meant to explain.

By contrast, the Self-Presentation View can deflate the worry. It does so not by excluding the possibility of a moral symmetry between some cases of stigma and some cases of treating as superior. Rather, it does so by providing a nuanced account of the circumstances in which either phenomenon is detrimental for self-presentation.

2. The Eidelson View

According to the Eidelson View, when we stigmatize a person, we fail to respect her autonomy and thus violate the dignity that this capacity confers on her. The respect which is owed here is in one sense general – it is due equally to all in virtue of a capacity that all persons share. But, given the nature of this capacity, such respect also requires forms of sensitivity to its exercise by particular individuals. It thus generates a requirement to treat them as individuals. Stigma violates this requirement because it involves the application of stereotypes to the stigmatized person.

This view requires an account of autonomy from which to construct the relevant principle of treating persons as individuals. The nature of autonomy is contested in philosophy. Fortunately for our purposes we need appeal only to the following two (reasonably uncontroversial) aspects of our nature as autonomous beings: first, we have the ongoing ability to make decisions for ourselves – to change, sustain, or develop the kind of life we lead; second, we exercise this ability in relation to our character – our individual profile of desires, commitments, and interests, the content of which is constructed through exercises of this very capacity. So, when it comes to respecting our autonomy, it matters both that our character is a result of past choices of ours and that future choices are not fully determined by earlier ones.

Eidelson gives expression to this concern with autonomy by defending the following requirement to treat persons as individuals:

> 'In forming judgments about Y, X treats Y as an individual if and only if:
>
> (Character Condition) X gives reasonable weight to evidence of the ways Y has exercised her autonomy in giving shape to her life, where this evidence is reasonably available and relevant to the determination at hand; and
>
> (Agency Condition) if X's judgments concern Y's choices, these judgments are not made in a way that disparages Y's capacity to make those choices as an autonomous agent'. (2015: 144)

Eidelson's account specifies requirements that govern our processes of forming judgements about people. In order to make them relevant to the topic of stigma, we need to extend them as follows:

In *expressing* judgments about Y, X treats Y as an individual if and only if the judgements expressed could reasonably be understood to have been formed in ways that satisfy the Character and Agency Conditions.[123]

[123] I say 'could reasonably be understood to have been formed' rather than 'were formed' to allow for the possibility that X does not endorse the judgements she expresses about Y.

This extension is necessary because the members of a community in which a person is stigmatized do not, typically, just hold beliefs about the stigmatized person that trade on stereotypes. They also give expression to those beliefs – e.g., by shaming them.[124]

Here is an example of how the charge that stigmatized subjects are not treated as individuals gets unpacked on the Eidelson View. Suppose someone is stigmatized because of her conviction for a crime. She is the target of various acts of shaming by members of her community. These acts express negative evaluations about her on account of her public identity as a convict. Such evaluations trade on stereotypes about convicts – they involve various generalized assumptions about convicts on the basis of group identity. In this way, she is not assessed simply as someone who has committed a crime but as someone whose whole nature is defined by that activity. Nussbaum writes about the contrast between shaming penalties on the one hand and fines and imprisonment on the other (but the point extends to shaming versus blaming generally): '[they] humiliate, and thus constitute an offense against human dignity… [whereas fines and imprisonment] are meted out for acts; they do not constitute a humiliation or degradation of the whole person' (2004: 230).

The Eidelson View holds that by expressing these generalized assumptions about convicts through acts of shaming we fail to treat persons as individuals. In the terms offered above, such judgements could not reasonably be understood to have been formed in ways that satisfy the Character and Agency Conditions. Consider the Character Condition. The character of

[124] Eidelson's account is not vulnerable to the worry that treating persons as individuals will require us to refrain from ever making judgements about people on the basis of generalizations. Eidelson notes: 'What the character condition requires is simply that one also consider information that does manifest a person's self-authorship' (2015: 145-46).

someone who has committed a crime is usually composed of elements beside her offense, and evidence of this is usually discernible from even the most cursory attempt to understand her life. When a person expresses an evaluation of a convict that casts her offense as definitive of her nature, we cannot usually accept (reasonably) that the judgement was formed in a way that satisfies the Character Condition.

Now consider the Agency Condition. The judgement that a person's nature is defined by some offense of hers is disparaging of her ability to continuously shape her character, to put her past behind her, and transcend any given act of hers. When a person expresses an evaluation of a convict that casts her offense as definitive of her nature, we cannot usually accept (reasonably) that the judgement was formed in a way that satisfies the Agency Condition. On both counts, the expression of this judgement fails to treat the convict as an individual, which on this view is a way of failing to respect her autonomy.

The Eidelson View can then explain, at least in part, why stigmatized subjects would appeal to a concern with being treated as individuals. This is a good result (and, to repeat, not one I will challenge). But is it a sufficient account of the charge that stigmatized subjects are not treated as individuals? Contrast the example of the stigmatized convict with the following case:

Seminar faux pas: A new graduate student in the philosophy department confuses some technical vocabulary in her contributions during a seminar (*de dicto*/*de re*; *explanans*/*explanandum*; etc.). A senior graduate student at the seminar concludes on this basis that she is philosophically unsophisticated, a belief which he also expresses to the other students behind her back. In fact, the student is highly imaginative and perceptive – a fact which could easily have been gleaned by properly attending to her contributions in the seminar.[125]

[125] This example may be complicated by the role of class, gender, race, and so on in the failure to attend properly to her contributions. So let us assume, artificially, that her confusion of the technical vocabulary is the only salient factor.

The senior graduate student fails in the way he forms his judgement about the new student, and in his expression of that judgement, to treat her as an individual in the way specified by the Eidelson View. This is because the judgement that she is philosophically unsophisticated could not reasonably be understood to have been formed (and is in fact not formed) in a way which satisfies the Character Condition. The senior graduate student had evidence of her imaginativeness and perceptiveness ready to hand, if only he had attended properly to her seminar contributions – her attempts to autonomously shape her identity as a philosopher.

So whilst *Seminar faux pas* is not a case of stigma, stereotyping, or perhaps even shaming, it does involve a failure to treat the graduate student as an individual, as the Eidelson View understands this notion. So, if the charge that stigmatized subjects are not treated as individuals should be understood in these terms, then the wrong that *Seminar faux pax* instantiates should be of the *same kind* as the one which is intuitively associated with stigma.

Does it seem this way? Such treatment as we find in *Seminar faux pas* is, bluntly, not very nice. But we would not want to say it involves the same kind of wrong as in the case of the stigmatized convict. For one thing, the contexts in which the graduate student confronts such failures to treat her as an individual are pretty localized – they are confined to her interactions with a single colleague. Nobody else cares about her seminar faux pas. One's public identity as a convict, by contrast, is salient across many areas of life. Indeed, this difference is partly responsible for qualifying the latter case, but not the former, as an example of stigma.[126] I will suggest in the next section that this feature of stigma also has the consequence that when an

[126] This point finds resonance in Viehoff's remarks about 'social status hierarchies' as 'a feature of society as a whole, rather than of a particular relationship' (2019: 12). See footnote 112 in Chapter Three of this thesis for discussion.

identity is stigmatized, one's very agency is threatened. That threat does not seem to be present in *Seminar faux pas*.

Yet the Eidelson View is committed to saying that the wrong in *Seminar faux pas* is the same kind of wrong faced by the stigmatized convict. This is because it explains the wrong in both cases, arising from failures to treat persons as individuals, by appeal to the same principle: an instance of the requirement to respect autonomy. True, the stigmatized convict is vulnerable to a much more pervasive risk of people failing to treat her as an individual. But the comparison here is similar to the comparison between being lied to by one person and being lied to by many more people in addition. The further wrongs that are committed in the latter scenario are just the wrong that appears in the first – repeated over and over. That seems a plausible account of this comparison.[127] But an analogous account of the comparison between *Seminar faux pas* and the stigmatized convict seems inadequate. The latter is distinctively wrong in a way that the former is not. As Sangiovanni puts it, 'An insult… is not correctly seen as an attack that is part of a systematic societal pattern whose effects reverberate throughout one's life and one's dealings with others' (2017: 96).

In general, whilst we might find fault in particular acts of shaming or other isolated failures to treat persons as individuals, these do not generally threaten our capacities as agents. By contrast, stigma does pose this threat, as I explain in the next section. Consequently, the wrong that stigma instantiates in virtue of failures to treat us as individuals is morally different in kind from a simple failure to respect autonomy. Because the Eidelson View cannot explain this aspect of the charge that stigmatized subjects are not treated as individuals, it is insufficient as an

[127] I am bracketing the possibility that in the latter case, when more people lie to a person, they are also committing some further distinctive wrong, such as collectively 'gaslighting' them.

explanation of it. I will argue in the next section that we need the Self-Presentation View to fill-in the wanted explanation.

Let me begin to plot this way forward. Stigma has two features that are significant for our interest in being treated as individuals. First, stigma involves the communication of assessments of the stigmatized person (including those which appeal to stereotypes) that treat a single feature of hers as definitive of her nature. It shares this with many forms of shaming that are not stigmatic.[128] Second, the stigmatized person is vulnerable to acts of this kind *across many areas of her life*. It does *not* share this feature with non-stigmatic forms of shaming or other failures to treat persons as individuals.[129]

The Eidelson View focuses primarily on the first feature. It is in virtue of involving assessments that treat a single feature of a person as definitive of her nature that stigma violates a requirement to respect autonomy. But because stigma shares this feature with many forms of shaming that are not stigmatic, the Eidelson View cannot explain the distinctive threat that stigma poses to our agency. My suggestion, then, is to see whether there are philosophical resources which place some additional importance on the second feature of stigma – that the stigmatized person is vulnerable to acts of this kind across many areas of her life. Because this is a feature which stigma does not share with non-stigmatic forms of shaming or other failures to

[128] See for example Thomason (2018: 205). This is connected to the point made in Chapter One of this thesis that the shamer presents her target *as shameful* and thus expresses that it would be appropriate for the target to feel that her 'whole being' is 'diminished or lessened'. The act or feature of hers that the target is shamed for is taken to impeach her person as a whole.

[129] For discussion of a kind of non-stigmatic shaming ('reintegrative shaming') see Braithwaite (1989).

treat persons as individuals, it may enable us to explain why stigma is distinctively threatening to agency. I put forward the Self-Presentation View with this objective in mind.

3. The Self-Presentation View

The Self-Presentation View focuses on harms that stigma threatens, in virtue of failures to treat us as individuals. Stigma threatens harm by inhibiting the functioning of certain morally important capacities – notably, our capacity to self-present. Stigma frustrates our ability to realize this capacity because it wrests away from us significant amounts of control over the terms in which we are understood by others.

What is the capacity for self-presentation? For starters, it is closely related to the two aspects of our autonomous nature mentioned above. Recall, we have, first, the ongoing ability to make decisions for ourselves – to change, sustain, or develop the kind of life that we lead. Second, our exercise of this ability is partly informed by our character – a character which we have constructed through exercises of this very capacity.[130] Both views discussed here thus emphasize the importance of our autonomous nature. But the Self-Presentation View differs from the Eidelson View in the following way. The Eidelson View holds that our capacity for autonomy confers a special kind of moral status on us – our dignity. The claim that acting and expressing judgements in ways which violate the Character and Agency Conditions disrespects us is not tied to the idea that doing so threatens harm. It is simply inappropriate in light of the special value of our capacity for autonomy – so even harmless violations of these requirements can wrong us. By contrast, the Self-Presentation View avoids assuming that our capacity for autonomy confers a special moral status on us (though I do not think it needs to deny this either). Instead, it

[130] For this account of the feedback mechanisms involved in self-presentation see Velleman (2005).

notices that as social creatures we are partly dependent on others for the effective exercise of our agential capacities. This makes us vulnerable to harms imposed by others when they fail to treat us in ways which support such exercise. Stigma wrongs us because it threatens such harms, in virtue of people failing to treat us as individuals.

This way of putting things suggests there is a burden on proponents of the Self-Presentation View to explain the value for a person of enacting a self-presentation (and thus the harm of such enactment being undermined). Proponents of the Self-Presentation View offer various answers.[131] But perhaps the simplest is due to Sangiovanni (2017), who draws our attention to an 'integral sense of self' which arises from our awareness of the process by which we make choices in light of, but not fully determined by, a character that we have fashioned through previous exercises of that very capacity for self-presentation. This is a sense of our life as having a kind of *narrative unity*.[132] The value of having an 'integral sense of self' is that it is a constituent of many of the good things in life (ibid: 81-82). Some (perhaps all) of these can be good for us independently of whether we have an 'integral sense of self'. Take friendship. It may make

[131] For example, Velleman (2001: 35-37) claims that being recognized as self-presenting, as actually aiming at the formation of character, is a necessary condition of social interaction. Other people simply cannot understand our behaviour on the level needed to co-operate, compete, or whatever else with us unless they perceive in us a minimally stable and coherent character that we are actively engaged in shaping for that purpose. So, part of our interest in having a certain amount of opportunity to self-present is that a failure to be recognized as self-presenting rules out social engagement with others. See Marmor (2015: 7-11) for yet another account of the value for a person of exercising her capacity for self-presentation.

[132] Sangiovanni is careful to emphasize that this is not in conflict with an amount of 'ambivalence' about various aspects of our lives, and indeed sometimes quite deep tensions between them. What matters is that we are able to recognize these ambivalences and tensions *as our own* (2017: 80-81). See Calhoun (1995) for an account of integrity that is sympathetic on this point.

friendship easier to pursue and enjoy if our life seems to us to have a kind of unity. But it is plausible that, were we able to attain it anyway, friendship could still be valuable for us without our possessing an 'integral sense of self'. Still, it also seems plausible that the full value of friendship (as well as many other goods) and perhaps the most important aspects of that value, are not accessible to us unless we can see it as appropriately related to core elements of our character – as well as being related intelligibly to other goods in our life that themselves make sense in light of our commitments, desires, interests, and so on.[133]

Supposing we accept this account of the importance of exercising one's capacity for self-presentation, a natural question to ask next is why stigma should be thought to frustrate it. The answer offered by proponents of the Self-Presentation View is that stigma deprives us of significant amounts of control over the terms in which we are understood by others.[134] And as Sangiovanni writes: 'A gap between the way we see ourselves and the way the world sees us (as we perceive it) will cause dissonance and lead us to adjust or adapt. Our capacity to sustain and develop an integral sense of self cannot survive long a widening gap between the two' (ibid: 82). But what are the mechanisms by which a 'widening gap' produces this 'dissonance'? And how does stigma produce this gap?

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[133] Rozeboom (2018a: 508) questions whether we need to appeal to our 'dignity as free, rational agents' in order to explain why this kind of relationship to character is valuable. If so, the Self-Presentation View needs to incorporate some insights from the Eidelson View. I do not think I need to resolve this issue here because my main argument goes through either way. Even if part of the value of self-presentation is explained by appeal to the dignity that autonomy confers on us, a simple affront to such dignity is not a sufficient explanation of the objection that stigma fails to treat us as individuals. We must appeal to the ways in which stigma undermines agential capacities – as the Self-Presentation View does and the Eidelson View does not.

[134] For example, Velleman writes: 'The target of racist remarks is displayed… as one who has been captured in a socially defined image that leaves no room for self-presentation' (2001: 45).

Begin with the first question. Velleman (2009) argues that our drive to be intelligible to ourselves (in the terms offered by Sangiovanni, to sustain and develop an integral sense of self) itself prompts us to aim at intelligibility *to others*. In order to interact successfully with you – which is partly a matter of such interactions manifesting my self-presentation – I need to understand you (ibid: 59). And because you, like me, are moved by the aim of maintaining a coherent narrative account of your life, this means I need to understand you as you understand *yourself* (ibid: 60). So, making sense of your responses to me then involves getting *your* conception *of me* into view (ibid: 64). This can still be achieved if your conception of me deviates from my self-conception. But a shared understanding, with less 'bookkeeping' of the various conceptions of me in play, is more conducive to understanding how you are acting in response to me and how I should act in response to you (ibid: 65). We want to avoid excessive amounts of what Warr (2020) aptly calls *narrative labour*.[135] In short, producing actions which are intelligible to others also promotes intelligibility to myself – and this is one important reason why we want to avoid a widening gap between our self-conception and the terms in which we are understood by others.

Some fit between these conceptions is achieved through reliance on a shared pool of roles and scripts for interacting with others (Velleman 2009: 70). Social roles, including hierarchically ordered ones, are often enablers for mutual understanding rather than barriers to it. They provide us with ready access to information about where we stand in a given interaction, clueing us in to expectations that will be placed upon us within it. But any given social role is only likely to comprise part of one's character – so we should not make or act upon judgements about

[135] Warr (2020) discusses this concept in relation to life, and indeterminately, sentenced prisoners who must manage multiple competing expectations on their public persona.

people that are not licensed by the need to occupy certain social roles for the purposes of mutual understanding. That does not mean we need to endorse the self that others present to us – but it does require that we recognize it as an attempt at self-presentation rather than as issuing from some unalterable nature (e.g., the circumstances of one's birth).[136] For example, I should not assume that my waiter is performing that job because they are not smart enough to get a different one. To do so is to fail to make a distinction between the roles that a person may contingently occupy and the person herself. It casts such roles as definitive of her nature. At the same time, by assuming more about a person than I am licensed to by the particular self-presentation she is enacting, I intrude inappropriately upon her freedom to conceal and reveal aspects of character as she sees fit. A concern with privacy is thus a core feature of the Self-Presentation View.[137, 138] By denying possibilities for individual expression in these ways, I run a serious risk of a widening gap between the terms in which I understand her and the terms in which she understands herself.

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[136] The respect which, according to the Self-Presentation View, is owed to persons is not then a form of 'appraisal' respect. Rather, it is a form of 'recognition' respect – which, in this case, requires that we refrain from violating rights that are grounded in the harms that stigma, for example, threatens. See Darwall (1977). See also Sangiovanni (2017: 86-87).

[137] See for example Marmor (2015), Nagel (1998), Rachels (1975), and Velleman (2001).

[138] This passage is indebted to Sangiovanni's discussion of 'inegalitarian Fellows' who treat 'Scouts' as *bound to serve* (2017: 91-94). The example is taken from Cohen (2013: 195). Sangiovanni thinks that a salient failure of such Fellows is that they do not accord *opacity respect* to the Scouts – by making assumptions about their essential nature, the Fellows fail to maintain an appropriate distance from aspects of the Scout's character that fall outside the social role they occupy on a given occasion. For the origination of the idea of opacity respect in contemporary moral and political philosophy see Carter (2011).

The complaint here is similar to the one raised earlier against stereotypes, which play a large role in stigma. Stereotypes are rigid – and crowd out the particularity of the stereotyped person.[139] We worried earlier, however, about whether modelling these failures in terms of violating a requirement to respect autonomy is sufficient to account for the weight of the charge that stigmatized subjects are not treated as individuals. There is an analogous worry: whilst any given failure to achieve mutual understanding in our interactions with others may manifest faults of various kinds, these may not be sufficient to threaten our capacity to sustain and develop an integral sense of self.[140, 141] As Velleman documents, a common strategy for dealing with relationships in which they occur is simply to exit them and find others that hold out better prospects for manifesting a shared conception of oneself (2009: 66-68). We need to specify why the gap between self-conception and how we are understood by others that is threatened by stigma is distinctively troubling for our capacity to sustain and develop an integral sense of self.

We can take our lead from the observation that whilst we may exit particular relationships in which failures of mutual understanding occur, we are also dependent on others to satisfy our goal of sustaining and developing an integral sense of self. We forge a public persona through interactions with others. So, as Velleman notes, there is no option to 'strike out entirely on our own' – and there is always the risk of becoming 'a kind of social outlaw… where others would have to take unorthodox measures to deal with you, leaving you with no intelligible avenues of response' (ibid: 87, 78). This is one lens through which to understand Velleman's remarks about

[139] On the rigidity of stereotypes see Blum (2004: 261-65).

[140] Sangiovanni makes a similar point by contrasting being rude to one's lawyer with the example of the 'inegalitarian Fellows' mentioned in an earlier endnote (2017: 95).

[141] They may, however, always be occasions for shame, if we think that shame just is an anxiety about real or imagined threats to our standing as a 'self-presenting' agent (Velleman 2001). Webster (2021) has used this account of shame to make sense of experiences of shame in response to racism.

people with 'low social status': it may be, amongst other things, their comparative lack of opportunity to find relationships in which their self-conception will be reciprocated that might lead them to '[internalize] the conception that other people have of [them], adopting it, and acting so as to confirm it' (ibid: 67-68, fn8).

This observation has an important upshot for how we think about the charge that stigmatized subjects are not treated as individuals. Recall that stigma has two features that are significant for our interest in being treated as individuals. First, stigmatized subjects are vulnerable to evaluations, often drawing on stereotypes, that cast a single trait as definitive of their nature. Second, they are vulnerable to such evaluations across many areas of their life. The first vulnerability is shared not only by stigmatized subjects, but also by targets of many other forms of shaming and so on. But the second vulnerability is distinctive. And whilst the first vulnerability certainly frustrates mutual understanding in particular interactions, it is only when coupled with the second vulnerability that one's very capacity to self-present is threatened. This is a moral concern of a different kind.[142] In short, the stigmatized person's lack of control over the terms in which she is understood by others is not merely a feature of particular interactions of hers, but of her life as a whole. This is because stigma is present throughout her social world – so there is a pattern therein, owing to the application of stereotypes and so on, of interactions that hold out little opportunity for self-presentation.

[142] This moral difference in kind is compatible with differences in the degree to which stigma inhibits self-presentation. The above argument suggests that the degree to which stigma threatens this capacity will vary according to how pervasive the stigma is in one's social world. It strikes me as intuitive that the most morally salient stigmas are often the ones that are, in this sense, most all-encompassing.

An objection that might be raised here is whether the Self-Presentation View really avoids the challenge put to the Eidelson View. Have I really identified a feature of stigma that introduces a moral difference in *kind* between stigma and other shaming practices or failures to treat persons as individuals? Might it not be the case that stigma is simply worse than other shaming practices or failures to treat persons as individuals because a stigmatized person is exposed to more breakdowns in mutual understanding (prompted by acts of shaming, applications of stereotypes, and so on) and thus has less opportunity to meaningfully enact a self-presentation?

This objection misinterprets our interest in enacting a self-presentation. Breakdowns in mutual understanding are not in themselves of any serious moral import. They are an ordinary part of life. We have no morally relevant interest in ever greater amounts of opportunity to shape our public persona unhindered by social roles and the expectations that other people attach to these. But we do have a fundamental interest in maintaining a basic level of control over the terms in which we are understood by others. Without this basic level, the self-understanding that is necessary in order to function as an agent is liable to fracture. And when we generate this liability by stigmatizing others, that is a moral failure of a different kind.

4. Treating as Superior

We have tried to make sense of the frequently cited objection that stigmatized subjects are not treated as individuals. I argued that the Eidelson View is insufficient for this. If we appeal only to the idea that stigma violates a requirement to respect autonomy, we will be unable to discriminate morally between stigmas and other cases of shaming, for example. The Eidelson View thus misses the full weight of the appeal to our interest in being treated as individuals in the complaint against stigma. In order to make sense of this, we need the Self-Presentation View. Stigma undermines the capacity of stigmatized subjects to self-present. This is not true

for other cases of shaming and failures to treat persons as individuals. This is explained not only by the fact that stigmatized individuals are vulnerable to evaluations, often drawing on stereotypes, that cast a single trait as definitive of their nature – but by their being distinctively vulnerable to such evaluations across many areas of their lives.

We now face an objection to the very charge we have sought to interpret – that stigmatized subjects are not treated as individuals. The concern with being treated as an individual is not tethered to a concern with being recognized in either positively or negatively valanced terms. It is simply a concern with being recognized as an individual. There is then no reason to assume that treating someone as superior poses less risk to such recognition than treating them as inferior. This opens the door to an implausible result: treating someone as superior can be morally on a par with stigmatizing them.

To see this, consider an example from Valentini (2022: 462):

> *Messiah.* Al is a good man. He leads a fulfilling life. Those around him appreciate him and treat him with respect. Shortly before his death, he makes an unsettling discovery. Unbeknownst to him, those in his community believe he is the Messiah: someone chosen by God, with innate virtue, and deserving of unconditional respect. As it happens, Al really is a good man, worthy of respect. But if, counterfactually, his behaviour and personality were disagreeable, those around him would continue to be positively disposed towards him. They all interpret Al's behaviour through the lens of the 'Messiah-script', without seeing him for who he really is.

We should take two things from this example. First, it is possible to fail to treat someone as an individual not only when we apply negatively tainted stereotypes to them, for example, but also when we treat them as superior. We can, if we wish, cash this out in terms of the Character and Agency Conditions. The members of Al's community do not give reasonable weight to evidence of the ways that Al has exercised his autonomy in giving shape to his life. That evidence is reasonably available – in the way he chooses to conduct himself agreeably in his interactions with them – but they ignore it completely, responding to him only through the lens of the 'Messiah-

script'. And the members of Al's community disparage his capacity to make choices as an autonomous agent, since they respond to him on the assumption that his choices are not subject to the hazards of ordinary autonomous choice but are rather the direct consequence of innate God-given virtue.

The second point is that some people who are treated as superior are, like those stigmatized, vulnerable to evaluations that cast a single feature of theirs as definitive of their nature *across many areas of their lives*. Al is vulnerable not only to experiencing failures to treat him as an individual in particular interactions – such failures are a pervasive feature of his social world. These points together suggest that some cases of treating as superior should be just as troubling as stigma to proponents of either the Eidelson View or the Self-Presentation View.

Is that such a counterintuitive result? I do not think so. Examples like *Messiah* – which is certainly troubling – should lead us to conclude that some people who are treated as superior are just as trapped as those who are stigmatized. Or, to take a real-world example, it is not so obvious that the treatment of some tabloid celebrities – who may be esteemed by others – is not morally on a par, in some respects, with stigma.[143]

Still, we can also point to examples of treating someone as superior, but failing to treat them as an individual, that do not seem morally troubling. Perhaps the workers at a company think the boss can do no wrong. They do not pay attention to his individual qualities – they only interpret his behaviour through the lens of the 'infallible-boss-script' and would continue to treat him as superior even if he started to fail as a boss. But what is so bad (at least for the boss) about that?

[143] See Velleman (2001: 49) for discussion of this example. Velleman endorses the view that we can sometimes experience 'praise itself as a kind of pillory'.

This objection is fatal for the Eidelson View. Its proponents are forced to concede that, as far as a concern with being treated as an individual goes, the boss example is morally on a par with stigma. In both cases, there is the same kind of failure to respect autonomy. This does not mean, of course, that the cases are morally equivalent all things considered. There are many contingent perks that go along with being treated as superior, even if people fail to treat you as an individual.[144] And there are further contingent disadvantages that accrue to you when you are stigmatized. This perhaps motivates the sense not only that it worse overall to be stigmatized, but that failing to treat someone in that position as an individual amounts to 'kicking them whilst they are down'.[145]

This move taken on its own, however, comes at great theoretical cost. We started with what appeared to be a morally salient feature of stigma – that stigmatized subjects are not treated as individuals. But now we are forced to say that it is really the contingent disadvantages associated with being stigmatized that account for most our sense that it is morally troubling. This is because the example of the boss involves the same kind of failure to respect autonomy as do cases of stigma. And yet the former seems hardly troubling at all. In the end, failing to treat a person as an individual turns out not to matter so much for proponents of the Eidelson View.

Can the Self-Presentation View do better? I think it can. This is because being treated as superior not only involves certain contingent benefits but is (in general) less likely to undermine your ability to self-present than if you were stigmatized. So, there is one sense in which, *from the*

[144] This is not generally true for targets of so-called 'positive stereotyping', who are often marginalized.

[145] For a similar strategy see Fabre (2022: 62-66).

point of view of our interest in being treated as individuals, being treated as superior is less troubling than stigma.

There are at least two features of being treated as superior that account for this. Recall that according to the Self-Presentation View the significance of stigma for our interest in being treated as individuals is that it wrests away from us significant amounts of control over the terms in which we are understood by others. This control is removed from us because stigma generates vulnerabilities that are present throughout our social world – there is a pattern therein, owing to the application of stereotypes and so on, of interactions that hold out little opportunity for genuine self-presentation. The inability to 'strike out on our own' means that, when confronted with such a predicament, we may simply be forced to accede to the identities that are imposed on us by others.

The point about people who are treated as superior – and this is the first factor that accounts for the moral difference compared to stigma – is that one of the perks of occupying such a position may be precisely that one is able to insulate oneself from circumstances in which one's self-conception diverges from the terms in which one is understood by others.[146] Notice that this feature of treating as superior is closely related to one's access to important social goods – the same goods which the Eidelson View appeals to as mitigating our concern with treating as superior. Consider the boss again. The boss may be able, for most purposes at least, to avoid her workers who understand her in terms that fail to treat her as an individual. She can seek out other contexts in which her self-conception is reciprocated – and secure in this knowledge she can (as Velleman suggests) 'act so as to win others over to [her] conception of [herself]' (2009: 68, fn8). This point is significant for the question of whether one's capacity for self-presentation

[146] This is not universally true. The example of tabloid celebrities is relevant – as is *Messiah*.

is undermined by others' failures to treat one as an individual. Or to put the point another way, it may lead us to question whether being treated as superior does, in general, generate vulnerabilities that are present throughout one's social world in the same way that stigmas do.

There is a second reason why it might be better, from the point of view of our interest in being treated as individuals, to be treated as superior. *An individual is more likely to welcome positive representations as part of her public persona than negative ones*. Esteemed individuals often do not have any trouble working such high regard into a coherent narrative account of their life – many expect to be well received.[147] The boss example may be like this (esteemed professors come to mind as another example). And this is important for the question of whether her capacity for self-presentation is undermined, even if the valence of the evaluations that she incorporates into her public persona are not directly relevant to her interest in being treated as an individual.

A worry. Does this open the door to a morally troubling result – that stigma is rendered less evil so long as the stigmatized person has fully internalized the negative evaluations of her that circulate in the community? I do not think so. Such internalization is rarely an example of genuine self-presentation but rather of acquiescence in an identity imposed from outside oneself. Still, I do think there is something correct in the idea that when a stigmatized person fully 'owns' a stigmatizing conception of herself, she does something to deflect from the harm that would otherwise have been done to her. By 'owning' here I mean, roughly, accepting and incorporating as part of one's self-conception stigmatizing elements that were previously resisted (by oneself or the members of a stigmatized group to which one belongs). Whilst I cannot offer a full account of 'owning' here, I do suggest that the Self-Presentation View lends itself to an account of the

[147] But see Velleman (2009: 66-67) for a different take. See also Velleman (2001: 47, fn24) for the claim that 'positive stereotypes' may only hold out the prospect of a *false* sense of 'authorship'.

value of 'owning' that appeals to the ways in which it may facilitate a stigmatized person's self-presentation in an environment that is otherwise hostile to it.[148]

Let us summarize how the Self-Presentation View avoids the worry about grounding a complaint against stigma in a concern with being treated as individuals. First, we concede there is no principled reason why some cases of treating as superior cannot be as morally troubling as stigma. Intuitively, there are such cases. Second, we follow the Eidelson View in noticing the contingent perks that go along with being treated as superior and the contingent disadvantages that accrue to you when you are stigmatized. This has some role in explaining our judgement that it is, in general, worse all things considered to be stigmatized than to be treated as superior. But we cannot stop here without downplaying the salience of our concern with being treated as individuals in complaints against stigma. So, we must appeal to the Self-Presentation View to explain why there is one sense in which, from the point of view of our interest in being treated as individuals, being treated as superior is less troubling than stigma. This involves offering a nuanced account of the circumstances in which either phenomenon is detrimental to self-presentation.

5. Conclusion

[148] Tentatively, I would urge that 'owning' is a phenomenon that can only exist alongside stigma. It is not a 'post-stigma' phenomenon, but rather a strategy for navigating the challenges it presents us with (and possibly for moving us towards an end to stigma). I would also suggest that there are two kinds of condition for successfully 'owning' a stigma. First, there are conditions that pertain to the attitudinal orientation of the stigmatized people. What they take to be 'owning' cannot really just be acquiescence. Second, there are conditions pertaining to uptake by the community (or communities) that they are stigmatized relative to. It seems, for example, that there can be a social climate that is still too hostile for 'owning' to be possible. These remarks fall far short of a full account.

I have not rejected the idea that part of what is involved in treating persons as individuals is adhering to a requirement to respect their autonomy. I have instead argued that even if we accept such a requirement, pointing to a violation of it will be insufficient to explain the weight of the common accusation that stigmatized subjects are not treated as individuals. The Self-Presentation View is superior in this regard since it allows us to treat stigmas as morally different in kind from other shaming practices and failures to treat persons as individuals. This is because the former, but not the latter, generate vulnerabilities that are present throughout our social worlds – and it is this feature which accounts for the threat stigma poses to our capacity for self-presentation. I have also argued that the Self-Presentation View is an improvement upon the Eidelson View in its ability to explain when and why there are moral symmetries between treating as superior and stigma. When it comes to the complaint that stigmatized subjects are not treated as individuals, self-presentation is the place to start.

Chapter Five: Shame, Liberalism, and Anti-Stigma

1. Introduction

Stigma can be deeply morally troubling. For many liberals, the appropriate posture for the state to adopt is one of *anti-stigma*.[149] By this I do not simply mean that the liberal state should seek to mitigate the downstream consequences of stigma – though it should certainly do that too.[150] Stigma is, plausibly, objectionable independently of such consequences. Rather, the view I have in mind is that the liberal state should seek to undermine the very social norms, standards, individual attitudes, and so on that are constitutive of stigmas in the first place.[151]

[149] For example, see Anderson (1999) and Nussbaum (2004).

[150] See discussion of the harms associated with 'fat stigma' in Chapter One of this thesis. It may not be possible in practice to separate the task of addressing such harms from the more fundamental task of destigmatizing. See Anderson (2010a) on the strategy of desegregation in the United States – which seems to be envisioned as both mitigating harms contingently associated with the stigmatization of Blacks, and as partially undermining the stigmatization itself.

[151] Nagel takes a basically opposing view: 'the persistence of private racism, sexism, homophobia, religious and ethnic bigotry, sexual puritanism, and other such private pleasures should not provoke liberals to demand constant public affirmation of the opposite values' (1998: 30). Setting 'constant public affirmation' aside, the liberal view I have in mind would advocate various public attempts to shape individual attitudes in ways that are conducive to anti-stigma. Nagel seems to argue that a public culture like this (whether supported by the state or not) 'takes a stand' on more issues than a stable public culture needs to take a stand on. In doing so, it risks social conflict and undermines valuable forms of privacy.

In what follows I will problematize this liberal commitment to anti-stigma. The basic challenge is that the grounds that liberals might appeal to as justification for their opposition to stigma will support a *universal* objection to stigma. For example, liberals might appeal to the idea that, for the targets of stigma, stigma undermines the social bases of their self-respect. But it seems that all stigmas are vulnerable to this charge.

This conclusion is implausible. First, it generates counterintuitive results. We are not that troubled, after all, by the stigmatization of the socially powerful, for example a sleazy corporate CEO. Second, there is a criticism which is internal to our commitment to anti-stigma. We might think that one important tool for counteracting the stigmatization of Blacks, for example, is to stigmatize the racists. A universal objection to stigma may frustrate the proper aims of anti-stigma itself.[152]

In saying all this, I do not mean to deny that there might always be something less than ideal or *pro tanto* objectionable about stigma – that is, that stigma possesses certain regrettable features that may not be possessed by practices of mere blame, or even by shaming that is not stigmatic. If this is correct, it might also give us reason, other things being equal, to prefer the latter forms of censure (other things may, of course, not be equal). What I mean to deny is that these are always very *weighty* reasons to oppose stigma – reasons which are not easily defeated by other reasons that might be adduced in favour of the stigma (e.g., that it enforces good social norms). But reasons concerning the social bases of self-respect purport to be just such weighty reasons. So, the problem is that generalizing such reasons as an objection to all stigmas generates

[152] Some stigmas may also be supported by other shared values. For example, stigmatizing 'big-polluters' might serve important environmental goals. See Jacquet (2016).

implausibly weighty reasons for objecting to some stigmas – stigmas which we may even think are justified all things considered.

I will begin by specifying the kind of liberalism I have in mind. I will then explain why a commitment to anti-stigma is by no means straightforward on this view since it seems to require the state to steer citizens away from *controversial* stigmatic attitudes. In section 4 I will lay out in greater detail a strategy which I think many liberals will be inclined to lean on in support of a commitment to anti-stigma – namely that, for the targets of stigma, stigma undermines the social bases of their self-respect. In section 5 I will press the objection that this strategy upholds an implausibly universal objection to stigmas.

I will then explore in some detail a promising strategy for avoiding this worry. This draws upon Nussbaum's distinction between 'primitive' and 'constructive' forms of shame (2004, ch.4). The suggestion is that we draw a distinction between forms of shame that are inherently detrimental to self-respect and those which are not – and so we only have reason to object to those stigmas which give rise to the former kind of shame. I ultimately argue that this view fails because, first, we cannot bring the distinction to bear in support of steering people away from some stigmatic attitudes, but not others, without violating constraints on liberal political justification. Second, stigma *as such* is liable to produce forms of shame that are inherently detrimental to self-respect.

The primary aim of the chapter is thus simply to show that there is a real problem with which liberals need to wrestle. I do not think that liberals are left without any viable strategy for endorsing anti-stigma, however. So, in the final section I will set out in a programmatic fashion what seems to me a promising strategy for avoiding the universality objection consistently with liberal premises. I make use of Bartky's (1990) discussion of gender and shame to argue that there is a particular kind of shame experienced by some (though not all) targets of stigma that it

is an appropriate object of liberal concern, whether because of our commitment to upholding the social bases of self-respect or on more narrowly egalitarian grounds.

2. Political Liberalism

Liberalism is a broad camp. Let me be more specific about the position I intend to pick out when I use the term 'liberal'. The view is often more specifically labelled as *political liberalism*.

Modern liberal societies are, according to political liberalism, characterized by reasonable disagreement amongst citizens. This is an intractable feature of them – by providing the conditions for free deliberation, liberalism itself guarantees that citizens (as they will when left to their own devices) arrive at deeply opposing positions on the most pressing matters for the state, as well as much else. This gives rise to the question of how political justification should respond to reasonable disagreement, ensuring the stability of the liberal state in a way that is still (in some sense) agreeable to all. The liberal view that will occupy us in this discussion accepts the following as a starting point to guide us through these challenges:

> *Reciprocity Principle*: When making political decisions, citizens must rely only on considerations that they can reasonably expect all reasonable people to accept.[153]

The discussion that follows is meant to be ecumenical between competing accounts of how exactly this principle is justified in light of the preceding.[154]

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[153] This statement of the principle is taken from Leland and van Wietmarschen (2017). For important accounts of political liberalism see Larmore (1996) and Rawls (2005 [1993]).

[154] For the view that something like the Reciprocity Principle is justified by appeal to a principle of respect for persons – that if citizens appeal to 'controversial' considerations to justify their preferred policy, that disrespects their fellow citizens – see Larmore (1999) and Nussbaum (2011). For criticism, see van

The Reciprocity Principle establishes a distinction between 'political values' or 'public reasons' on the one hand and 'controversial' considerations on the other. The latter category is classically taken to include religious convictions (e.g., that Jesus is the son of God), many moral beliefs (e.g., that selling sex is wrong), and other evaluative commitments (e.g., that graffiti should be valued as a form of artistic expression). The Reciprocity Principle says that citizens may not appeal to these considerations to justify their preferred policy, either in an official capacity (e.g., as a member of parliament) or simply as a voter. The Reciprocity Principle could apply quite generally in such contexts or only to deliberations concerning a narrower set of questions, perhaps 'constitutional essentials'.[155] Since we confront the relationship between the state and stigma outside our consideration of constitutional essentials, I assume the former interpretation.

Instead, the Reciprocity Principle says that citizens should rely, in such contexts, only on public reasons ('considerations that they can reasonably expect all reasonable people to accept'). These are classically taken to include core liberal values such as freedom, equality, and fair social cooperation, as well as many of the findings of science. The idea is that there is some set of considerations which reasonable citizens may not *actually* accept – but which other reasonable citizens can reasonably *expect* them to accept. The reasonableness of citizens is partly cashed out in terms of their acceptance of these considerations – which citizens can thus rely on for the

Wietmarschen (2021b). For the suggestion that the Reciprocity Principle can be justified by the value of political community, see Leland and van Wietmarschen (2017).

[155] The latter seems to have been Rawls' view (2005 [1993]: 227-30).

purposes of political justification consistently with the demands of the Reciprocity Principle.[156, 157]

3. Liberal Neutrality and Stigma: First Pass

Given this statement of the view, one might wonder whether it is really the business of the liberal state to be shaping the attitudes of citizens in ways that are conducive to anti-stigma. When an individual is stigmatized, this involves members of her community expressing certain negative evaluations of her. This takes the form, archetypically, of acts of shaming. These evaluations are responsive to social norms and/or standards that are operative in the community. For example, suppose the profession of an undertaker is stigmatized in some community. Let us suppose there are social norms and standards operative in this community that cast undertakers

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[156] I will not offer an account of what licenses this conception of reasonableness – suffice to note that it is quite a demanding conception.

[157] The Reciprocity Principle concerns the conditions that the deliberations of citizens must satisfy in political contexts. It thus cuts across a distinction in the literature between 'consensus' and 'convergence' views which concerns the conditions that political decisions themselves must satisfy (see Vallier (2011)). According to consensus views political decisions can only be justified by considerations that all reasonable citizens can reasonably be expected to accept. So, the same considerations justify the decision to each citizen. Convergence views, on the other hand, claim that political decisions can be justified so long as they are justified in some terms to each citizen – even if they are justified by different considerations to different citizens. So, political justification is not restricted to the subset of considerations that all reasonable citizens can reasonably be expected to accept. Endorsement of either view would, if usage of the term in the literature is anything to go by, also qualify one as a 'political liberal'. I will, however, reserve the use of 'liberal' in the main text for those positions which endorse the Reciprocity Principle specifically. I leave the reader to draw their own conclusions about how the distinction between convergence and consensus views bears on the issues raised in the discussion.

as 'impure' or 'untouchable' in virtue of their contact with dead bodies. In response to such norms and standards, people avoid social contact with the undertakers in the community, thereby expressing these negative evaluations of them.

Now, I assume that the belief that undertakers are 'impure' is precisely the sort of quasi-spiritual belief about which there is reasonable disagreement. And it seems, further, given the very close relationship between the belief and the stigma in question, that in order to challenge the stigma we would have to make some headway with undermining endorsement of this belief by individual members of the community, as well as perhaps the social norms and/or standards to which such beliefs (or at least their expression) are responsive.[158] This will itself involve some shaping of individual attitudes.[159] There is then a difficulty with squaring any attempt on the part of the state to steer citizens away from the attitudes in question with the fact that these are attitudes about which the liberal state cannot act simply on the basis of their merits. This problem generalizes, assuming that a great many stigmas (though perhaps not all) are tied to beliefs with controversial contents.

To be clear, the difficulty is not (or at least not only) that a course of action like this will necessarily involve the liberal state in expressing opinions on subjects about which it is not entitled to have an opinion. A publicly funded billboard campaign for example – 'Undertakers

[158] In saying all this, I do not mean to contradict my earlier claim that it is not necessary for stigma that individuals within the stigmatized person's community hold any particularly negative beliefs about her. I take myself here to only be making the bland point that stigmas do, often, involve such beliefs – and that if we want to do something about such stigmas then we better take head of this fact.

[159] For an account of social norms in terms of individuals' conditionalized preferences, see Bicchieri (2017).

are not impure!' – may not be publicly justifiable anyway.[160] Rather, the point is that the controversial content of the attitudes tied to stigma, joined with our commitment to the Reciprocity Principle, may lead us to conclude that a concern with whether citizens hold these attitudes is an illegitimate basis for government action.[161] It is not a concern we can reasonably expect all reasonable people to share. Suppose a policy comes before us for consideration, e.g., a pay cut for undertakers. We worry, amongst other things, that this will further inflame stigmatic attitudes in the community. But now we remember that those attitudes are controversial ones – and so perhaps, at least so far as consideration of public policy goes, it is no business of ours whether people come to hold such attitudes.[162] This is the implication I am worried about here.

So, there are principled reasons why some liberals may deny that the state has any business shaping the attitudes of citizens in ways that are conducive to anti-stigma. But I suspect that for many of us this will be a deeply unsatisfactory result. We do want the state to busy itself not only with mitigating the downstream harms of stigma, but with dismantling the stigmatization of racial, sexual, and religious minorities, the disabled, immigrants, and so on. And this surely requires making some effort to alter individual attitudes.

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[160] Amongst other things, there are very general worries about reconciling such a policy with concerns about freedom of speech and conscience. Of course, such concerns may be brought to bear on any attempt to steer citizens away from particular attitudes. I cannot address this worry directly here, other than to acknowledge my assumption that some policies that are justified, at least in part, by the aim of steering citizens away from particular attitudes can be reconciled with these concerns. In general, there will be a plethora of reasons, of varying weights, bearing on any particular policy of this kind. I will not be able to account for all of these here.

[161] This is a different issue again from the strengthening of the sense of justice that may occur as an indirect effect of the presence of just institutions in society (see for example Rawls (2005 [1993]: 140-44)).

[162] Of course, it also follows that if we suspect the policy of cutting undertakers' pay is itself motivated by stigmatic attitudes then we have good reason to reject those grounds.

It also seems clear what we should say in response to the present challenge. This challenge seems to rest on the assumption that our reason for being concerned about the holding of stigmatic attitudes is that we think such attitudes are unwarranted. It would of course violate the Reciprocity Principle to rely on that conviction in political justification given the reasonable disagreement to which such attitudes are subject. But that need not be our reason for being concerned. There may be good *public* reasons (or *political* values) that lead us to worry about the holding of stigmatic attitudes independently of whether we think those attitudes are correct. And this is precisely the kind of consideration – indeed, the only kind of consideration – that the Reciprocity Principle permits us to rely on when justifying particular policies. I turn below to a strategy that seeks to identify such a reason.

4. A Rawlsian Argument (And Its Problems)

Perhaps the reason we should be concerned with stigma, and thus the reason we appeal to for shaping citizen's attitudes in ways that are conducive to anti-stigma, is that it erodes the *social bases of self-respect* for stigmatized subjects. Such reasons are not controversial in the relevant sense, and so we can appeal to them in support of anti-stigma consistently with the demands of the Reciprocity Principle.

This argument has a Rawlsian heritage. Rawls claims that self-respect is 'perhaps the most important primary good' (1999 [1971]: 386). By 'primary goods', Rawls means goods that 'normally have a use whatever a person's rational plan of life' – and the distribution of these is governed directly by the principles of justice (ibid: 54). Self-respect is a primary good in this sense because 'Without it nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them' (ibid: 386). It is thus a concern of justice that we secure the *social*

bases of citizens' self-respect. It would be inappropriate and probably unfeasible, I take it, to be concerned with citizens' self-respect in any more direct way. That is, the fact that a citizen experiences diminished self-respect merely on account of taking themself to have violated a personal moral norm does not raise issues of justice. By contrast, when person's self-respect is threatened by political subordination (e.g., state-sponsored apartheid), the bases of one's self-respect that are threatened are 'social' in the relevant sense, and thus raise issues of justice.

Stigma often seems to occupy a middle ground between these cases. The threat they pose to the bases of one's self-respect need not by sustained by the state itself, or even by the political community as a whole. Nonetheless, it is always sustained by norms and/or standards that are operative in one's (sub-)community. The threat here is thus also to the *social* bases of one's self-respect. A belief in our own worth, or (what may come to the same thing) a belief in the worth of our life projects, is partially constitutive of our self-respect (ibid.). It is usually (empirically) necessary for this belief to be sustained, amongst other things, that we find 'our person and deeds appreciated and confirmed by others who are likewise esteemed and their association enjoyed' (ibid.). Stigma, precisely because it involves members of a person's community expressing certain negative evaluations of her (e.g., through acts of shaming that are responsive to social norms and/or standards that are operative in the community), erodes this condition. The stigmatized person thus becomes vulnerable to shame and corresponding harms to her self-respect.[163]

This argument (which is not Rawls', but Rawls*ian*) is slightly complicated by Rawls' insistence that for the satisfaction of this condition 'It normally suffices that for each person there is some

[163] Thus, for Rawls, shame necessarily involves a kind of negative self-evaluation (see footnote 34 in Chapter One for further references to views of this kind). For criticism see Deigh (1983).

association (one or more) to which he belongs and within which the activities that are rational for him are publicly affirmed by others' (ibid.). The challenge is that that whilst stigmatized people are held in poor regard by members of some wider community to which they belong, we might reasonably assume that there is (usually) some sub-community to which they belong in which they do receive the kind of positive affirmation that is usually (empirically) necessary to support a person's self-respect. This may be, for example, their family or a community of people who share their stigma.[164]

I think we should only be troubled by this observation up to a point. First, we have some reason to think that Rawls has overstated how much of a security blanket such associations provide against shame – at least if the well-documented experiences of shame on the part of stigmatized subjects are anything to go by.[165] Second, even if a person's stigma is rarely all-encompassing, we can at least insist that it is (in order to count as a stigma in the first place) a fairly pervasive feature of her social environment.[166] It is thus a significant feature of being a stigmatized subject that the social bases of one's self-respect are placed in a far more precarious position than those of one's fellow citizens. This surely matters independently of whether some associations do in fact protect stigmatized subjects (to some degree) from harms to their self-respect.

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[164] See Goffman (1963: 31-45).

[165] See for example Fanon (1986 [1952], ch.5). See also Cordelli (2015: 104) for a point related to the one in the main text. There have been a number of attempts to provide a philosophical account of shame that makes sense of these experiences. Admittedly, not all of this work agrees that such experiences involve diminished self-respect. See footnote 2 in the Introduction to this thesis for references.

[166] This thought finds some echo in Viehoff's claim that 'social status hierarchies' are 'a feature of a society as a whole, rather than of a particular relationship' (2019: 12). See footnote 112 in Chapter Three of this thesis for discussion.

This argument looks promising. We have located a reason why we might be interested in shaping the attitudes of citizens in ways that are conducive to anti-stigma that does not rest on the controversial stance that the contents of particular stigmatic attitudes are unwarranted. We can reasonably expect all reasonable people to agree that citizens have an interest in possessing the primary goods, and that we ought to weigh this interest seriously in our political deliberations. Self-respect is such a primary good. And stigma interferes with its social bases for stigmatized subjects. That is why we should seek to steer people away from stigmatic attitudes.

Here then is the problem with this argument. Stigma is not always seriously problematic, and neither is the shame which we worry stigma threatens.[167] Some people think that stigmatizing murderers, for example, is morally appropriate (Sangiovanni 2017: 75). And even if we do not think this, we probably do not want to go so far as denying that there are morally good experiences of shame that we should not be seeking to protect citizens from. If citizens were not vulnerable to such experiences of shame, we would describe such a society as *shameless* – and in doing so we would not be saying something positive about it.[168]

It is not clear however that the present argument leaves room for this. After all, the reason we are concerned to protect people from stigma is not because we think that the stigmatic attitudes people hold towards them are wrong or that any negative self-evaluation formed on account of exposure to such attitudes would be unfounded. That is precisely the kind of reasoning we wanted to avoid. Rather, it is the bare fact that the social bases of their self-respect, and thus their access to an important primary good, is threatened by stigma that moves us to act. But a disgraced corporate CEO, for example, is no less subject to these ills than a member of a

[167] See for example Arneson (2007).

[168] See Flanagan (2021) for recent commentary.

stigmatized racial group, say. Even if we are not totally comfortable with the stigmatization of sleazy corporate CEOs, do we really want to say that it is a weighty matter of justice that we protect them from shame and stigma?[169]

There is another way of pressing this objection that may add additional bite. We might think there is a particularly strong case for stigmatizing those citizens who are committed to injustice.[170] One reason for this might be that such stigmas play a role in sustaining the self-respect of other citizens. For example, stigmatizing racists might help secure the self-respect of

[169] It might be suggested, at this point, that failing to protect such an individual from shame and stigma is not an injustice (as opposed to being merely regrettable in some respects), since a lot might be thought to hinge too on the nature of the 'sleaziness'. Perhaps we simply do not have reason to protect individuals from shame when this is occasioned by *unreasonableness* on their part (see discussion of racists below). Indeed, it might be thought that to do so would itself be an injustice. This might allow us to place some distance between the stigmatization of, for example, a corrupt public official (who is unreasonable) and the stigmatization of a philandering celebrity (who is not, on a suitably political conception of reasonableness). We might also think it is an injustice, and not merely regrettable, when we fail to protect citizens from shame and stigma where *the stigmatizers* are unreasonable (see discussion below of the explicit denial of women's political equality). All of this is consistent with having a general self-respect-based reason to protect individuals from shame and stigma. In response, I am not entirely convinced that there is a weighty reason of justice for protecting a philandering celebrity, say, from shame and stigma. But even if we grant this, there is a more significant problem with resting this much on the reasonableness of the stigmatized and stigmatizers. This is because there are some cases where the stigmatizers are *not* unreasonable, but where there are clearly weighty reasons of justice for protecting the stigmatized group from shame and stigma (see discussion of stigmatized sex workers below). Thanks to Jack Hume for discussion on this.

[170] We might also think that some stigma is simply an unavoidable upshot of enforcing social norms that map onto our conception of justice. So, there may also be a feasibility worry about adhering to a weighty universal objection to stigma.

those very citizens belonging to racial minorities that racists seek to treat as inferior. It might do so by providing a clear demonstration to members of racial minorities that their standing as an equal citizen should be respected by all. If this is right, then some stigma seems central to the proper aims of anti-stigma. The present argument thus defangs the project of anti-stigma because it finds objection to stigmatizing racists on the same weighty grounds as stigmatizing racial minorities. In either case, stigma erodes the social bases of their self-respect.

5. A Reply (And Rebuttal): Nussbaum on Constructive Shame

One might wonder: is it not possible to draw a distinction between the kinds of shame that it is desirable for sleazy corporate CEOs to experience, for example, and the kind of undesirable shame experienced by stigmatized minorities? And could we not then appeal to this distinction to explain why we should steer people away from attitudes that induce the former kind of shame, but not from attitudes that induce shame of the latter sort?

Perhaps. But the challenge is to draw this distinction in a way that does not necessarily appeal to our rejection of attitudes that give rise to the 'bad' experiences of shame. Of course, not all rejections of this kind will be controversial in the relevant sense that would preclude reliance on them in political justification (e.g., opposition to the view that women are second class citizens). But it seems that some will be. Perhaps we think that stigmatized sex workers experience the bad kind of shame. But then the stigmatization of sex workers that gives rise to such shame may only involve expressing the view that selling sex is immoral, which is subject to reasonable disagreement.[171] So if we are seeking a general solution, the distinction must appeal to features

[171] In reality, the stigmatization of sex workers probably involves a much more complicated cluster of attitudes, but the situation I am describing is certainly imaginable.

of these shame experiences besides the particular contents of the attitudes that give rise to them.[172]

A promising distinction of this kind is offered by Nussbaum (2004, ch.4). Her argument draws on an account of the 'natural history' of shame: the development of the emotion in the life of a human agent.[173] Shame, she argues, has its roots in infantile narcissism: the belief of the infant that the world, and the objects which populate it, should cater perfectly to its interests. The recognition that we are vulnerable, dependent, and finite, are thus rudimentary occasions for shame. Vestiges of these psychic forces are retained, to a greater or lesser degree, even in the emotional landscape of a mature human adult. Nussbaum labels experiences of shame that draw upon these forces as 'primitive' forms of shame. They are rooted, fundamentally, in a violent and irrational desire for self-sufficiency.

On the other hand, there are what Nussbaum calls 'constructive' forms of shame, which are envisaged as 'reinforcing a sense of common human vulnerability, a sense of the inclusion of all human beings in the community, and related ideas of interdependence and mutual responsibility' (ibid: 213). Nussbaum emphasizes that whilst this is a very real distinction, it is not always transparent in practice – and this is part of what motivates her general scepticism about appeals to shame in our political, social, and personal lives. Still, the distinction serves to illustrate that

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[172] Relatedly, Brettschneider (2010) argues that the liberal state has a duty to publicly criticize beliefs that deny the entitlements of citizens to be treated as free and equal. These resources are insufficient to explain why the liberal state should steer citizens away from certain stigmatic attitudes that they intuitively ought to, since these need not deny the entitlements of citizens to be treated as free and equal (e.g., the example of stigmatizing sex workers just given).

[173] Following the lead of Arneson (2007: 49), I will simply grant the truth of this story for my purposes here. But see Flanagan (2021, ch.5) for arguments against it.

there is a kind of shame which may not be inherently detrimental to our self-respect, and which may serve valuable ends in a somewhat stable manner. Perhaps this is a kind of shame that, as liberals, we think it permissible to instil in sleazy corporate CEOs, or which (at the very least) the state should not be seeking to undercut by steering people away from attitudes that give rise to it.

There are two reasons why I do not think this strategy is satisfactory. The first is again a worry about whether the solution is complete. The second is a worry about whether stigma is usually likely to give rise to the constructive, as opposed to primitive, forms of shame.[174] If this is not the case, then it seems we are still in the position of taking there to be a weighty reason against all stigmas, whether of sleazy corporate CEOs or of racial minorities.

Let us consider the first worry. Nussbaum proposes two (jointly sufficient) conditions for constructive shame (ibid: 212-13). First, the shame must be connected 'to valuable moral and public norms, norms to which it seems good for all human beings and societies to aspire.' Second, it must satisfy an *anti-narcissistic constraint*. This condition adds further content to the norms to which constructive experiences of shame must be tethered: they should exert some pressure against the narcissistic forces that loom large in experiences of primitive shame.

I think Nussbaum is right to insist on both of these conditions. Surely an experience of shame is not a valuable one if it in fact frustrates good moral and public norms. And given that the threat of narcissism is always latent in the operations of shame, it seems that any form of shame we can wholeheartedly endorse must be one which has some built-in defence against these mechanisms.

[174] I think Nussbaum would agree with this point. She suggests for instance that stigma involves stigmatizers compensating for the recognition of their own fragility by asserting their supposed 'normalness' in contrast to some group of 'unnaturals', thus drawing on the mechanisms of primitive shame (2004: 217-21).

I also agree with Nussbaum that neither condition involves 'special pleading' for examples of shame that we happen to find attractive (ibid: 212).[175] As we have seen, there are general motivations for accepting these conditions – they are not gerrymandered to fit particular cases.

Unfortunately, this is insufficient for our purposes. This is because in order to make the case that some experiences of shame are ones that we should not be seeking to undercut, we need to establish that the conditions are actually satisfied. And this will often involve 'special pleading' of a different kind – namely, reliance on the sort of controversial judgements that the Reciprocity Principle excludes from political justification. We can illustrate this point by focusing on just the first condition. Granted, insofar as some experiences of shame are generated by judgements such as e.g., murder is wrong, we can establish that they satisfy this condition without relying on any controversial judgements about what valuable public and moral norms there are. Such experiences of shame are tethered to norms that are part of the political conception of justice. But what about experiences of shame that are generated by judgements such as e.g., selling sex is wrong? I do not see how we could establish whether or not the first condition of constructive shame is satisfied in a case like this without taking a controversial position on the valuable moral and public norms that exist. So, the present strategy does not give us a way of carving out all the cases of shame we may want to undercut by steering people away from the stigmatic attitudes that cause them.

Turn now to the second worry, that stigma will not usually give rise to constructive, as opposed to primitive, forms of shame. If this is correct, we will now have reason to think that stigma will usually give rise to a form of shame that is inherently detrimental to self-respect, even in cases

[175] Nussbaum's own favoured example (2004: 211-12) is Barbara Ehrenreich's (2001: 220-21) claim that shame is the appropriate emotional response for Americans to the scourge of in-work poverty in their own country.

where there seem to be appropriately political grounds for holding that the stigma is connected to good norms. This includes the case of a stigmatized murderer. Our weighty grounds for opposing stigma will remain entirely general.

At various points in her argument, Nussbaum alludes to features of an appeal to shame that is conducive to shame in its constructive form.[176] These features are sometimes stated vaguely, and it is not always clear whether they are supposed to add up to an account of the necessary and/or sufficient features for 'constructive' appeals to shame. Nevertheless, it may help motivate my worry to show how stigma is in tension with some of the features Nussbaum mentions.

First, Nussbaum recommends a particular example in virtue of its 'utterly general character', its 'self-inclusiveness', and its being 'informal, and in that sense general' (2004: 244).[177] The difficulty with many appeals to shame, and part of the explanation of their narcissism, is that they exempt the shamer herself from the objects of shame. She is an authority that stands outside the shameful and passes judgement on it.[178] This is the importance of the *informal* character of the shaming, since in *state-sanctioned* shaming the state acts as such an authority.[179]

The problem is that stigma is never 'general' in this sense. This is because stigma constitutively relies upon an opposition between those who are stigmatized – and are thus taken to have violated some social norm and/or standard – and those who are not.[180] That is perhaps part of

[176] These include that the appeal to shame is 'noninsulting, nonhumiliating, and noncoercive' (2004: 214).

[177] The example is the one from Barbara Ehrenreich's book mentioned in footnote 175 in this chapter.

[178] Thomason also worries that *stigmatizers* exert an 'illegitimate authority' over the stigmatized (2018: 205).

[179] The illegitimacy of state-sanctioned shaming is a major preoccupation of Nussbaum's book (2004, ch.5).

[180] This point is powerfully expressed in Goffman (1963).

the reason that stigma, and the shame to which it gives rise, is so threatening to self-respect. Stigmatized people are *cut-off* from the good favour of members of their community – and so from the social bases of their self-respect.

Second, discussing the same example, Nussbaum applauds the fact that the shaming is 'so to speak, silent' (2004: 244). It is important for Nussbaum that the invitation to feel shame in this example is issued through a book, which the reader contemplates in private. She is thus drawing our attention to the absence of an audience. This may certainly mitigate the risks of coercion – there are certain forms of public pressure that the shamer is simply not able to bring to bear on the target. The resulting experience of shame is thus more likely to be one in which the target herself plays some role in coming to see the shame as appropriate – reflecting a mature (or autonomous) rather than primitive (or heteronomous) sense of shame.[181]

Publicity does, however, play an absolutely central role in stigma. Stigma is a form of social hierarchy involving collectively recognized standings of inferiority. Those who are known to bear a stigma are treated differently by members of their community. Thus, in navigating her relationship with other members of her community, an agent who bears a stigma must take special account of the epistemic position of those she interacts with – do they know about her stigma?[182] Again, there is some (intuitive) reason to suppose that a kind of shame which is experienced in the full knowledge that the members of our community will respond to some feature of ours in this way is a kind of shame which is particularly threatening to our self-respect.

[181] These oppositions, or at least their ethical importance, are disputed by some philosophers of shame. See especially Calhoun (2004) and Williams (1993, ch.4). I do not take a stand on these matters here.

[182] See Goffman's discussion of 'information control' (1963, ch.2).

To summarize, we have explored the possibility of drawing a distinction between forms of shame that are inherently detrimental to self-respect and those that are not. We might then use this distinction to explain why we should seek to steer people away from stigmatic attitudes that encourage the former type of shame, but not from those that encourage the latter kind. In particular, we focused on a well-developed version of this strategy that draws upon Nussbaum's distinction between 'primitive' and 'constructive' shame. This strategy ultimately fails for two reasons. First, we cannot bring the distinction to bear in the desired way (i.e., to support steering people away from some stigmatic attitudes but not others) without violating the constraints of the Reciprocity Principle. Second, stigma is more likely to result in primitive shame than shame in its constructive forms. So, despite appealing to these resources, we have still upheld a weighty universal objection to stigma.

6. A New Strategy

I have until now tried to problematize the liberal commitment to anti-stigma. And the central point I hope to have established in this chapter is simply that there is a real problem with which liberals need to wrestle. This claim holds even if everything I have left to say fails. In what remains, I shall try to plot a path out of this predicament. These remarks will be of a programmatic nature, and I will note the places in which further work is needed.

We start by agreeing with the broad contours of the strategy pursued in the previous section. If the difficulty is that our rejection of stigma-induced experiences of shame upholds a weighty universal objection to stigma, then what is needed is some distinction in these experiences of shame that places some of them outside the scope of our commitment to anti-stigma. (And, of course, we want to draw this distinction in a way that does not violate the Reciprocity Principle.) The mistake in the previous section was to try to map this distinction onto a difference *in kind* –

between experiences of shame that are inherently detrimental to self-respect and those that are not. The distinction should rather be mapped onto something more like a difference *in degree*. Namely, some stigma-induced experiences of shame are troubling because they are bound-up with an especially pervasive condition of the stigmatized subject as a social inferior – a position that is partly constituted by the shaming and stigma that causes those experiences.

This is all rather abstract. So let us turn to Bartky's (1990) discussion of the specifically gendered dimensions of shame, which is instructive for the broader strategy. Bartky's discussion is rich and multi-faceted – but one recurring theme is that a kind of shame experienced by women is distinctive in virtue of 'disclosing' to the subject an inferior social position that she occupies *as a woman*. As Bartky writes, it 'has a different meaning in relation to their total psychic situation and general social location than has a similar emotion when experienced by men' (ibid: 84). Indeed: 'Some of the commoner forms of shame in men, for example, may be intelligible only in light of the presupposition of male power, while in women shame may well be a mark and token of powerlessness' (ibid.). The social inferiority of women *as a class*, along the dimension of gender, is part of the content of many forms of shame experienced by women.

What explains this difference? Bartky appeals to the idea that shame is an inherently social emotion. I feel shame *before* the Other. This is true even of private experiences of shame in which the Other is merely imagined.[183] Bartky suggests that the Other at work in the distinctive shame experiences of women are a construction out of the many forms of 'demeaning treatment' to which they are subject as women – such as 'consistent shaming behaviour' (ibid: 90). In other words, these experiences of shame reflect back at the subject the perspective of a sexist society in which she is treated and regarded as inferior. And because those structures are so deeply

[183] See Williams (1993, ch.4 and Endnote 2) for an account that is sympathetic on this point.

entrenched and all-encompassing, the vulnerability of women to these experiences of shame is 'not a discrete occurrence, but a perpetual attunement, the pervasive affective taste of life' (ibid: 96).

The mechanisms of shame to which Barkty appeals are controversial. In particular, it is not clear how consonant this picture is with the Rawlsian treatment of shame mentioned earlier.[184] So unpacking some of the detail here is one place in which more work is needed. But there does appear to be something intuitively correct about her central idea. Namely, there is a distinctive kind of shame experienced by women which is bound up with gendered hierarchy, drawing the subject's attention to their inferior place within such hierarchies that are partly constituted by the very acts of shaming, stereotyping, and so on that give rise to such experiences of shame. Moreover, I would conjecture that something like this is true with respect to distinctive forms of shame experienced by further (and intersecting) marginalized and stigmatized classes as well. I will refer to shame that exhibits these features as 'Bartky-shame'.

If this conjecture is along the right lines, what general lessons might we extract for the liberal commitment to anti-stigma? The suggestion is this: the kind of shame we should be seriously troubled by just is Bartky-shame. That is, if stigma gives rise to a vulnerability to shame that is especially enduring, in virtue of drawing the subject's attention to their low position within a fairly pervasive hierarchical order, then we have strong reasons to steer citizens away from the relevant stigmatic attitudes. Notice that this argument makes no appeal to the inappropriateness of particular stigmatic attitudes, but rather to the character of the shame that a stigma may induce.

[184] See footnote 163 in this chapter.

Which stigmas, then, are likely to give rise to Bartky-shame? My suggestion is that it will map rather closely onto those cases of stigma which we wanted our liberal commitment to anti-stigma to pick out – stigmas that attach to the social categories of race, gender, disability, and so on, as well as other salient social groupings, such as one's occupation as a sex worker or an undertaker (to draw on some earlier examples). In virtue of being classified in these ways, a person occupies an inferior social position that is partly constituted by the shaming and stigma that such roles attract. And moreover, being so classified has fairly pervasive significance within one's social world. The shame to which one is characteristically vulnerable on account of belonging to such stigmatized groups is thus an especially enduring one.[185]

This contrasts notably with some of the cases which we wanted to fall outside of our liberal commitment to anti-stigma. The stigmatization of a sleazy corporate CEO is not a case that should primarily be understood through the lens of membership in a socially salient inferiorized group – and thus not a case that gives rise to Bartky-shame. It is rather a case in which we have to understand the diminished social standing of the stigmatized person in relation to the *high* social position that they possess as a corporate CEO. What about stigmatizing racists? Again, if we conceive of such stigma as a strategy for opposing existing racist social structures, this should also not be understood through the lens of membership in a socially salient inferiorized group. Of course, there is a sense in which stigmatized racists (and indeed stigmatized corporate CEOs)

[185] I take it for granted that any stigma must have a certain level of reach within one's social world in order to count as a stigma in the first place. We might then worry that all stigmas will be liable to give rise to Bartky-shame. At this point I should remind the reader that I am not trying to establish a difference in kind between Bartky-shame and other forms of shame. The difference is rather one of degree. So, whilst any stigma might give rise to a kind of shame that is as encompassing as the stigma itself, I simply want to suggest that membership in socially salient inferiorized groups, owing to their particular reach within a person's social world, warrants special attention when it comes to shame and stigma.

do, just in virtue of being stigmatized, belong to an inferiorized class. But insofar as their racist ideology is actually supported by the dominant social structures of society, we should understand the stigmatization of racists in relation to that system of racial hierarchy in which it is those *targeted* by racists who belong to inferiorized social groups.[186, 187]

An important question we have not addressed yet is why Bartky-shame in particular would be worrying. I can think of two possible justifications that are amenable to the liberal mode of justification. The first simply draws on the same resources appealed to earlier, namely that a vulnerability to shame threatens one's self-respect. The earlier strategy is now modified so as to include the claim that vulnerability to an especially enduring form of shame – as is characteristic of the members of socially salient stigmatized groups – represents a particularly critical threat to one's self-respect. Again, this is not a distinction in kind – between forms of shame that are inherently detrimental to self-respect and forms of shame which are not – but rather in degree.

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[186] Intersectional considerations may well be relevant to whether this argument applies. For example, it may be significant whether those who are stigmatized as racist are themselves marginalized along some other dimension (for example, an economic one). This does not speak against the general strategy pursued here, but rather points to a richer, yet undeniably more complicated, understanding of a liberal commitment to anti-stigma. For seminal work in the literature on intersectionality, see Crenshaw (1989, 1991).

[187] It is less clear to me whether there is anything to be said here that would place the stigmatization of murderers, for example, outside the scope of the liberal commitment to anti-stigma. Maybe this is a case, unlike the stigmatization of the socially powerful (or those who make use of dominant systems of social subordination), in which the intuition that it should fall outside such a commitment (if indeed we share that intuition) will have to give away. See Braithwaite (1989) for a criminological perspective that opposes the stigmatization of criminals. Of course, there are many crimes (including many murders) which reflect or reinforce dominant systems of racialized or gender-based hierarchy, for example. In such cases we could certainly appeal to the resources above.

Whilst all stigmas might threaten some harm to self-respect (and so might be to that extent regrettable), it is only a certain kind of threat to self-respect, at the upper end of the scale of severity, that really warrants liberal attention.

It is worth noting here that the argument just given might be understood as a fleshing-out of the Rawlsian Argument discussed in section 4, rather than as an outright rejection of it. As I mentioned there, liberals are concerned with the *social* bases of self-respect in particular, not with the bases of our self-respect in general. This makes state-sponsored apartheid, for example, an appropriate target of liberal concern, but not (for example) shame that is induced purely by one's personal moral beliefs. But between these extremities there are a whole range of possibilities. We need some way of carving out those bases of self-respect which are 'social' in the relevant sense that would warrant liberal concern. The character of one's stigmatized social identities seems like one sort of consideration which might be relevant to drawing this distinction.

This development of the Rawlsian Argument seems promising. It does, however, run into an objection alluded to earlier – that shame, according to some views, need not necessarily involve a harm to one's self-respect in the shape of a diminished evaluation of one's own worth. [188] To the extent that it is possible to do so, it is preferable to avoid hinging our argument on controversial claims about the nature of shame. Again, this is a place in which further work is needed.

Whilst I prefer the option just outlined, it is worth outlining one other possible explanation as to the significance of Bartky-shame. On this view it is not shame itself, or rather what it involves (i.e., a lowering of one's self-respect), that leads us to oppose stigmas that give rise to it. Rather, we are directly concerned with the phenomenon of *social hierarchy* of which certain vulnerabilities

[188] For footnote 2 in the Introduction to this thesis for references.

to shame are a part. Of course, stigma just is (definitionally, I take it) a form of social hierarchy in which stigmatized people occupy social positions that are inferior to others within their community who are not stigmatized in the relevant dimension. But as both so-called 'relational' or 'social' egalitarians and their critics have been at pains to point out, not all socially unequal relationships are especially problematic (take, for example, the relationship between academic supervisor and supervisee). It is, amongst other things, those social hierarchies that have the most pervasive scope within a person's life that will be most troubling from the egalitarian perspective.[189] And it is precisely this kind of pervasiveness that seems to characterize the stigma that attaches to the socially salient categories of race, gender, disability, and so on – leading to particularly enduring vulnerabilities to shame.

A commitment to equality of some kind, with implications for both distributive justice and the legitimacy of particular social hierarchies, is certainly amongst the public values to which we may appeal consistently with the demands of the Reciprocity Principle. But the exact boundaries of this commitment are far from obvious. It is not clear whether they will line up in a way which supports the argument above. In particular, I will argue in the next chapter of this thesis that egalitarians should reject the view that there is any general reason for objecting to unequal social relations as such. If my arguments there are correct, this supplies some reason to prefer the former option.

7. Conclusion

[189] For a 'social' or 'relational' egalitarian strategy along these lines, see Kolodny (2014: 303-307). For the point pressed by critics that not all social hierarchy is objectionable, see Arneson (2010).

Liberalism faces serious challenges reconciling its commitment to anti-stigma with the restrictions it places on political justification. To justify steering citizens away from stigmatic attitudes liberals may appeal to a concern with securing the social bases of self-respect. This is certainly a reason with an appropriately *political* character. Unfortunately, it also upholds a weighty universal objection to stigma – which is implausible. In response, liberals might argue that a range of stigmas in fact lie outside the scope of its commitment to anti-stigma. They might carve out this range by appealing to the kind of shame that such stigmas encourage. I have argued that this is not an easy task. An initially plausible suggestion is that the stigmas which fall within the relevant range encourage a form of shame that is not inherently detrimental to self-respect. But this suggestion ultimately fails. Liberals may do better to appeal to the idea that certain kinds of shame are especially enduring, owing to their dependence on one's membership in a socially salient stigmatized class. It is stigmas which encourage shame like this which are the appropriate target of a liberal commitment to anti-stigma.

Chapter Six: Against (Ambitious) Relational Egalitarianism

1. Introduction

In recent philosophical writings, social hierarchy, as a general category, has received much critical attention from so-called 'relational egalitarians'. Relational egalitarianism is classically presented as a competitor view to 'distributive' conceptions of equality.[190] According to distributive conceptions, equality is an ideal that governs the distribution of certain goods amongst people.[191] On this view, it is better if, or perhaps required by some deontological principle that, people possess equal (or more equal) amounts of the relevant goods. According to relational egalitarians, by contrast, equality is an ideal that governs social relations. On this view, it is required by some deontological principle that the relationships in which we stand to others be structured on equal terms.[192] This is not to suggest that relational egalitarianism has no distributive implications. For example, in order bring about equality in our relations as citizens,

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[190] Some philosophers who are usually understood as offering a distributive conception of equality include Arneson (1989), Cohen (1989), and Dworkin (1981a; 1981b). For relational egalitarian critiques of distributive conceptions, see Anderson (1999) and Scheffler (2003). Lippert-Rasmussen (2018) is one philosopher who rejects the opposition of the two views and whose own account incorporates both distributive and relational elements. Wolff (1998) also seems to advance such a position.

[191] The issue of which goods are relevant here is taken up in the 'equality of what' debate. See e.g., Arneson (1989), Cohen (1989), and Dworkin (1981a; 1981b).

[192] A possible relational view, paralleling the possible distributive views above, is that it is *better* for our relationships to others to be equal (or more equal) rather than unequal (or less equal). I have omitted this possibility from the statement in the main text because I do not think it is the most charitable light in which to present the relational view. I will say more about this shortly.

it may be empirically necessary to abolish large disparities in wealth – as these upset equal opportunities for political influence which are partially constitutive of such equality. The point is that equality is fundamentally an ideal which governs our social relations, and not the distribution of certain goods amongst people. Where an unequal distribution of goods is not a threat to equal social relations, there is no egalitarian reason to object to it.

Relational egalitarians are thus opposed to *unequal social relations* or *social hierarchy* (I will use these terms interchangeably). What is social hierarchy? There at least three views in the philosophical literature. The first view is that social hierarchies are explained by agents holding and/or expressing certain evaluative beliefs about each other.[193] The second view is that social hierarchies exist when agents act in accordance with social norms in ways that constitute valuing some people more than others.[194] A third view holds that there is no single unifying feature of social hierarchies. Rather, social hierarchies can involve 'Some having greater relative *power*… [or] greater relative *de facto authority* […] over others… [or] Some having attributes (for example, race, lineage, wealth, perceived divine favor) that generally attract greater *consideration* than the corresponding attributes of others' (Kolodny 2014: 295-96, emphasis original).[195]

I will not take a stand on this dispute here. What matters for my purposes is this. The target of the relational egalitarian critique is a phenomenon which is well-studied in philosophy. And whichever one of these options we choose, social hierarchy (a) encompasses a wide range of

[193] For examples of this approach, see Fourie (2012: 113), Lestas (2023: 330-32), Lippert-Rasmussen (2018: 71), Motchoulski (2021: 623), and Schemmel (2012: 134). This is an amalgam of the Belief Strategies and the Expression Strategies discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

[194] See van Wietmarshchen (2022).

[195] See also Anderson (2017: 3-4).

relationships, and (b) the task of uncovering the nature of social hierarchy 'is not, in the first instance, a moral inquiry but a conceptual one: an attempt to identify, and properly characterize, core features of a particular social phenomenon' (Viehoff 2019: 11).[196] 'Social hierarchy' picks out, first and foremost, a descriptive category, rather than operating as (for example) a term of condemnation. The distinctive contribution of relational egalitarianism is thus to make a normative claim about relationships belonging to this category.

This framing sets up a challenge for relational egalitarianism. Because social hierarchy, as understood by the accounts above, encompasses a wide range of relationships, it is implausible that unequal social relations are, because unequal, *thereby* ones which are morally condemned by a deontological principle.[197] It is important to separate this from a neighbouring claim. I am not denying that there is always something bad or regrettable about unequal social relations (whether because unequal or for some more contingent set of reasons).[198] We could, of course, turn relational egalitarianism into the evaluative claim that there is always something bad or regrettable about social hierarchy. But this would be a disservice to the view. There are lots of good things in the world and lots of bad things too – and pointing this out does not settle how we should balance them against each other. If relational egalitarianism aspires to have some

[196] Despite making this (I think) correct assertion, Viehoff's own position on this is murky – a point I will return to later.

[197] I will not always add the qualifier 'morally' as in the phrase 'morally condemned' – so the reader should note that it is moral criticisms of hierarchy that are my object of study. There may be other ways to critique (or defend) hierarchy that I ignore. I should add, too, that the fact that a social hierarchy is condemned in this way is consistent with it being something we have to live with for purely instrumental reasons.

[198] I do not have any strong intuitions about this claim.

fairly direct bearing on the permissibility of social hierarchies, it cannot be merely one principle amongst many for evaluating states of affairs.[199]

So, again, my claim is that it is implausible that unequal social relations are, because unequal, *thereby* ones which are morally condemned by a deontological principle. I do not take this to be controversial, but rather as following from the broadness of the accounts of social hierarchy just outlined, combined with common intuitions about particular kinds of social relation.[200, 201] I assume there is some set of social relations that would turn out as unequal according to (almost) any of these conceptions of social hierarchy, and which we would not think are condemned in this way.[202] Academic supervisory relationships are a relevant example.[203]

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[199] For related discussion, see Lippert-Rasmussen (2018, ch.6). Arneson (2010) is one theorist who thinks the only plausible way to assess social hierarchies is to see whether they pass muster against such principles. The positive view sketched at the end of this chapter is an alternative to this skeptical position.

[200] See also van Wietmarschen (forthcoming: 5).

[201] What counts as a 'common intuition' for my purposes? I think we should not rely on cases where relational egalitarians have tried to modify ordinary opinion. For example, workplace command hierarchy is often regarded as a relatively benign form of hierarchy. But it has also been the target of relational egalitarian critique (e.g., Anderson (2017)). My claim is not that the view should have no revisionary implications.

[202] This is common ground between myself and Kolodny (2023), whose account I criticize later. On Kolodny's view, complaints against relating as socially inferior can be fully 'answered' by the presence of 'tempering factors', leaving no 'moral remainder'.

[203] Consider how this social relation turns out as unequal on each of the accounts canvassed. On the first view, it is unequal because people hold and/or express the belief that the supervisor possesses certain academic merits that the supervisee lacks. On the second view, it is unequal because there are social norms governing the relationship (e.g., requiring forms of deference towards the supervisor from the supervisee, but not vice versa) which when complied with thereby involve some people valuing the supervisor more than the supervisee. On the third view, it is unequal because (perhaps amongst other things) the supervisor has certain

If this is right, and yet relational egalitarians hold that the unequal nature of social relations has some bearing on whether they are morally condemned in this way, then they need a mechanism for sorting 'problematic' social hierarchies from 'unproblematic' ones.[204] To do this, they need to answer a fundamental question – what is problematic about social hierarchy, when indeed it is problematic? Here, they must move beyond relying on the intuition that there simply is something problematic about the hierarchical nature of the relations between master and enslaved person or between Brahmin and Dalit, say.[205]

In this chapter, I argue against two versions of an 'Ambitious Strategy' for answering this demand. The strategy is ambitious because it seeks to distinguish between problematic and unproblematic social hierarchies by appealing to a single general reason why social hierarchies are problematic, when they are problematic. The first version of this strategy, call it the 'Moral

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kinds of power over academic matters within the relationship that the supervisee lacks. One way, in keeping with the first view, to avoid the result that this is a case of social hierarchy is to hold that only evaluative beliefs with a certain content are relevant to whether the social relation is unequal. An oft cited restriction of this kind holds that the relevant beliefs involve taking one to be *morally* superior or inferior to others. For reasons that will become clear, I do not find this restriction plausible.

[204] I mean 'problematic' here and throughout in the technical sense described – as condemned by some deontological principle. I also mean problematic *in light of their essential features*. There is much that might be contingently problematic or unproblematic about particular social hierarchies. It would not be feasible to give a general account of the objectionability of social hierarchy that incorporates such facts as well. I will not add such qualifications, so the reader should insert them wherever necessary.

[205] Kolodny (2023: 90-91) refers to these as 'paradigms'. See also Viehoff (2019: 11-12). It is not clear to me that we should think of these as paradigm cases any more than we should think of the relationship between academic supervisor and supervisee as a paradigmatic case.

Equality View', holds that social hierarchies are problematic, when they are problematic, because they are an affront to our equal moral status.[206] The second version of the strategy, call it the 'Basic Complaint View' holds that social hierarchies are always the target of 'complaints' (a kind of deontological condemnation), but that these complaints can be undercut by the presence of 'tempering factors'.[207] In section 2, I set out the Moral Equality View. In section 3, I argue that it is impaled on the horns of a dilemma. Either the Moral Equality View (*qua* ambitious strategy) is false – because there are social hierarchies which are intuitively problematic, but not for the reasons given by the Moral Equality View. Or the Moral Equality View must depart objectionably from the framing of the relational egalitarian position given above. On this view, the distinctive contribution of relational egalitarian is not to make a normative claim about the members of a descriptive category (social hierarchy). Rather, the conception of social hierarchy is itself normativized. This makes the view trivial. In section 4, I set out the Basic Complaint View. In section 5, I argue that it also fails because the list of tempering factors is *ad hoc*.

Together, these represent the dominant versions of the Ambitious Strategy. So, if the state of the existing literature is anything to go by, we should reject the Ambitious Strategy. In section 6, I begin to set out a positive vision for criticizing social hierarchies and outline some implications for the objectionability of social hierarchies. My remarks will be programmatic. In a nutshell, we should avoid making general claims about the objectionability of social hierarchy as such. We should pay attention to the diversity within this category. For example, we should pay attention to essential features of specific kinds of social hierarchy (e.g., stigma) that threaten certain sorts of harm – features which may not be shared by other kinds of social hierarchy (e.g., workplace command hierarchy). This will result in objections that, in terminology offered by Scanlon, are

[206] I will focus on the version of this strategy defended by Viehoff (2019).

[207] See Kolodny (2023).

egalitarian in the 'broader' rather than 'narrower' sense – that is, objections *to* forms of inequality but not *for* the bare reason that they involve an inequality (2018: 2). I will also gesture at a mechanism, consistent with this approach, for vindicating the intuition that there are forms of social hierarchy which are unproblematic. Call this new approach the 'Disaggregative Strategy'.

We can think of the contributions in Chapters One and Four of this thesis as exemplifying just such an approach. Our account of the objectionability of social hierarchies – stigma being a paradigmatic case – should be fine-grained, taking account of features which can make a large difference to the reasons why certain kinds of social hierarchy are problematic – and others are not. By sketching the relationship between shaming and stigma, and then showing how this sheds light on the threat stigma poses to our interests as 'self-presenting' beings, I have avoided relying on any general account of the moral significance of social relations being unequal – and thus avoided the pitfalls of the Ambitious Strategy.

2. The Moral Equality View

Some relational egalitarians hold that social hierarchy is problematic, when it is problematic, because it is an affront to our equal moral status. This is the 'Moral Equality View'.[208] On any plausible rendering of this view, the sense in which some social hierarchies are an affront to our equal moral status must not be understood as referring to a completely general account of wronging – as in the broadly Kantian View that wrongful actions disrespect us as beings with

[208] Some version of this is endorsed by Anderson (2010b), Motchoulski (2021: 636-40), Schemmel (2021: 55-6), and Viehoff (2019: 18-19). Fourie (2012; 2015) also holds that social hierarchies are objectionable when they are an affront to our moral equality – but that this does not exhaust the fundamental objections that might be raised against social hierarchies.

equal dignity.[209] Rather the appeal to our moral equality must be understood as an appeal to a narrower category of wronging – one which is instantiated in wrongful forms of social hierarchy, but not in many other kinds of wronging.

How should we understand this narrower category? A prominent strategy appeals to a requirement that our actions are justified *to* one another – that we are able to give sufficient reasons for our actions, reasons which those affected by our actions could themselves reasonably accept.[210] To this general constraint, we add the following: if we were to justify our actions by appealing to the putative moral inferiority of at least some people affected by them, then this is *not* something they could themselves reasonably accept.[211] Actions that are justified in this way are thus wrongful because they violate our moral equality in a particular sense, namely they are justified, at least in part, by the denial of that status (which we in fact have). This yields the following interpretation of the Moral Equality View: the general feature of wrongful social

[209] If the view were understood this way, it would simply be the claim that the social hierarchies which are wrong (along with everything else which is wrong) are wrong because they violate the fundamental moral principle. This is a trivial claim, which does not tell us anything substantive about the features of problematic social hierarchies which distinguish them from unproblematic ones. (Anderson (2010b) is not always careful to distinguish her view from this trivial claim.) See also van Wietmarschen (forthcoming: 5) for this criticism.

[210] See for example Darwall (2009) and Scanlon (1998).

[211] Here, and elsewhere, I use 'justify' and cognate terms in a purely descriptive sense to signal the activity of offering reasons. I do not intend the normative sense of 'justify', which implies that such reasons are *good* reasons. I will not flag when I am shifting between these uses, since my meaning should be clear from the context. Relatedly, I will not add the qualifier 'putative' in such expressions as 'by appeal to their putative moral inferiority'. This does not imply that such appeals are veridical – I am simply, as in the unabbreviated expression, pointing to reasons that the would-be justifier takes there to be. Such reasons may not in fact exist.

hierarchies which sets them apart from the not-wrongful ones is that they are justified by an appeal to the moral inferiority of those set in inferior social positions.

A difficulty for the Moral Equality View, thus understood, is that few people today deny that most human adults, at least, have the same fundamental moral status. An implication of this is that the vast majority of contemporary social hierarchies are not rationalized on the grounds that those set in inferior social positions are morally inferior to those who occupy superior social positions.[212, 213] Assuming many of these social hierarchies are nonetheless objectionable, it follows that the Moral Equality View cannot be construed as offering a completely general account of the moral significance of social relations being unequal. This is a problem for the view, *qua* version of the Ambitious Strategy, since it seeks to specify a single general reason why social hierarchies are problematic, when they are problematic.

Defenders of the Moral Equality View could reply that I have been too quick to insist that problematic social hierarchies are not in general justified by an appeal to the moral inferiority of those set in inferior social positions. To see this, we have to look beyond the explicit

[212] Sangiovanni (forthcoming) presses a similar objection.

[213] Insofar as contemporary racial hierarchies in the United States are rationalized at all, for example, its defenders usually appeal to considerations of personal responsibility, desert, and so on. See Anderson (2010a, ch.4). This is also a key theme of Lebron's (2013) book on racial injustice in the United States. Anderson claims elsewhere that 'The foundational justification of command hierarchy depends on the idea that some adults are fit to rule and others only to follow, because they are incapable of self-government but must instead follow the reason of others' (2012: 45). If this is a general statement about how command hierarchies (such as those within the firm) are actually rationalized, then it is clearly false.

rationalizations offered – which may be insincerely appealed to, or else involve some kind of inconsistency or blindness to other important grounds on which people are inferiorized.[214]

Viehoff offers a notable version of this strategy. He holds that we should instead examine the *social justification* of hierarchy. Viehoff has quite a technical understanding of 'social justification' in mind:

> '… at issue is not simply whether an unequal distribution is *objectively* justified, but whether it can be justified from within the normative commitments of society at large without presupposing that some people (some people's interests or claims) are of greater ultimate moral significance than others (their interests or claims). The attribution of social status hierarchy to a society is thus an interpretive exercise that requires judgments about the normative basis on which society endorses particular social norms, most obviously norms that distribute unequally certain advantages. Where, on the best interpretation available to those living under these norms, society's endorsement of these norms cannot rest on normative and factual premises that treat everyone's interests or claims as of fundamental equal importance, these norms embody society's implicit (and sometimes explicit) judgment that some people matter more than others. Social status hierarchies, we may say, *embody* society's judgment that some people are *fundamentally more important* than others; and they exist – *as a social fact* – where those living in a society cannot reasonably see how the unequal distribution of advantages could be given a social justification compatible with everyone's equal fundamental moral significance.' (2019: 18-19, emphasis original)

Suppose we examine the justifications that are explicitly offered for social hierarchy within a society, as well as justifications we can reasonably attribute to the society (though not explicitly offered). Suppose in light of these we cannot make sense of the differential allocation of certain privileges. Suppose finally that we can only make sense of this allocation by positing as a societal norm the view that the disadvantaged group are morally inferior. If this is so, then Viehoff thinks we should attribute such a norm to the society and take it to be acting as a social justification for the social hierarchy in question, even if not explicitly offered as such.

[214] In a pragmatic spirit, however, we might wonder how effective it will be for those opposed to social hierarchy to point out to its defenders, who claim they are committed to moral equality, that they are in fact not committed to it. This situation has all the ingredients of an impasse.

This avoids the worry that explicit rationalizations of contemporary social hierarchies are unlikely to appeal to a hierarchical view of moral standing. Such hierarchies can nonetheless be socially justified by such a view – and problematic for that reason. I will focus on Viehoff's interpretation of the Moral Equality View henceforth.

3. Objection to the Moral Equality View

As a version of the Ambitious Strategy, the Moral Equality View is committed to the claim that the fundamental reason why social hierarchy is problematic, when it is problematic, is that it is justified by an appeal to the moral inferiority of those set in inferior social positions. The sense in which such problematic hierarchies are so justified can be understood broadly, as in Viehoff's suggestion that they are socially justified by an appeal to a hierarchical view of moral standing. The difficulty for such an account is that it is simply false that all problematic social hierarchies are fundamentally problematic for this reason. There can be problematically hierarchical social relations that are not justified by a hierarchical view of moral standing, even in the broad sense proposed by Viehoff. Such cases are counterexamples to the idea that there is a completely general account of the moral significance of social relations being unequal that is located in a particular kind of social justification for such relations.[215]

Here is a relevant case.[216] Suppose there is a religious document that the members of a community treat as authoritative. This document commands that the community organizes itself

[215] For a similar argument, that our claims against social hierarchy cannot be reduced to claims against such relations expressing that some are morally inferior, see Kolodny (2023: 117-18).

[216] The case is fictional. As indicated later in the chapter, I am not the biggest fan of fictional examples. That said, relying on one here does have the dialectical virtue of avoiding disagreements that might emerge about

hierarchically. Some members get to order other members around. Other members are expected to comply with these orders. These relations between the first set of community members and the second are not merely a feature of some restricted sphere of life (such as the workplace). They are an utterly pervasive feature of the life of the community and its members. But significantly, the religious document states: the requirement to stand in these relations is not justified by the moral inferiority of subordinated members. Everybody is morally equal by the lights of this religious doctrine. The document states, on the contrary, that this social differentiation is completely arbitrary – and should be accepted simply because it is a religious commandment. This rationale is understood and accepted by everybody in the community, though many subordinated members are deeply unhappy in this arrangement and wish it could be otherwise.[217]

It is clear that we can make sense of the differential allocation of certain privileges within this society in terms of justifications that are explicitly offered, or at least reasonably attributable to it. Namely, we can appeal to their acceptance of the religious prescription. Such justifications make no appeal to a hierarchical view of moral standing – and we need not posit such a view as a societal norm in order to make sense of the differential allocation of privileges. The hierarchy is thus not socially justified by an appeal to the moral inferiority of the members set in inferior social positions. But the example nonetheless seems problematic.[218] We certainly should not

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whether real-world social hierarchies are in fact socially justified by a hierarchical view of moral standing, and, if not, whether it is a problematic case of social hierarchy at all. These features can be brought out vividly by the fictional case.

[217] This last stipulation is necessary since some people might otherwise find the relations unproblematic.

[218] The defender of the Moral Equality View need not deny that there is something problematic about this case. But they would need to deny that this is explained by the fundamental reason why social hierarchy is problematic, when it is problematic. I will turn to some strategies of this kind in a moment. But on the face

reject this conviction on the basis of any conviction we might have that the fundamental wrong-making feature of social hierarchies is that they are justified in some way by an appeal to a hierarchical view of moral standing.

To summarize, we have uncovered a case of intuitively problematic social hierarchy that is not justified by the moral inferiority of those set in inferior social positions – even in the fairly wide sense of being socially justified by such a belief. This is a problem for the view, *qua* version of the Ambitious Strategy, since it offers this as the single general reason why social hierarchies are problematic, when they are problematic.

Confronted with a case like this, defenders of the Moral Equality View could adopt the following position in order to preserve their view as a completely general account of the significance of social relations being unequal: deny that it is a case of social hierarchy. One way of doing this is to fix the meaning of 'social hierarchy' by appealing to moral criteria – indeed by appealing to the very features that proponents of the Moral Equality View pick out as explaining the objectionability of social hierarchy. Viehoff seems sympathetic to this approach when he claims that 'part of what seems to unify instances of the phenomenon [social status hierarchy] is that we view them as morally problematic; and we would expect this to matter for our analysis of the phenomenon's central features' (2019: 11). It is not a far step from this general strategy to insisting (as Viehoff does) that social hierarchies are by definition objectionable for the particular reason that they are socially justified by an appeal to the moral inferiority of those set in inferior social positions. If we take this route, then the example I have just given is not a case of social hierarchy, since it is not socially justified by an appeal to the moral inferiority of those set in

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of it, it is not what the justification would be for saying this here, besides a prior commitment to the Moral Equality View.

inferior social positions. It thus not a counterexample to the generality of the thesis that the objectionability of social hierarchies is explained by their social justification, which appeals to an inegalitarian view of moral standing.

There is nothing that can be said decisively against this approach. But it is important to register its theoretical costs. Consider this. We began by framing the relational egalitarian position as follows. Relational egalitarianism holds that equality is an ideal which governs social relations – this distinguishes it from distributive conceptions which hold that it governs the distribution of certain goods amongst people. The target of the relational egalitarian critique is thus unequal social relations – whose nature has been well-examined by philosophers. This phenomenon of unequal social relations has also been the focus of attention from social scientists and political activists.[219] I assume the example I have just given would qualify as hierarchical according to (almost) any of the philosophical conceptions of social hierarchy canvassed at the start.[220] If we

[219] Anderson: '… political philosophers need to become more sociologically sophisticated. Because the object of egalitarian concern consists of systems of social relations, we need to understand how these systems work to have any hope of arriving at normatively adequate ideals' (2012: 55). See Anderson (2012) for an attempt to situate relational egalitarianism within the history of egalitarian thought and egalitarian social movements. But see Lippert-Rasmussen (2018: 174-77) for an argument against using this as a criterion to assess the success of egalitarian theories in philosophy.

[220] On the first view, we can say it is hierarchical because people hold and/or express the belief that some people ought to comply with the commands of some others, and this is itself a sort of valanced judgement about the agents respectively. On the second view, assuming this practice is underwritten by social norms requiring some people to comply with the commands of some others, we can say it is hierarchical because when agents comply with such norms this is thereby a way of valuing those who issue the commands more than those who follow them (see van Wietmarschen (2022: 927-29)). On the third view, it is straightforwardly an asymmetry of de facto authority. Again, in keeping with the first view, we could avoid the result that this is a case of social hierarchy by holding that only evaluative beliefs with a certain content are relevant to whether

take these accounts seriously, there is no room to deny that this is a case of social hierarchy. Similarly, there is no room to deny that there are social hierarchies which are not condemned by some deontological principle, such as academic supervisory relationships – something which proponents of this reply *would* also need to deny.

What this demonstrates is that proponents of the reply cannot be understood as offering an account of the same phenomenon of social hierarchy which is theorized by those philosophical accounts canvassed at the outset. For such theorists, 'social hierarchy' does not primarily pick out a descriptive category. It operates, first and foremost, as a term of condemnation, picking out a specific kind of wrong.[221] In particular, it picks out the wrong of socially justifying a practice by appeal to the moral inferiority of some people situated within it.

What should we make of this view? Again, I do not think there is anything that can be said decisively against it. What we can say is that the distinctive contribution of relational egalitarianism would no longer be to make a normative claim about relationships belonging to a social category – one which has provoked independent interest amongst social scientists and political activists. Instead of making this interesting contribution, triviality looms.[222] On this reading, its contribution is to point to some moral principle (that social practices should not be justified by an appeal to the moral inferiority of those situated within them) and say: 'social hierarchy' is whatever violates that principle. This view could not (as a conceptual matter) fail to

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the social relation is unequal, namely beliefs which involve taking one to be morally superior or inferior to others. These are, I have just argued, not present in this case. This is the strategy under consideration.

[221] This is in tension with Viehoff's own methodological remarks, which I cited approvingly earlier (see footnote 196 in this chapter).

[222] This objection is anticipated by van Wietmarschen (forthcoming: 5).

give a correct answer to the question: what is problematic about social hierarchy? On pain of triviality, we should reject the Moral Equality View.

4. The Basic Complaint View

I have argued against the Moral Equality View, *qua* version of the Ambitious Strategy, on the grounds that because there are social hierarchies which are intuitively problematic, but not for the reasons given by the Moral Equality View. To avoid this result, the Moral Equality View must adopt a normativized conception of social hierarchy, which renders the view trivial. So, we should reject this attempt to provide a single general explanation of why social hierarchies are problematic, when they are problematic. In this section, I set out another attempt to provide a completely general account of the significance of social relations being unequal.

In a discussion of relational egalitarianism, Arneson describes the following view: relational egalitarians might hold that 'all inequalities of rank, power, and status are *per se* bad, and the degree to which we should tolerate any simply depends on the degree to which achieving gains along any particular dimension of equality would impose costs in terms of other values we should also care about' (2010: 32). On this view, the unequal nature of social relations is always to some extent regrettable – even if they are better, all things considered, than egalitarian alternatives because good in some other respects. Perhaps, for example, some unequal power relations are much more likely to generate reasonably efficient corporate structures than workplace democracy, and so better all things considered than workplace democracy, even if the latter is better from the point of view of equality. These costs from the point of view of equality are regrettable, even if the unequal social arrangements are ones that are reasonable to live with.

As I said in the introduction, I will not deny this position here since I think that relational egalitarians should be in the business of making deontological rather than merely evaluative claims about hierarchy.[223] There is, however, a view which parallels the one described by Arneson, but which is expressed in deontological terms. According to this view, hierarchy is always, as such, the target of 'complaints' (a kind of deontological condemnation). Call this the 'Basic Complaint View'.

Kolodny (2023) offers a well-developed version of this strategy. On his view, we have a complaint against being set in inferior positions in any hierarchy of power, authority, or regard.[224] But how then do we square this with the claim made at the outset that there is some set of social relations that would turn out as unequal according to (almost) any of the dominant philosophical conceptions of hierarchy, and which we would not think are condemned by some deontological principle? Kolodny's explanation is that such complaints are *answered* – or *undercut* – whenever hierarchy is suitably *tempered*. When such complaints are answered, hierarchies are not problematic for the specifically egalitarian reason that they involve unequal social relations.

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[223] Arneson himself denies it on the grounds that 'the bland claim that X involves an inequality of some sort in rank, power or status does not seem to thereby qualify X as involving what is *per se* bad' (2010: 32). As I mentioned in footnote 198 in this chapter, I do not have any firm intuitions about this.

[224] Kolodny's focus on the complaints possessed by those set in inferior social positions allows me to make a point about both the Basic Complaint View and the Moral Equality View. It is not clear whether either can capture complaints that are sometimes held by those placed in superior social positions, such as by celebrities who cannot escape from the public gaze. (The example comes from Velleman (2001: 49, fn28). See also Fourie (2012) and Chapter Four of this thesis.) It is conceptually possible that such individuals are regarded as morally inferior. But I assume that, in practice, they are not. I set this point aside in what follows.

Consider again the academic supervisory relationship. Kolodny's view can explain why such unequal social relations do not seem to be condemned by any deontological principle. On his account, the supervisee has a complaint against the asymmetrical power that the supervisor exerts over her. But this complaint is fully answered by the presence of 'tempering factors'. These include, in this case, that the supervisor's power over the supervisee is restricted to academic matters and is operative only in the supervisory context. The asymmetrical power relation may also be tempered by other egalitarian relations between supervisor and supervisee (e.g., equal democratic citizenship). The claim here is not that the problematic nature of such relations is somehow compensated for by such factors – rather, such factors make it so that such relations are not problematic (or at least less problematic) after all.

This view is not as such distinct from the Moral Equality View. We might think, for example, that our claims against relating as socially inferior are grounded in our status as moral equals.[225, 226] Whilst this view is possible, I want to interpret Kolodny's position so that it is distinct from the Moral Equality View.

Kolodny says that our claims in general are 'grounded in the interests of […] natural, individual persons… These include, but are not necessarily exhausted by, interests in living a worthwhile life, in controlling how others use one's body, and being treated fairly' (2023: 13). So, our claims

[225] Kolodny himself sometimes seems to gesture at a view of this kind (2014: 299-300).

[226] Another possibility is to hold that we have a complaint against all social hierarchies because all social hierarchies express that we are morally unequal. We could then hold in addition that such complaints can be undercut in some way, such as by the presence of tempering factors. (This is different from holding that whilst some social hierarchies express that we are morally unequal, and are problematic for that reason, others do not express this, and so are not problematic. That view is similar to versions of the Moral Equality View discussed above.) It is unclear to me which factors would undercut such a complaint, and why.

against being set in inferior social positions must be grounded in some interest we have in avoiding relating in such ways to others.

What kind of interest might this be? Remember, Kolodny thinks that all (untempered) hierarchies are problematic. This rules-out a number of candidate interests. Suppose we say that our interest in avoiding relations of inferiority to others is grounded in an interest in happiness (understood as a certain kind of pleasurable mental state). To be sure, many hierarchies do render the people who stand in them (at least the inferior parties) deeply unhappy. Still, this is a contingent causal claim – and there is nothing in principle which blocks the result that a wrongfully subordinated person could be perfectly happy nonetheless. So, our interest in avoiding relations of inferiority to others cannot be grounded in interests that are only contingently frustrated by such relations.

The lesson to draw is that our interest in avoiding relations of inferiority to others must be in some sense *basic*. How should we understand its 'basicness'? One suggestion is that it gets added to the list Kolodny gives of interests which ground claims. So, as well as having interests in living a worthwhile life, controlling how others use our bodies, and being treated fairly, we would also have an interest in avoiding relations of inferiority to others. Another possibility is that the avoidance of such relations could be taken as a constituent of a worthwhile life.[227] On this view, avoiding relations of inferiority to others is not merely good for us because it (usually) serves our interest in accessing other things which are taken to be constitutive of a good life (pleasurable mental states, say). Rather, avoiding such relations is itself taken to be non-

[227] Sangiovanni (2023: 257-62) makes the case that it is a constituent of a worthwhile life that we do not engage in certain kinds of inferiorizing acts towards others.

instrumentally good for us.[228] Either account of our intertest in avoiding relations of inferiority to others could be plugged into the Basic Complaint View.[229]

5. Objection to the Basic Complaint View

Return to the challenge that was originally posed for relational egalitarianism. Relational egalitarians hold that it is significant for whether a social relation is condemned by some deontological principle that the social relation is unequal. But it is not plausible that unequal social relations are, because unequal, *thereby* ones which are morally condemned by a deontological principle. So relational egalitarians need some way of distinguishing between problematic and unproblematic social hierarchies. This is an explanatory demand. It is not sufficient to point out that the hierarchical nature of some social relations troubles us and that

[228] This implies a commitment to an 'Objective List Theory' of well-being (Parfit (1984, Appendix I)).

[229] One might object that if our complaints against relating as socially inferior appeal to our interest in living a worthwhile life then they are not really basic. True. But since the significant point for my purposes is that the Basic Complaint View is distinct from the Moral Equality View, it suffices to note what these complaints do *not* appeal to. The view does not explain the claims we have on others, stemming from (e.g.) our interest in living a worthwhile life, by appealing to our standing as moral equals. For those who think that such claims must still be explained by our standing as moral equals, we could nonetheless draw a distinction between the Basic Complaint View and some versions of the Moral Equality View. We could think of our complaints against relating as socially inferior as expressing a particular requirement on realizing (socially) our standing as moral equals. This might be thought of as analogous to the requirement to justify our actions *to* one another, in terms that those affected by them could themselves reasonably accept. That might be thought of as another distinct requirement, falling out of the more general requirement to realize (socially) our standing as moral equals. We could call the view that the first requirement explains the objectionability of social hierarchies the 'Moral Equality View'. And we could call the view that their objectionability is explained by the second requirement the 'Basic Complaint View'.

the hierarchical nature of some other relations does not. We want to know why this is so. As a version of the Ambitious Strategy, the Basic Complaint View seeks to distinguish between problematic and unproblematic social hierarchies by identifying a single general reason why social hierarchies are problematic, when they are problematic. That reason is that hierarchy is always, as such, the target of complaints – but that these complaints can be undercut. In this section, I will argue that the Basic Complaint View fails to meet the explanatory demand, and so is not an acceptable way of pursuing the Ambitious Strategy.

To bring this out, consider what it would mean to provide a counterexample to Kolodny's view. Kolodny holds that hierarchy is always, as such, the target of complaints – and we have already seen examples of hierarchy, like the academic supervisory relationship, that do not seem to be condemned by some deontological principle. But this sort of case will not work as a counterexample to the Basic Complaint View. This is because Kolodny will point to the presence of tempering factors that answer any complaints we have against being set in inferior positions in such relationships. And indeed, we can agree that the relationship does begin to look intuitively problematic in the absence of some of these tempering factors. Suppose, for instance, that the supervisor, in addition to certain kinds of power over academic matters, had the power to get the supervisee to do their political bidding. This seems to speak in favour of Kolodny's view that it is only because of the presence of tempering factors that the hierarchical nature of such relations is unproblematic.

So, what would be needed as a counterexample to Kolodny's view is not a tempered hierarchy that looks unproblematic but rather a completely *un*tempered hierarchy that nonetheless looks unproblematic. If we could find an example like this, it would show that hierarchy cannot always, as such, be the target of complaints. This is because Kolodny's view predicts that such

complaints would be apparent in a case like this where the factors which can undercut such complaints are not present.

Kolodny himself addresses a case that purports to be of this kind.[230]

> 'Imagine Hierarcadia, a chivalric paradise, in which people are attached to their social roles, even though these roles constitutively depend on social inequality. Their attachment to them does not stem from false consciousness, or ignorance of the alternatives. As even we can see, their social roles provide them with meaning, orientation, and the possibility of a fulfilling life. Moreover, relations among members of the society, while socially unequal, are nonetheless what we might call "role-respectful": everyone relates to everyone else in a way that acknowledges and affirms the value that each person takes his own role to have. The value that those on the lower rungs take their stations to have is a value that is manifestly affirmed in how those higher up relate to them. The servant who finds his own worth in being his liege's loyal and dependent retainer is acknowledged and affirmed as such in his liege's relations with him.' (2014: 301-2)

The first thing to register here is that intuitions will be split – or hard to uncover at all – about a case like this. But it does not really matter for my purposes whether we think that the social relations in this case seem to be condemned by some deontological principle or not. What matters is rather the structure of the response that Kolodny can give to it as a case that purports to be a counterexample to his view.

So let us grant for the sake of argument that the social relations in this example seem unproblematic. The first avenue of response available to Kolodny is to concede that the hierarchy is untempered, but to explain away our intuition that the social relations are unproblematic. This is the response that Kolodny actually gives in this case (2014: 303). The thought here is that because the hierarchy secures (perhaps uniquely) certain important goods, the parties to these relationships themselves have reason not to attend to the fact that their hierarchical nature is problematic, since this would distract from the goods in question. So, the

[230] Kolodny's case is fictional. It would be desirable to draw upon something closer to a real-world analogue. A possible example is a monastic order with an almost totalizing influence over its members.

case is not a counterexample to the view that there will always be unanswered complaints against untempered hierarchy – such complaints are just not, in some ways, decisive here. (If we prefer, we can say they are 'rebutted', rather than undercut so as to make the relation unproblematic.) This is why it might seem to us (wrongly) that the relations are unproblematic.

But this is not the only possible reply available to Kolodny. Kolodny could instead deny that the hierarchy in this case is untempered. This reply draws upon the more general mechanism within his account for explaining why, despite the fact that hierarchy is always, as such, the target of complaints, some hierarchy is nonetheless unproblematic. It is unproblematic because the complaints are answered by the presence of tempering factors. In the case in question, we could appeal to – as tempering factors – the fact that the arrangement expresses role respectfulness across the board, or (perhaps at the limit) that all the parties are happy with their roles.

The more general point that I now want to make is that this second strategy will always be available to Kolodny in response to purported counterexamples to his view. Since there will always be some feature of a hierarchy that seems problematic that distinguishes it from a neighbouring case that seems unproblematic (otherwise they would be the same case and we would have the same reaction), we can simply appeal to this feature as a tempering factor.[231] This is the case unless there is some general principle for adjudicating what can count as a tempering factor and what cannot. Is there such a principle? Kolodny does not provide one. But I do not think this is merely an oversight. It is not obvious what would unify such diverse factors as the fact we stand in other egalitarian social relations, or that hierarchy is limited in its context, or that (we might add) social stratification is role-respectful. To be sure, these things all

[231] At least, we can hold that is a tempering factor in this sort of case – we need not hold that it tempers complaints against any sort of hierarchy.

seem significant to whether particular kinds of hierarchy are objectionable or not. But the kind of explanation we can offer for this, as I will argue in the next section, does not amount to the kind of unifying explanation we are seeking.

If I am right that the list of tempering factors is open-ended in this way, then it suggests that Kolodny's view is structurally immune to counterexample. I do not think this is a virtue of his view, but rather signals that it fails to meet the explanatory demand we started with. Recall, we wanted an explanation why hierarchy is sometimes (to a greater or lesser extent) problematic, sometimes not. Kolodny's explanation is that the complaints that exist against hierarchy as such are sometimes undercut by the presence of tempering factors. But what counts as a tempering factor is itself determined by our intuition that cases of hierarchy vary in the extent to which they are problematic, or in whether they are problematic at all. This is objectionably *ad hoc*. Rather than explaining why some cases of hierarchy are problematic and some are not, Kolodny's view simply restates the fact to be explained. We should thus reject the Basic Complaint View.

One way to push back against the argument that the Basic Complaint View is unexplanatory is to point to another way in which it *is* explanatory. To see this, consider the argument that Kolodny offers for the claim that we possess an interest in avoiding relations of inferiority to others. The strategy pursued by Kolodny is 'abductive' (2014: 300).[232] This is the basic argument structure:

(1) We point to some claim we intuitively take ourselves to possess.
(2) We see that such claims cannot be grounded in other interests we think we have.
(3) If we had an interest in avoiding relations of inferiority to others, that would explain the claim in question.

[232] See also Sharp (2022: 651).

(4) So, we posit that we have an interest in avoiding relations of inferiority to others in order to explain the claim.

There are many arguments that have this general shape in Kolodny's book (2023). Some claims that Kolodny seeks to explain by appeal to claims against relations of inferiority to others include claims against the state's force, against corruption, claims to equal treatment, and to the rule of law. The alleged explanatory pay-off of his view is that it explains this range of claims, which we would not otherwise be able to explain.

Might this pay-off counterbalance the respects in which I have shown the Basic Complaint View to be unexplanatory? I will not be able to say anything decisive here, since this would require detailed engagement with each of the individual arguments offered in Kolodny's book. But let me gesture briefly at some general strategies for showing that the explanatory virtues of his proposal are overstated by focusing on a specific argument he offers for the claim that complaints against the state's use of force are explained by an interest in avoiding relations of inferiority to others.

The first strategy is this: instead of accepting the posited explanation of the thing we are trying to explain, we could instead embrace skepticism about that same thing. Of course, the significance of this point in any given case rests on how palatable we find the skeptical option. So, how palatable is it then to give up on the claims that Kolodny seeks to explain in this case, rather than accepting that we have an interest in avoiding relations of inferiority to others that explains them? I think it would not be so bad, in the sense of imposing great theoretical costs. This is because in order to pursue such a strategy against Kolodny we need not deny wholesale our intuitions that we have complaints against the state's force. Kolodny grants that in many cases we do have a complaint against the state's force that is partly accounted for by more familiar

interests in, say, controlling how others use our bodies. Such complaints are untouched by accepting the skeptical option (that we do not have an interest in avoiding relations of inferiority to others). Kolodny's point is simply that these more familiar interests cannot do *all* the work of explaining the complaints we think we have against the force of the state – and so we have to appeal to interests in avoiding relations of inferiority to others in order to explain the leftovers.

In this regard, consider one argument that Kolodny offers here in pursuit of the second step of the argument structure above. Kolodny first imagines that we could remove the thing which is, in terms of more familiar interests, thought to provoke the complaint – that is, the force of the state, which interferes with our interest in controlling how others use our body. This is 'The Myth of the Omittites':

> 'So, consider, for good measure, the Omittite Empire. Their Emperor, the Guardian of the Ladder, does not put violators of his directives in prison or build prisons around them. He doesn't need to. This is because each Omittite, to survive the elements, must descend into his naturally carved hole each night. Every morning, the Guardian drops the Ladder into each hole to enable its occupant to climb back up. His deterrent is simply to withhold the Ladder, confining the occupant there for a fixed period. Suppose an Omittite, Holton, violates some directive, and the Guardian, as announced, does not drop the Ladder into Holton's hole for several months. This isn't a use of force or even an "active confinement." It's simply a failure to aid.' (ibid: 42)

Kolodny suggests there is still, intuitively, a complaint against the state in such a case that is of roughly the same kind as the complaint we have against the state when it uses force. He concludes that our original complaint against the state cannot be wholly explained by appeal to our interest in controlling how other people use our bodies. There is a 'moral remainder' – and we need to appeal to other interests that are undermined by the state's use of force in order to explain it. This argument is an application of what he calls the 'Subtraction Test'.

But what if, despite this argument, we decided not to follow Kolodny through the third and fourth steps of the argument structure above?[233] Suppose we granted that our interest in controlling how others use our bodies cannot explain all the complaints against the state that Kolodny seeks to explain. But suppose that instead of looking for new interests that might explain these leftover complaints we simply opted to deny that we have them. Would this involve large theoretical costs? I am not sure that it would. Even if we took this skeptical option, we would still have complaints against the state's use of force that are grounded in our interests in how other's use their bodies. And these complaints would still need to be answered, e.g., by subjecting the state's use of force to the consent of those over home it is wielded. So, the explanatory pay offs here might be quite minimal – certainly not enough to compensate for the respects in which I have shown the Basic Complaint View to be unexplanatory.

This is how things stand if we grant some credence to the intuitions Kolodny's example is taken to elicit: there are some theoretical costs involved in not being able to explain such intuitions, albeit not large ones. But should we even grant them this credence? How significant (or surprising) can it be that familiar complaints against the state's use of force, articulated in ordinary circumstances, run out in the contrived circumstances of the Omittite Empire? So, the second (related) strategy for resisting the claim that Kolodny's view has significant explanatory pay-offs is to insist that we should be careful about trusting our intuitions in such cases precisely because of their unusualness. And we should be doubly careful about extracting implications from them for more ordinary circumstances. Insofar as Kolodny's arguments trade on contrived

[233] Kolodny (2023: 122-40) argues that there is a complaint that we have against the state's use of force *and* which Holton has against the Emperor – the state/the Emperor wield asymmetrical power over us/Holton, which we have a basic complaint against. In other words, positing a basic complaint against relating as socially inferior explains the 'moral remainder'.

cases like this, it seems we have some reason to doubt that there actually are moral remainders which his view has the virtue of explaining. In conjunction with the strategy above – arguing that the theoretical costs of denying that we have an interest in avoiding relations of inferiority to others may not be large to begin with – this puts significant pressure on the strategy for establishing that we have an interest in avoiding relations of inferiority to others.

In summary, I have argued that the Basic Complaint View does not meet a significant explanatory demand – it does not tell us why some social hierarchies are problematic, and others are not. I have also outlined a credible strategy for denying that this failure is compensated for by explanatory virtues elsewhere. Hence, we should also reject this attempt to provide a completely general account of the moral significance of social relations being unequal.

6. The Disaggregative Strategy

The Moral Equality View and the Basic Complaint View represent the dominant strategies for pursuing relational egalitarianism in its Ambitious form. If the state of the existing literature is anything to go by, we should abandon the goal of identifying a single general reason why social hierarchy is problematic, when it is problematic. Suppose we accept this conclusion. How should egalitarians proceed in critiquing unequal social relations? Can we sustain the idea that such relations are often problematic independently of their effects on the distribution of certain goods amongst people – and thus retain the core insight of relational egalitarianism? I think we can. I will limit myself to some programmatic remarks.

The basic insight behind the strategy I propose is that social hierarchy is a diverse category. There are many kinds of hierarchy, and even those kinds that seem intuitively problematic differ widely in their essential features. For example, I have argued in Chapter One of this thesis that

there is a close connection between stigma (an intuitively problematic kind of hierarchy) and shaming (a kind of social act).[234] But philosophers who have theorized relations of domination (another intuitively problematic kind of hierarchy) have not appealed to any such connection with shaming – nor is it obvious why they would.[235] On the face of it, it would seem surprising if these distinctive features of kinds of hierarchical social relation made no difference to the fundamental reason why each form of relating unequally is problematic. Yet this is exactly the view the Ambitious Strategy encourages us to adopt. I say we do better to take this diversity at face value. This means adopting a strategy that is neatly summarized by van Wietmarschen: 'the relational egalitarian should distinguish different types of social inequality, and argue that certain types of social inequality are objectionable while others are not, and that when social inequalities are objectionable they can be so for different reasons' (forthcoming: 5). Call this the 'Disaggregative Strategy'.[236]

To give an example of how this strategy might proceed, let us return to the case of stigma. I have argued in Chapter Four of this thesis that stigma threatens our interest in having a certain kind of control over our public persona – and this is explained by certain essential features of the phenomena, amongst other things the kinds of constraining representation to which the target of stigma is subject (shaming, stereotyping, and so on).[237] One might worry that this kind of argument risks turning egalitarian objections to hierarchy into the kind of evaluative view criticized earlier. But the claim is not merely that certain kinds of hierarchy threaten morally important interests, and that the world is better (other things equal) when such interests are

[234] See also Braithwaite (1989), Nussbaum (2004), and Thomason (2018).

[235] See for example Pettit (2012).

[236] The label is also taken from van Wietmarschen (forthcoming).

[237] See also Sangiovanni (2017) and Velleman (2001).

served. Rather, egalitarians should hold that the threat stigma poses to these interests grounds a deontological requirement that we not be stigmatized.[238] So, the Disaggregative Strategy can continue to have a fairly direct bearing on the permissibility of certain kinds of hierarchy.

If relational egalitarians opt to argue in this way, this has a number of important upshots. First, since the argument for the objectionability of stigma is not grounded in any general claim about why hierarchy is problematic, when it is problematic, it has no immediate bearing on the objectionability of other kinds of hierarchy. Of course, other hierarchies may share the essential features of stigma that give rise to the objection. But this must be shown by a further stretch of argument. Moreover, the argument is consistent with other kinds of hierarchy being problematic, when they are problematic, for reasons besides the one appealed to here. It is at least not obvious, for example, that relations of domination will be problematic for exactly the same reason that stigma is.

Second, this kind of argument demonstrates that the objections raised against hierarchy within the Disaggregative Strategy do not appeal to a bare concern with equality. A bare concern with equality can be found, for example, in the 'telic' egalitarian view which says that the world just is better when people possess (more) equal amounts of relevant goods.[239] It can also be found in the Basic Complaint View which holds that hierarchy is always, as such, the target of complaints. By contrast, the Disaggregative approach paves the way for a range of strategies for criticizing hierarchy including, as I have shown, highlighting certain harms or bad consequences for

[238] This concern, I should add, is not obviously reducible to a concern with an equal or more equal distribution of certain goods amongst people. So, the egalitarian view I am developing here is plausibly independent of a distributive conception of equality.

[239] See Parfit (1997) for discussion.

individuals that are threatened by certain forms of hierarchy, such as stigma.[240] In terminology offered by Scanlon, these objections are egalitarian in the 'broader' rather than 'narrower' sense – it is an objection *to* a form of inequality but not *for* the bare reason that it involves an inequality (2018: 2). I do not think this should be viewed as weakening the egalitarian credentials of the view, but rather as the feature of the Disaggregative approach which enables it to avoid the implausible Ambitious Strategy.

The Disaggregative Strategy picks up a number of threads left hanging from the rejection of the Moral Equality View and the Basic Complaint View. First, despite my earlier arguments, many of us will hold onto the sense that there is something deeply problematic about social hierarchy that is in some way justified by an appeal to the moral inferiority of those set in inferior social positions. The first thing to say here is that this claim is in fact entirely consistent with the Disaggregative Strategy. That a social hierarchy is justified in this way can be amongst the plethora of reasons we might appeal to for objecting to certain kinds of social hierarchy. Once this concern with moral equality is disentangled from the Ambitious Strategy, I no longer see any reason to object to it.

Once we view this concern through the lens of the Disaggregative Strategy, we are forced to abandon some of the argumentative ploys identified earlier. We should no longer be tempted to

[240] Such consequences are only contingently associated with stigma. It is possible to imagine (and indeed there probably are) cases of stigma in which the relevant consequences do not arise. Still, this would not undermine the claim that stigma as such is problematic since, as Sangiovanni (2017: 109-10; forthcoming) argues, we can point to essential features of stigma that robustly threaten these consequences for stigmatized people. This is sufficient to ground a deontological requirement not to stigmatize even when such consequences do not in fact arise. This may also dampen the worry that the view is insufficiently egalitarian since the harms identified are closely connected to the essential features of this unequal social relation.

reason from the general normative claim that social hierarchy is problematic because it is an affront to equal moral status to claim about a particular social hierarchy that, because it is problematic, it must involve an affront to equal moral status. Since we now accept that there are no such general claims to be made about the significance of social relations being unequal, we will see that substantive work must be undertaken to show that a particular social hierarchy is an affront to equal moral status. Part of this work may involve attending to whether the parties situated with the social hierarchy are in fact moral equals. Many philosophers have doubted whether it true, as a general matter, that we are moral equals – and some have even embraced an inegalitarian view of moral standing.[241] This is troubling for the Moral Equality View. Since there is no equal moral status to be disrespected between moral unequals, and disrespect for such status is the single general reason why social hierarchy is problematic, when it is problematic, social hierarchy between moral unequals cannot be problematic.[242] And yet many of us would hold onto the sense that such hierarchies would be problematic.[243] On the

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[241] For criticism of the thesis of moral equality, see Arneson (2014) and McMahan (2008). For work that is more sympathetic to the idea that all humans are morally equal – that is, that all humans possess an equal standing that underwrites a range of claims to equal treatment – see Carter (2011), Kittay (2005), and Waldron (2017). See McMahan (2008) for an inegalitarian view of moral standing.

[242] Anderson: 'If Aristotle had been right to suppose that significant classes of people were natural slaves, a stable egalitarian social order would be impossible' (2012: 45). Anderson goes on to make some confusing remarks about command hierarchies in which some intellectually disabled humans – who, I take it, she thinks of as exceptions to the thesis of moral equality – are set in inferior positions: '… while the fact that some adults suffer from such disabilities justifies paternalistic authority in their cases, such authority is never unaccountable or arbitrary' (ibid). The question this surely invites is why such authority would need to be accountable if the objectionability of unaccountable social hierarchies is explained by the moral equality of the parties and the parties in this case are not morally equal? I am not saying this question is unanswerable – only that the Moral Equality View itself does not furnish us with the answers.

[243] Sangiovanni (forthcoming) presses this point.

Disaggregative Strategy, by contrast, we do not need to fear the result that some people are moral unequals. There are many reasons why social hierarchy could be problematic even if it is not an affront to equal moral status.[244, 245]

A thread left hanging from my criticisms of the Basic Complaint View is that many of the tempering factors seem relevant to whether a particular hierarchy is objectionable or not. The Disaggregative Strategy can explain some of these intuitions. One possible explanation is that some of these factors can undermine or mitigate the harms that are threatened by particular kinds of hierarchy. For example, in Chapter Four of this thesis I argued that the pervasiveness of the shaming to which one is subject makes a large difference to whether it threatens our interest in controlling our public persona, as in stigma. As Sangiovanni writes: 'An insult… is not correctly seen as an attack that is part of a systematic societal pattern whose effects reverberate throughout one's life and one's dealings with others' (2017: 96). So, the Disaggregative Strategy can agree with Kolodny that the limited context of some hierarchies is significant to whether the hierarchy is problematic or not. But importantly, such factors do not undercut a general complaint against hierarchy as such. Instead, they are related to harms that

[244] It could, for example, still threaten some of the harms mentioned earlier. For the claim that moral unequals could still be under a requirement to relate as moral 'sufficients', see Bengston and Lippert-Rasmussen (2023).

[245] Rozeboom (2018: 164) draws our attention to related complexities that the Disaggregative Strategy enables us to embrace. The wrong which is committed when someone is treated as inferior within an otherwise egalitarian social context is different from the wrong which is committed when someone's inferior social position is reinforced. If we understand both wrongs in terms of a violation of moral equality, we gloss over this difference. I am sympathetic to this argument. Rozeboom, however, takes this as evidence that our standing as a moral equal is dependent on our social standing – and so those set in inferior social positions may not count as moral equals. I do not endorse that further stretch of argument here.

are associated with certain kinds of hierarchy, but not with others.[246] On this account, hierarchy is not presumptively problematic.

Finally, what implications does the Disaggregative Strategy have with respect to *un*problematic hierarchies? What mechanisms does it yield for vindicating some hierarchies as unrproblematic? The first thing to note is that since on this account there is no single general reason why hierarchies are objectionable (when they are) we should not assume that there is a uniquely correct path to vindicating some hierarchies as unproblematic either. That said, it seems that many intuitively acceptable hierarchies will admit of a kind of *institutional* justification: that 'It is justified to have an institution that generates inequalities of this kind' (Scanlon (2018: 41)).[247] If it is justified to have institutions like universities that generate stratification between supervisors and supervisees, because of the benefits they secure for students and society at large, then perhaps such stratification is justified as well.

7. Conclusion

[246] I am not sure whether this sort of explanation can be generalized so that the significance of all whole range of 'tempering factors' is explained by their role in undermining or mitigating harms that are threatened by particular kinds of hierarchy. It is important to note that even if it can be generalized in this way, this would not provide the kind of unifying principle that we sought on behalf of the Basic Complaint View in section 5. This is because, again, the focus of our complaints against hierarchy is not their inequality as such, but rather the various kinds of harms that are associated with some hierarchies (and not with others).

[247] Scanlon (2018: 40-41) sees this as part of a 'three-level' justification for responding to objections to inequality. Institutionally justified inequality must also satisfy requirements of *Procedural Fairness* and *Substantive Opportunity*. I agree with Scanlon that there are other conditions that acceptable inequalities must satisfy.

In conclusion, I have argued that we should abandon Ambitious versions of relational egalitarianism. These views seek to distinguish between problematic and unproblematic social hierarchies by appealing to a single general reason why social hierarchy is problematic, when it is problematic. If we hold that social hierarchy is problematic when and because it is an affront to our equal moral status, either we will fail to satisfy the demands of the Ambitious Strategy – since there are some case of intuitively problematic social hierarchy, but not for the reason suggested by this view. Or we will avoid this result at the cost of trivializing the account. If we instead hold that social hierarchy is always, as such, the target of complaints – that are sometimes undercut – then our account is in important respects unexplanatory. More broadly, we should abandon such attempts to offer a fully general account of the moral significance of social relations being unequal. We should instead embrace a Disaggregative Strategy. There are many kinds of social hierarchy – and there are harms which are associated with the essential features of some kinds of social hierarchy but not others. We can thus form objections to certain kinds of hierarchy that are egalitarian in the 'broader' rather than 'narrower' sense – that is, objections *to* forms of inequality but not *for* the bare reason that they involve an inequality. There are some kinds of social hierarchy that are unproblematic. But since we do not embrace an Ambitious form of relational egalitarianism, there need not be a general explanation of this fact. Rather, a range of explanations can be drawn upon to vindicate the claim.

8. Endnote to Chapter Six: On Relational Egalitarianism and Democratic Theory

Democratic theory has occupied a central place in much of the writings on relational egalitarianism.[248] This is so much so that Arneson (2010) has labelled one kind of distinct view in the literature 'democratic sufficientarianism'. According to this view, the concern of relational

[248] For examples, see Anderson (1999; 2010a, ch.5).

egalitarianism is that we are able to function as democratic citizens. So, we should reject hierarchies that undermine our ability to so function – as well as any distributive inequalities (or whatever else) that does so. This view is at base a form of relational egalitarianism because our ability to function as democratic citizens is itself partly relational – it is partly a matter of relating to our fellow citizens as democratic equals.

This has some fairly direct implications for the objectionability of particular kinds of hierarchical social relations. Anderson draws our attention to so-called hierarchies of 'standing':

> '…whereby those at the top are entitled to make claims on others in their own right, and to enjoy rights and privileges, and while those below are denied rights or granted an inferior set of rights and privileges, and denied voice to make claims on their own, or given an inferior forum in which to make their claims.' (2008: 144)

Such hierarchies are absolutely prohibited (ibid: 145). Slave ownership, state-sponsored apartheid, and invidious forms of discrimination are all inconsistent with relating as democratic equals, to give just some relevant examples.

Of course, this still leaves many social hierarchies on the table. There are, for example, informal stigmas or – to choose a very different kind of case – hierarchies of military order in which generals have asymmetrical power over privates, say. What are we to say about these? There may, in the first instance, be a concern about the practicability of eliminating all forms of hierarchy – even if we were to assume, for the moment, that this would be desirable. Some forms of stigma, for instance, may be an (almost) inevitable of upshot of having any kind of moral code that we hold each other accountable for maintaining. And some unequal power relations may be by far the most achievable way of generating reasonably efficient corporate structures.[249]

[249] For relevant discussion on this last point, see Anderson (2017).

But recall, democratic sufficientarians are only concerned about social hierarchies insofar as they undermine our ability to function as democratic citizens. Plausibly, many hierarchies are unproblematic from this perspective. A teacher may have the power to assess their student's academic performance, but they have no such power to get their student to do their political bidding, for example. What powers they do have over their student are restricted by their content and by the context in which they are operative – i.e., in the classroom only. Something analogous could be said about hierarchies of military order. And we might speculate, whilst stigmas which attach to social categories such as race, gender, disability, and so on threaten our standing as democratic equals, those which are fairly mild, or which enforce morally good norms, pose no such difficulty. Democratic sufficientarianism may underwrite a limited policy of anti-stigma.[250] As Anderson says, the aim is 'to sharply limit the grounds on which social hierarchy can be based, and the scope of its authority' (2008: 145).[251]

The democratic sufficientiarian approach then yields an initially plausible mechanism for sorting the problematic hierarchies from the unproblematic ones. That is, it gives us a completely general account of the moral significance of social relations being unequal. Such relations are problematic, when they are, because they undermine our ability to function as democratic

[250] For relevant discussion, see Chapter Five of this thesis.

[251] Nussbaum's arguments against state-sanctioned shaming penalties (2004, ch.5) provide another good example of the democratic sufficientarian approach. As I understand her, Nussbaum believes that shaming is an (in most cases) unfortunate but (in some cases) probably inevitable feature of human life (ibid, ch.4). But the state in particular should absolutely refrain from shaming its citizens. This is because state-sanctioned shaming renders a hierarchy of esteem official – which either turns it into a hierarchy of standing (and thus renders it definitionally incompatible with the ideal of democratic equality) or exacerbates the hierarchy of esteem to such an extent that it compromises the shamed person's ability to function as a democratic equal.

citizens. Is the democratic sufficientarian view then a viable (Ambitious) alternative to the two versions of the Ambitious Strategy canvassed above?

I think that depends on further specifications of the view. This is because there are at least two ways of interpreting the democratic sufficientarian approach, and on one interpretation it is simply a version of the Moral Equality View. If we interpret the view that way, then it may be vulnerable to some objections raised in this chapter.[252]

Why might democratic sufficientarianism be understood as a version of the Moral Equality View? The answer is that some proponents of the view seem to explain the requirement to relate to one another as democratic equals by appeal to a more fundamental concern with relating to one another (socially) in ways that realize our *moral* equality. For example, Anderson writes:

> '[Egalitarians] condemn [social inequality] as morally wrong in the specific sense that it is *unjust* to those placed in inferior positions… it is with respect to judgements of justice that the specifically *egalitarian* assumption of the moral equality of persons plays the most critical role'. (2012: 44-45, emphasis original)

Anderson then goes on to present a democratic view as one way of cashing out the vision of an egalitarian society free from social inequality (ibid: 46-47; 51-53).

This way of setting things out makes the appeal to moral equality look like an answer to the question: Why should we relate as democratic equals?[253] Of course, the democratic

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[252] Note, for example, the charge of triviality and the discussion of hierarchy between moral unequals in section 6.

[253] Though Anderson does also say: 'The egalitarian assumptions of moral equality are more plausible when they are employed dialectically against defenders of social hierarchy than when they are taken as foundational philosophical claims on the basis of which a just theory of social order can be built a priori' (2012: 45). This

sufficientarian need not claim that our moral equality requires, at all times and in all places, that we relate as democratic equals – our moral equality may be compatible with multiple forms of social organization.[254, 255] (Though, the democratic sufficientarian may hold that democracy is the only feasible form for us here and now.) Still, on such an approach, the concern with relating as democratic equals moves through a concern with relating socially in ways that realize our moral equality – social hierarchies are objectionable, when they are objectionable, because they fail to realize (socially) our moral equality, either by coexisting with our standing as democratic equals, or by coexisting with some other way of relating socially that manifests our moral equality. This is just a version of the Moral Equality View, according to which the fundamental reason why social hierarchies are objectionable, when indeed they are objectionable, is that they violate our moral equality.

There is another way to interpret the democratic sufficientarian approach. On this approach, we resist the demand to answer the question: why should we relate as democratic equals? This is not to deny that the requirement to relate as democratic equals is justified (again, probably not in all times and places) by some more fundamental moral principle. It is simply to hold that appealing to such justification is not necessary to sort the problematic hierarchies from the unproblematic ones. We can make a compelling argument drawing only on distinctively democratic values.

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may suggest that Anderson actually endorses the second interpretation of the democratic sufficientarian view that I will outline in a moment. I do not think her view on this is clear.

[254] Anderson, for example, also discusses anarchism in her paper (2012: 46, 51-53).

[255] And, of course, our moral equality imposes many constraints on life besides opting for one of these forms of social organization.

A project which is consistent with this approach is *political liberalism*.[256] According to political liberalism, modern liberal societies are characterized by intractable forms of reasonable disagreement about the most pressing matters for the state, as well as much else. Political liberals claim that an appropriate response to this fact, and one which is amenable to the stability of a liberal society, is that citizens justify their preferred policies by appealing only to considerations that their fellow (reasonable) citizens could reasonably be expected to accept. They should avoid relying on other 'controversial' considerations. The considerations that are usually thought to satisfy this requirement include core liberal and democratic values such as freedom, equality, and fair social cooperation, as well as many of the findings of science.

Political liberals have shown some interest in social hierarchy. I take Rawls' (1999 [1971]: 386) arguments about the importance of the 'social bases of self-respect', discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis, to be an example of work that points to how forms of social hierarchy can be in tension with such values. Still, I think it is fair to say that such work has not so far tried to offer a completely general account of the moral significance of social relations being unequal. Moreover, such work has not generally conceived of itself through the prism of relational egalitarianism.[257] Finally, the question of how political liberalism is able to justify its own restrictions on political justification takes us far beyond the issues that can be addressed here.[258] For these reasons, I leave examination of this view – as an alternative to the Disaggregative Strategy which I favour – for another occasion.

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[256] See footnote 153 in Chapter Five of this thesis for references.

[257] But see Anderson (1999) for her sympathies with political liberalism.

[258] See footnote 154 in Chapter Five of this thesis for references. There is a worry that if the restriction is justified by a principle of respect for persons, then there is a risk, in turn, that the normativity of democratic values, and thus the rejection of certain social hierarchies on the basis of such values, is ultimately supported by a concern with moral equality – turning this view, again, into a version of the Moral Equality View.

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