

## CHAPTER 4

# *Ordinary self-consciousness*

*Lucy O'Brien*

“the thinking about others thinking of us . . . excites a blush”

Darwin ([1872] 1965, 325)

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### *I. Ordinary self-consciousness*

When one walks into a room full of strangers one may describe oneself as “feeling self-conscious.” To feel self-conscious is to be conscious of oneself as an object represented by others. It seems to me that this kind of self-consciousness is a pervasive phenomenon that is worthy of our attention. It has, however, been rather overlooked in philosophy. When philosophy has focused on self-consciousness it has been the kind of self-consciousness that characterizes our ability to think about ourselves in the first person. While that ability might be required for feeling self-conscious, the latter self-consciousness is I think a distinct and important phenomenon. In this chapter I will explore the nature of what I will call ‘ordinary self-consciousness’ (OSC) and offer an analysis that aims to identify its key components.

My main aim is to identify, and to look closely at the phenomenon. However, I will also raise the suggestion that the phenomenon has a crucial role to play in explaining and understanding the nature of the self-conscious emotions of guilt, shame, pride, and embarrassment. Darwin has tended to

I have given this paper as a talk on a number of occasions: “The Self and Self-Knowledge” Conference, Institute of Philosophy, London; “Workshop on the Self,” Fribourg; Research Seminar, Essex University; 12th Philosophy and Psychiatry Conference, Lisbon; APIC Research Seminar, Institute Jean Nicod. I am very grateful to audiences for excellent questions and discussion that have directed how the paper was written up. My thanks for very helpful written comments to JeeLoo Liu, co-editor of this volume. I am also very grateful to Chris Peacocke for discussion on these topics and for written comments on the chapter.

be slightly mocked by psychologists of the emotions for his tendency to treat all self-conscious emotions as if they were like embarrassment, and to treat embarrassment as merely being the focus of attention of others. Surely, not all emotions that involve “the thinking about others thinking of us” excite the blush associated with embarrassment, and surely more is needed for embarrassment than just being the focus of others. Guilt, shame, pride, and hubris all involve others thinking about us, but often do not, and certainly need not, make us blush. It is of course right that not all self-conscious emotions are like embarrassment. Nevertheless, I think that Darwin might be right in thinking that a relatively simple self-conscious emotion is at the heart of the family of self-conscious emotions. It is not that the relevant emotion is an emotion of which the other self-conscious emotions are a variety. Rather it is what we might call an ‘*ur*-self-conscious emotion’ – an emotion which will enable us to understand the others, and out of which the others develop. Nor do I think the relevant emotion is embarrassment, rather it is ordinary self-consciousness. I will not, in this piece, try to account for the particular relations between ordinary self-conscious and the distinct self-conscious emotions. Rather, I will table a general hypothesis that ordinary self-consciousness is a phenomenon that has a role to play in our ability to have self-conscious emotions at all.

Before offering some quotations, which I hope will serve to fix and bring color to the notion of self-consciousness I am interested in exploring, let me distinguish between ordinary self-consciousness understood as a conscious mental attitude and ordinary self-consciousness understood as a way of acting. We talk not only about someone feeling self-conscious when, for example, she walks into a room full of strangers, but we also talk about someone acting self-consciously when in the presence of others. In this chapter I am going to take feeling self-conscious, rather than acting self-consciously, to be my focus. I take it that feeling self-conscious is the primary notion in terms of which acting self-consciously will be understood. However, the relation between feeling self-conscious and acting self-consciously is not straightforward. Acting self-consciously is arguably the way individuals act in paradigm cases of feeling self-conscious. But one can feel self-conscious and not act self-consciously, and act self-consciously without feeling self-conscious. Further, feeling self-conscious will lead different individuals to act differently; and a single individual will act differently on different occasions, whilst feeling self-conscious. However we are to explain the relation between the two, my interest in this piece will be with the phenomenon of feeling self-conscious, however it manifests itself in action.

## 2. Some examples

In this section I want rather to step aside and let more gifted authors do some of the work of identifying and describing the phenomenon of ordinary self-consciousness for me. In particular, I want to use some quotations from fiction, as well as a couple from philosophy, to help get a grip on the phenomenon. These quotations serve to illustrate the phenomenon both by describing what it is to be in the grip of it, and just as effectively, by describing the complete absorption in another which can push aside the feeling of self-consciousness, and which the return to self-consciousness in relation to the other breaks up. I hope I will be excused for quoting extensively here. The authors quoted (Scott Fitzgerald, Eliot, Sartre) are each clearly aiming to conjure in their readers a vivid recognition of the state of the subject being described. I hope to use this conjuring as an effective way of presenting the phenomenon before going on to analyze and dissect it.

First, let me start with a quotation from F. Scott Fitzgerald:

Gradually he [Amory] realized that he was really walking up University Place, self-conscious about his suitcase, developing a new tendency to glare straight ahead when he passed any one. Several times he could have sworn that men turned to look at him critically. He wondered vaguely if there was something the matter with his clothes, and wished he had shaved that morning on the train. He felt unnecessarily stiff and awkward among these white-flannelled, bareheaded youths, who must be juniors and seniors, judging from the *savoir faire* with which they strolled. (Fitzgerald 2000, 34)

As we read this we can easily enough imagine the slight stiffness in the neck, the inhibition of the free flow of action, and the sense that to turn left or right would constitute a deliberate act, one that would need a definite decision. Amory walks conscious of others and conscious of how he appears to others – in particular how his external features, his clothes, his suitcase, his skin might be taken. Amory's continued self-consciousness is in contrast to Maggie's loss of self-consciousness, and its painful return, in the following scene from Eliot. In the scene, at the book club, Maggie's friend Lucy is delighted to introduce Maggie to Stephen, her fiancé. Lucy hopes that they like each other. They do, very much:

Stephen became quite brilliant in an account of Buckland's Treatise, which he had just been reading. He was rewarded by seeing Maggie let her work fall, and gradually get so absorbed in his wonderful geological story that she sat looking at him, leaning forward with crossed arms, and with an entire absence of self-consciousness, as if he had been the snuffiest of old professors, and she a downy-lipped alumna. He was so fascinated by the clear, large gaze that at last he forgot to

look away from it occasionally toward Lucy; but she, sweet child, was only rejoicing that Stephen was proving to Maggie how clever he was, and that they would certainly be good friends after all.

"I will bring you the book, shall I, Miss Tulliver?" said Stephen, when he found the stream of his recollections running rather shallow. "There are many illustrations in it that you will like to see."

"Oh, thank you," said Maggie, blushing with returning self-consciousness at this direct address, and taking up her work again. (Eliot 1985, 489–90)

Sometimes one best captures a phenomenon, and its frequent presence, by noting the effects of its removal or institution. One notices that the radio has been on and has been distracting and aggravating when, blissfully, silence falls as someone turns it off. Or one notices that the silence was pleasant when the radio is switched on. Here it is Maggie's *unselfconscious* engagement with Stephen and his illuminating talk on the Buckland Treatise that enables us to see her sudden switch to self-consciousness and the awareness of being the object of Stephen's awareness.

Sartre is perhaps the *philosopher* who has come closest to discussing what I calling ordinary self-consciousness. He talks about '*la honte*,' generally translated as 'the shame,' which is involved in the recognition of one's being the object looked at and judged by another. He illustrates what he means in this famous passage in the section of *Being and Nothingness* called 'The Look':

Let us imagine that moved by jealousy, curiosity or vice I have just glued my ear to the door and looked through a keyhole. I am alone and on the level of non-thetic self-consciousness. This means first of all that there is no self to inhabit my consciousness, nothing therefore to which I can refer my acts in order to qualify them. They are in no way known, I am my acts and hence they carry in themselves their whole justification . . . My consciousness sticks to my acts, it is my acts; and my acts are commended only by the ends to be attained and by the instruments to be employed . . .

But all of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me. What does this mean? It means that I am suddenly affected in my being and that essential modifications appear in my structure – modifications which I can apprehend and fix conceptually by means of the reflexive cogito.

First of all, I now exist as myself for my unreflective consciousness. It is this irruption of the self which has been most often described: I see myself because somebody sees me. (Sartre 1969, 259)

And he goes on to say:

Now shame . . . is shame of self; it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the OTHER is looking at and judging. (Sartre 1969, 261)

Sartre uses shame in these discussions both to stand for the usual notion, which involves the painful sense of being judged or seen in a negative light, and also for the “pure” or “original” shame that is just the feeling of being an object to another. The latter is what I mean by ordinary self-consciousness and what I want to focus on in this chapter. However, if I am right about the relation between ordinary self-consciousness and the other self-conscious emotions, it is no accident that such self-consciousness and shame get run together. They share the same structure and one can be seen as the transformation of the other.

Finally, we see this connection between shame and the sense of being an object for others, in this case for the eye of the world, dramatically, even hysterically, expressed by Nietzsche:

Centre – The feeling “I am the mid-point of the world!” arises strongly if one is suddenly overcome with shame; one then stands there as though confused in the midst of a surging sea and feels dazzled as though by a great eye which gazes upon us and through us from all sides. (Nietzsche 1997, 166)

### 3. *Why consider ordinary self-consciousness?*

It might be asked why we should bother devoting our philosophical efforts on this rather specific and particular aspect of human life. I have at least three reasons for bothering.

First, specific and particular human phenomena can be interesting in themselves. And if our attention alights on such phenomena, there is no more reason needed to justify our perusal and attempt to analyze them than that they are interesting and human. Ordinary self-consciousness is fascinating. Although specific and particular, it is a salient and engaging feature of our conscious lives that is a prelude to pain and pleasure of a particularly human kind. It is also a complex psychological phenomenon in which a number of different facets of our consciousness of ourselves, and others, come together.

Second, ordinary self-consciousness is in my view the basis of an important source of knowledge about ourselves. It puts us in a position to gather information about ourselves both from (i) others and from (ii) our reaction to others. With respect to (i): in being conscious of others’ reactions to us we can gather information about how we are presenting to the world. With respect to (ii): we can gather information about ourselves, and about what and who we in fact care about by monitoring our reaction to the reaction of others picked up when we feel self-conscious. It is not straightforward to

explain how feeling self-conscious is a source for knowledge, particularly if we consider it to be an emotion. Emotions are not, in general, straightforward sources of knowledge about the world. To tackle this issue properly would take me beyond the aim of this chapter. It is enough for present purposes to note that ordinary self-consciousness seems to put one in a state of receptiveness that is epistemologically significant, however precisely it does so.

Third, I want to contend that a consideration of ordinary self-consciousness may enable us to understand better the self-conscious emotions of hubris, pride, shame, guilt, and embarrassment. I will suggest that ordinary self-consciousness has a nature and structure that makes it a candidate to be a kind of *ur*-self-conscious emotion, an emotion suited to adaptation and transformation into the more familiar self-conscious emotions.

However, within the confines of this discussion, I will not be able, and will not try, to make good this claim. To do so would need a case-by-case treatment of the relations between ordinary self-consciousness and shame, or guilt, or pride and such a treatment is not feasible here. Nevertheless I hope I will say enough to give one reason to think that the attempt to do the latter may not be a vain one.

## II. THE CHARACTER OF ORDINARY SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

In this section I want to try to do a bit more in the way of identifying the particular character of ordinary self-consciousness.

First, in central cases, ordinary self-consciousness seems to involve particular phenomenological and bodily features. There is a heightened awareness of one's skin, clothes etc. – an awareness of one's physical externalities. There is an externalized awareness of one's speech and other actions – an awareness about how our sayings and doings come across to others. There are sensational and physical reactions: prickles in the back of the neck and elsewhere, blushing, turning the head away from a gaze. These phenomenological and bodily features vary in nature and intensity. Nevertheless, they are the natural concomitants of the phenomenon of ordinary self-consciousness.

Second, and essentially, OSC seems to involve a subject taking two perspectives on herself: an *observer's perspective* and a *subject's perspective*. It is my thinking about others' thinking about me. However, it is important to note that it is *not* that these perspectives oscillate within ordinary self-consciousness, as we might oscillate between self-consciousness and

absorption. We do not capture the phenomenon if we think of it as shifting in serial between an observer's perspective on us and a subject's perspective on the observer – flick-flaking back and forth between a focus from the inside out, to one of outside in. That would not capture what is so central to the phenomenon, and that is that it is an awareness of others' awareness of me. Rather what we have is the two perspectives held at one and the same time. It is this simultaneous awareness that it is me, as I appear to others, that gives rise to the particular pleasures and pains of self-consciousness. If in ordinary self-consciousness we inhabited the observer's perspective only, and fully, we would look on ourselves only as another, and be displaced from our selves.

Consider, for example, sitting in front of an interview panel – suppose one experiences a kind of hyper-awareness of oneself from the outside. This would not be such an intense state if one fully occupied the position of the observer. One is not the observer who is thinking: "She might have polished her shoes," "I wonder why she is blushing," etc. One is the subject of perusal who is conscious of her scuffed shoes and her blushed face as presenting themselves to others. It is the self-perusal from the perspective of the other, knowing at the same time that it is oneself that is the object of perusal, which gives the state the character it has. Thus, rather than oscillating between awareness of oneself from the inside and from the outside, it is that the two perspectives are held Janus-faced together.

Third, it is a crucial feature of ordinary self-consciousness that it seems to involve an evaluative component, without there needing to be a particular evaluation. And connectedly it is a state that *need* be neither pleasurable nor painful. I can be conscious of myself as the object of a possible evaluation from others without having any view about whether a particular evaluation – good, bad, or indifferent – has been or will be reached. There are two parts to this claim. The first is that there is an evaluative component, and the second that there need be no particular evaluation. Let me start with the second. It seems clear that one can be aware of oneself as being under the inquisitive gaze of another without taking the other to have reached one or other evaluation. One is self-conscious to just the same degree when one is aware of others' awareness of one's bristly chin – I imagine – even if one has no idea whether it will present as shoddy or designer stubble. Consider the interview case that was raised earlier – I might be quite comfortable, even though highly conscious, of the way in which I appear to the panel. It may be that I am waiting, ready for the first question from the interview panel, with no particular hopes or anxieties about how I come across. However, that is perfectly compatible with my being self-conscious in the sense of

being highly conscious that I am the object of attention of others. And what of the first part of the claim: that there is an evaluative component? In the state I have in mind it is not just that I am aware of myself being the object of attention from others – it is an awareness that I might please or displease, be praised or criticized. I am *up for evaluation* even though no specific evaluation need have come in.

Fourth, ordinary self-consciousness seems to involve the idea of an evaluator without there needing to be a concrete evaluator. In the sorts of cases mentioned so far, there have tended to be particular evaluators. Maggie is self-conscious with respect to Stephen and the assembled group, Sartre is self-conscious with respect to the person seeing him look through the keyhole, and in the interview case, the evaluators are the interviewers on the panel.

However, note that in the Fitzgerald quotation the self-consciousness precedes the thought that others are turning to look. The observer in this case seems to be an imagined one, or perhaps to be the agent himself catching himself from the outside. Consider a slightly different version of the interview case. Imagine that I am shown into the room, asked to sit down, and left on my own to await the arrival of the panel. While waiting, I may feel self-conscious in my sense, while having no idea who, and how many, will constitute the panel. There is more to say about the identity and nature of the evaluator, and I will come back to the issue. However, I hope enough has been done to put a recognizable phenomenon before us.

### III. HOW SHOULD WE CLASSIFY OSC?

How should we classify ordinary self-consciousness? It is a state that involves a number of distinct kinds of self-awareness, awareness from the observer's perspective and from the subject's perspective, and has an evaluative dimension without necessarily involving an actual evaluation. Is it an emotion?

It is standard in philosophy and psychology to distinguish between the "simple emotions" and the "self-conscious emotions." The "simple emotions" of joy, anger, fear, sadness, etc. are supposed to be more or less universal, culture independent and are thought to characterize the mental lives of even very young babies and non-human animals. In contrast, the "self-conscious emotions" of guilt, shame, pride, hubris, and embarrassment, while marked by certain universal forms of expression, are supposed to be more sensitive to cultural differences and to characterize the lives only of somewhat older human beings and perhaps some adult primates. Human

beings are generally not thought to be capable of these self-conscious emotions until they reach the age of three – although embarrassment may come earlier.

It seems clear that if OSC is an emotion, it is not a simple emotion. It will require cognitive capacities beyond those required for joy, anger, and fear. The nature and complexity of structure involved in feeling self-conscious – in particular in the capacity to be aware of others' awareness of oneself – is more like that involved in the self-conscious emotions. Perhaps having OSC is a matter of experiencing an emotion like pride, embarrassment, guilt, or shame.

There seem to be a number of options here that we need to consider separately. There are different ways we might view the relations between OSC and the more familiar self-conscious emotions. Roughly, we might think of it as no more than a specific type of self-conscious emotion or we might think it has generality and is in some way involved in all or most of the other self-conscious emotions. Let me identify seven options:

- (Option A) Pride, guilt, shame, etc. are feelings of self-consciousness and we should take OSC to be a genus under which such emotions fall as species.
- (Option B) OSC is in fact only what others have called embarrassment, and it has no special generality or claim to basicness.
- (Option C) OSC is in fact only what others have called embarrassment, but it has special generality and a claim to basicness.
- (Option D) OSC is not just embarrassment, rather it is a specie of “self-conscious emotion” distinct from the more familiar ones. It has, however, no special generality or claim to basicness.
- (Option E) OSC is not just embarrassment, and is a specie of “self-conscious emotion” distinct from the more familiar ones. Moreover, it does have some special generality or claim to basicness.
- (Option F) OSC is not itself an emotion at all, but does have some special generality or claim to basicness with respect to the self-conscious emotions.
- (Option G) OSC is not itself an emotion at all, and it has no special generality or claim to basicness with respect to the self-conscious emotions.

Option A seems quite implausible. The phenomenon I have tried to identify is a concrete one, not an abstract structure that can be thought of as genus. One can feel self-conscious in a particular situation at a particular time, and such self-consciousness can fade, or perhaps morph into shame, embarrassment, or pride. OSC may, I will suggest, have a

role to play in explaining any such consequent emotions but they are not varieties of OSC.

According to options B and C, OSC just is embarrassment. But that cannot be right – you can be self-conscious without it being painful, or in any way uncomfortable. You can be self-conscious while standing at the front of a lecture hall waiting for the audience to settle without being embarrassed. Embarrassment seems, necessarily, to be at least a bit uncomfortable, and to involve some sense of misfit or inappropriateness, to involve the desire to turn or hide. Like the other self-conscious emotions, it seems to involve a positive or negative evaluative element. Ordinary self-consciousness may very quickly involve discomfort, or a desire to shy away from the eyes of others. But it need not. It can also come to involve a feeling of pleasure, and a sense of well-being, or holding one's own under the circumspection of others. And it can, just occasionally, be neutral, characterizing a stable feeling of being up for the perusal of others without fear or hope. I say "just occasionally," because more often than not, given the creatures that we are and the nature of ordinary self-consciousness, we fear or expect evaluation to go a certain way, or we pick up information about how that perusal of others is going: are we too much a focus or too little, are we disappointing or are we pleasing? Once we come to be aware of the particular reactions of others we may become embarrassed, or proud or shameful, but it seems that we can be self-conscious without being in those states. What is less clear is whether one could be embarrassed without also being self-conscious, or having been self-conscious. I think probably not – when one is embarrassed one is reacting to the feeling of oneself being the object of perusal by others.

Options D and E agree that the feeling of self-consciousness is distinct from embarrassment and agree that it needs to be treated alongside the other self-conscious emotions. However, they disagree about its importance in understanding the other self-conscious emotions. Establishing which option is right will ultimately depend upon more detailed work in analyzing OSC and its connection with the other self-conscious emotions. Even though a complete account cannot be given here, I do aim to do enough in a subsequent analysis of the elements involved in OSC to make it seem plausible that it may play a useful role in understanding the self-conscious emotions, thereby giving us reason to prefer option E to option D.

What about options F and G? The standard self-conscious emotions seem to be characterized along a dimension of success or failure with respect to some standard, or by some measure of pleasure or pain. They split into roughly two groups: the ones that involve a negative evaluation or a painful

character (embarrassment, shame, guilt) and the ones that involve a positive evaluation or pleasurable character (hubris, pride). If we take some such determination of a value – positive or negative – as a *necessary* mark of emotions, then OSC cannot unproblematically be classified as an emotion. On such an understanding of an emotion we would be forced to choose between options F and G.

I cannot hope to settle here whether we should think of emotions as, of necessity, requiring either a negative or positive character, so cannot hope to settle properly whether we should count all cases of OSC as cases of a self-conscious *emotion*. However, OSC does emerge as a feeling, with a complex structure, that naturally takes its place in the category of self-conscious emotions. It is true that it need not be evaluative or be characterized along a dimension of success or failure: one can be OSC without suffering a painful sense of misfit, or without thinking that one has offended the rules or mores of one's peers, or transgressed some moral standard. However, while OSC need not involve an *actual* evaluation, it is wrong to say that it involves no evaluative dimension at all. OSC involves a focus on ourselves on which we are, as I will put it, *up for evaluation*. By "up for evaluation" I mean that in feeling self-conscious we are aware of others – others who are aware of us – as potential evaluators, as subjects capable of judging us fitting or unfitting, well dressed or badly dressed, foolish or sensible, or merely as capable of giving us an undetermined evaluative thumbs up or thumbs down with respect to some standard. Note, however, that unlike shame and guilt, one can feel self-conscious without having any grasp of what standards or rules are in operation, and relative to which one may be evaluated; and further, one need have no evidence that one is actually being evaluated one way rather than another. Rather, in feeling self-conscious, one is aware of being the subject of a potential evaluation of some kind or other. Given the nature of feeling self-conscious, I see no obvious reason to deny that it is a self-conscious emotion, and therefore am inclined to option E. However, if it were to be established, for independent taxonomic reasons, that all emotions, and the self-conscious emotions in particular, *must* be determinate in value – positive or negative – then instances of OSC on my account may not be emotions, and I would have to countenance option F.

#### IV. THE STRUCTURE OF OSC

Let me now turn to the job of trying to analyze ordinary self-consciousness to understand better its structure and component elements. OSC seems to involve at least the following elements:

1. OSC involves *focus on oneself from a third-person perspective*. That is, we have reflexive consciousness from the perspective of another. Thus, OSC involves the capacity to think of another as minded and to think of one as the object from the perspective of that other. So, if X is our subject, [OSC-1] X is conscious of X from a third-person perspective.
2. OSC involves focus on oneself from a third-person perspective while *knowing it is 'me' I focus on*. That is, one does not just have consciousness of oneself as an object from the outside, from over there. The consciousness has a *duality*, which means I am at the same time conscious that it is *me* that is the focus of others' awareness. This is the double perspective mentioned earlier and involves not only the capacity to think of what is in fact myself from "over there" but also the capacity to think of the object of awareness *as myself*. We can say, [OSC-2] X is conscious of X from a third-person perspective, aware that *she herself* is X.
3. OSC involves focus on oneself from a third-person perspective, knowing it is 'me' I focus on *with an evaluative question*. This element points to the idea that in feeling self-conscious, the subject feels *up for evaluation* from the third-person perspective, aware of having she, herself, in their gaze. There does not have to be a fixed standard for evaluation nor a fixed evaluation. It is rather that the self-conscious subject is aware of herself as up for evaluation in some way or other. So we have: [OSC-3] X is conscious of X from a third-person perspective, aware that she, herself is X, and an object of a potential evaluation.
4. OSC involves focus on oneself from a third-person perspective, knowing it is 'me' I focus on, with an evaluative question, and *with an evaluator assigned*. In the central case the evaluator or evaluators involved in OSC are the person or people looking at you as you look at them: the people on the interview panel, or at the party where you do not know anybody, or the audience in front of which you give a paper. However, they need not be. Imagine you are dancing on your own in your study. You could suddenly disengage from your leaping, seeing yourself from the outside, and thereby coming to feel self-conscious about what you are doing, quietly sitting back to finish writing that paper. In this case there is not an actual external evaluator – unlike the case when you realize that the guy in the building opposite is glued to his window staring at your antics. Rather, in this case one seems to function as one's own evaluator, or one has imagined an evaluator. Note also that there are other cases in which one might have a particular other assigned as an evaluator, but the other person's presence, and indeed identity, may be imagined rather than

actual. For example, I might suddenly think of my mother watching me dancing when I was supposed to be working, or imagine Anne Elliot (of Austen's *Persuasion*) disapproving of my frivolity. So we now have:

[OSC-4] X is conscious of X from a third-person perspective, aware that she, herself is X, and an object of potential evaluation, by Y.

5. OSC involves focus on oneself from a third-person perspective knowing it is 'me' I focus on with an evaluative question, with an evaluator assigned, and *sometimes* with an *evaluative schema*. A final element often in play in OSC is the evaluative schema/schemas of the evaluator. If anything substantial is meant by 'schema,' this element seems not to be essential. One could feel self-conscious with no more than the presence of another and the sense that one might please or fail to please, may elicit a smile, or a frown from the evaluator with no more sophisticated schema in play. One might know in the interview case, for example, that one is likely to be judged relative to the demands of the job for which one is being interviewed. There are other cases where the subject might suppose that there are evaluative schemas in play, but know almost nothing about what they are and so not know, and perhaps worry about, how and on what basis one is likely to be judged by the evaluator. For example, one can feel self-conscious when one walks into a room of strangers not knowing anything much at all about what standards are in play. So, finally we have:

[OSC-5] X is conscious of X from a third-person perspective, knowing she, herself is X, and up for evaluation, by Y, using Y's evaluative schema(s).

If we identify OSC using the above five elements we can see that it allows for variation along at least the following dimensions:

1. Identity of the evaluator.
2. Presence of the evaluator (actual, imagined, expected).
3. Knowledge of the evaluator.
4. Degrees of weight given to the evaluator.
5. Nature of evaluative schema.
6. Degrees of knowledge of the evaluative schema.
7. Degrees of weight given to the evaluative schema.

Let me say something about these in turn.

As we have seen, the identity of the evaluator can vary. The central case involves others – strangers, acquaintances, friends – looking at one. But we can, as mentioned, also function as our own evaluator. In the interview case

when we are sitting alone in the room waiting for the panel we can feel self-conscious, seeing ourselves from the outside, and feeling self-conscious as a result. Perhaps even the beady eye of a pet or portrait can trigger a feeling of self-consciousness. We can also have an imagined evaluator – a fictional character we admire, for example. The identity of the evaluator is fixed by whomever, or whatever, is supposed by the subject to be at the external viewpoint from which she takes an observer's perspective on herself.

We need also to distinguish between the *identity* of the evaluator and the *presence* of the evaluator. Standardly, the evaluator is the person standing in front of you. But it may not be. Obviously, if the evaluator is a fictional character then both the evaluator and her presence are only imagined. However, the evaluator's identity may be real enough with only her presence imagined, as in the case where I imagine being seen by my mother, or father, or some admired teacher. Or it may not be that their presence is purely imagined; rather, it may be that the evaluator is *expected*. In the interview case, where I feel self-conscious sitting alone, the relevant evaluator may be myself, but may also be the expected interviewers.

Additionally, our knowledge of the evaluator can vary from the case where we know almost nothing at all – the evaluator is a stranger – to the case where the evaluator is well known to us – our mother, our colleague. There are then of course many cases in between.

Perhaps the dimension that has the most effect on the consequences and nature of our feeling self-conscious is the *weight* we put on the evaluator. OSC does not just involve focus on oneself from a third-person perspective knowing it is 'me' I focus on with an evaluative question, with an evaluator assigned; it also tends to involve *a weighting given to the evaluator*. The more we care about how that person takes us when we are aware of being the object of attention, the more anxious we are likely to be and so the more likely will our self-consciousness tip into embarrassment or discomfort, or perhaps into hubris and attempts to show ourselves off.

I have distinguished between the evaluator and the evaluative schema. It is clear that the identity and our knowledge of our evaluator(s) and the nature and knowledge of the evaluative schema(s) in place will be linked. The better I know someone the more I am likely to know about the schemas she is likely to be operating with, and the less I know generally the less I will know about how I am likely to be judged. But note that there are circumstances and situations in which I will know little about the evaluator personally but will know, or have a good idea about, what schema will be in place and by means of which I will be evaluated. The interview situation is obviously one such case. Or suppose I am asked to give a talk on women's

dress codes in philosophy at the London Fashion Show – this might seem an unpromising topic, but would in fact be a rich seam. Whatever else I know when I stand ready to speak, I know that my appearance will be up for evaluation.

Furthermore, just as I can weight the evaluator and just as that weighting will make a significant difference to the likelihood of feeling self-conscious and to the consequences of feeling self-conscious, so too I can weight the evaluative schema. OSC involves focus on oneself from a third-person perspective knowing it is ‘me’ I focus on with an evaluative question, with an evaluator and evaluative schema assigned, a weighting given to the evaluator, and a *weighting given to the evaluative schema in play*. Importantly, my weighting of the evaluator and the evaluative schema may not run together. I may not care a jot about my clothing and appearance, but I may nevertheless care about the audience and their engagement and interest at my talk on women’s dress codes in philosophy. This weighting given to the evaluator might lead me to become self-conscious about the aspects of me the evaluator is concerned about, even though I do not independently weight their evaluative schema.

Consider the following case: Suppose I have a much-admired and loved grandfather: a career soldier in the British Army, retiring as a colonel, after a significant number of years of active service, earning one or two medals for bravery. I trust his judgment on many matters, think he is a decent and good man, and find him to have a pretty unerring eye for nonsense. I care very much that he thinks well of me, care that I do not disappoint him. I might nevertheless think his views about when and when not military intervention is justified are quite mistaken. Thus, I weigh his status as an evaluator very highly, even though I might put little weight on the evaluative schema he is likely to be operating with in certain contexts and conversations. And putting little weight on the relevant evaluative schema does not mean that I will not become highly conscious of saying something that contradicts his views on the matter. I am likely to refrain from expressing a view contrary to his, to try to get the conversation away from the interventionist wars on to other matters. And if I do this, it is not, in the case I am imagining, because I do not want to hurt him, or argue with him, or think I do not have the arguments to convince him if I tried hard enough. It is because I do not want him to see me in a certain way; I do not want to disappoint him. I become self-conscious of my contrary views in his presence.

In the grandfather case we have a dislocation between the weight given to the evaluator and the evaluative schema in play. It can, of course, happen

the other way around. You can weight someone's evaluative schema within a given context or situation without caring much about the evaluator himself. The main point to note is that variation along the dimensions identified within the basic structure of OSC allows for a level of complexity and structure in the phenomenon. It will explain the different ways in which one can feel self-conscious and different things one can feel self-conscious about.

#### V. RELATION BETWEEN OSC AND THE OTHER SELF-CONSCIOUS EMOTIONS

Having tabled some ideas about the structure and dimensions involved in ordinary self-consciousness, I return very briefly to the question as to what the relation is between ordinary self-consciousness and the more discussed self-conscious emotions of embarrassment, shame, guilt, and pride.

I have suggested that we treat ordinary self-consciousness as a distinct self-conscious emotion, but also suggested that aside from being another self-conscious emotion, ordinary self-consciousness may have a claim to being the core self-conscious emotion in relation to which the others can be better understood.

The general idea is that the familiar self-conscious emotions, and indeed self-conscious emotions that are distinct from familiar ones and for which we do not have fixed names, will develop out of the different ways the elements identified in the analysis of OSC get filled in. In particular, a consequence of feeling self-conscious may be that the potential evaluations to which the subject is sensitive get fixed. One feels self-conscious, on my account, when one is aware of the awareness of others' awareness of oneself and takes oneself to be up for evaluation by an evaluator. So, to feel self-conscious is to be in a receptive state. It is to read others' reactions and one's own reaction to others' reactions. This means that as we feel self-conscious the evaluations will be fixed – as negative or positive or mixed. The subject will come to form hypotheses, beliefs, or knowledge of the reactions of others. A further dimension of the analysis is the distinct weighting given to the evaluator, and the evaluative schema, that the subject might be using. Therefore, the subject can tip into a number of different possible states depending on how she weights the evaluator and how she weights the evaluation that has been fixed.

My suggestion is that in being a receptive state, with the structure I have outlined, ordinary self-consciousness can tip over into embarrassment, humiliation, shame, or hubris. If, for example, I come to judge that I, as a

person, am failing to meet the approval of the evaluator and care sufficiently about the evaluator (whether I also weight their evaluative schema or not), I may feel shame. I may come to feel either, what we can call, *identifying shame* – shame in which I identify with the values by which I am judged or *non-identifying shame* – shame in which I do not identify with the values by which I am judged. If, however, I were to judge that I was meeting the standards I might come to feel socially comfortable or feel social pride, but if I were too hasty or secure in my judgments I might be suffering from hubris. (And, again, there is scope to distinguish between identifying and non-identifying cases.) But, what of guilt and personal pride? They do not seem to share quite the social dimension of the other self-conscious emotions. I have suggested that in some cases the subject herself, perhaps an imagined “better self,” can be identified as the evaluator under whose gaze the subject is up for evaluation. It is these cases that will be important if we are to explain guilt or personal pride in terms of ordinary self-consciousness.

I have not said enough properly to show that the standard self-conscious emotions might at least partly be understood in terms of OSC, but I hope I have said enough to suggest it might be worth pursuing the idea. But now, finally, to some problems that might seem to trouble the account of OSC offered.

## VI. PROBLEMS

The first worry with the analysis of ordinary self-consciousness offered is that it may seem to contradict the developmental facts. Michael Lewis (in Lewis and Brooks-Gunn 1979, and in his 1993 and 1995) places the age of development of a capacity for embarrassment pretty early – at around eighteen months to two years. This is roughly when children also start to pass the mirror test, which we can take as a marker of the capacity to be aware of ourselves as objects (Gallup 1970, 1979). However, Lewis (1993, 1995) places the age of development of evaluative standards, and the capacity to evaluate by use of them, at about three years. He argues that prior to that subjects are unable to have the evaluative emotions of guilt, shame, and pride. Lewis understands the development of a capacity for evaluation in terms of what he calls SRGs (‘Standards, Rules, and Goals’). SRGs, for an individual, are for Lewis, a unique set of beliefs about what actions, thoughts, and feelings are acceptable for others and for herself. He takes the set of beliefs to be constituted by information acquired through “culturalization in a particular society” (Lewis 1995, 567). Thus SRGs vary across societies, across times, and between groups within societies at a time.

Lewis divides the self-consciousness emotions into those he calls “exposed emotions” and those he calls “evaluative emotions” (Lewis 1995, 207). Embarrassment, of the kind exhibited by young children who hide their faces or hide behind their mothers, is his central example of an exposed emotion. Guilt, shame, and pride are the central evaluative emotions. The exposed emotions do not, thinks Lewis, require mastery of SRGs, but the evaluative emotions do.

Now, if we were to place ordinary self-consciousness into this schema, it would surely fall on the side of being an exposed emotion. Indeed, we might think that it is the exposed emotion par excellence – it is the feeling of oneself being available to view by others. If I am right, then embarrassment is what happens when a feeling of self-consciousness gets filled in a certain way. It is uncomfortable because it is when we suspect or fear that we are not or may not be viewed well.

However, it may be objected that if the analysis of ordinary self-consciousness is right, and if the supposed relation to embarrassment is right, then a subject must have the capacity to operate SRGs in order to feel self-conscious or embarrassed. The reason is that the analysis of self-consciousness offered here involves the subject’s being aware of herself being *up for evaluation* by others, and may in some cases involve knowledge of the evaluative schema with which others operate.

The first thing to say is that what it takes to think of something as having a value, or what it is to take oneself as up for or being evaluated by another is likely to be a complex matter admitting of many gradations. (Indeed, Lewis acknowledges that the process of incorporating the SRGs operating around one starts early in life.) In particular, there seem to be three distinctions that may give us the materials to show that one could meet the conditions set out in the analysis of OSC offered before one is in a position to be attributed the capacity to master Lewis’ SRGs.

First, we need to distinguish between a subject’s being aware of being ‘up’ for evaluation and the subject’s knowledge of, or beliefs about, the evaluation. We have already talked about the possibility of feeling self-conscious under the eye of another even though we know nothing much of the identity of the other, or of her evaluator schema. In most cases of ordinary self-consciousness – as opposed to some forms of embarrassment, and to shame and guilt – the subject only suspects, hopes, fears, guesses at how the other is evaluating her. It is a fluid, information gathering state, and the more developed the subject is, the more complex her suppositions, hopes, etc. will be. She does not need to be able to settle on a view about how she is viewed. The subject needs to be able to look for an answer to the question

about how she is being viewed – with pleasure or displeasure – but she does not need to be able to answer the question with reference to SRGs in order to count as having ordinary self-consciousness.

Second, we need to distinguish between the capacity for being aware of an evaluation by another and the capacity for self-evaluation. We do not have a capacity for guilt, or pride, or perhaps for shame or hubris, unless we have a capacity for self-evaluation as well as a capacity to be sensitive to the evaluations of others. Since guilt and pride just are self-evaluations – they are evaluations by the self of herself, or of her actions – this is obvious in their case. Shame and hubris may seem slightly different: they seem to be more closely linked to a subject's judging that others have judged her as failing the norms of the group. However, on most accounts of shame, shame is also an evaluation of the self – it is an evaluation of the self as bad, or failing. One of the reasons shame seems to be so damaging is that it involves the subject drawing into herself the perceived judgments of the group; moreover, it involves the subject, as a result, forming an attitude to her *whole* self, and not just to one of her actions or character traits. It is not clear that feeling self-conscious need involve a corresponding capacity for self-evaluation. It is a sensitivity to the power to elicit certain evaluative responses in others, and a sensitivity that it is *oneself* that is the object of a potential response. But it need not result in a self-evaluation and may not require the subject to have the capacity to judge herself.

Third, and most importantly, given our explanatory needs, we need to distinguish between the development of particular SRGs and the development of the idea of an evaluator. At its simplest, a subject can be aware of being up for evaluation even if she can be aware only that she can please or displease, elicit a smile or frown, or a behavioral thumbs up or down. The subject need have no grasp or capacity to grasp the standards, rules, or goals of the evaluator; she needs no grasp of the particular nature of the evaluation, just the fact that there is one.

These distinctions, I think, leave room for the possibility that young children before the age of three can take someone to be an evaluator, and take themselves as up for evaluation, even though they have not yet developed the capacity to master SRGs. They may not need to be able to know the particular SRGs that the evaluator is operating with in order to be self-conscious. They may not need to be able to grasp a particular evaluation, and need not be able to apply the evaluation of another to themselves.

A second worry about the analysis of OSC offered was suggested to me by Christopher Peacocke: does the characterization of OSC not need, over and above the consciousness by a subject that *she, herself* is the object of an

evaluator's evaluation, also the supposition by the subject that the evaluator represents her *as conscious*, and indeed *as self-conscious*? There are three forms of awareness that one might think could be involved in OSC: awareness of oneself as the object of an evaluator; awareness of oneself, represented as conscious, by the evaluator; and awareness of oneself, represented as self-conscious, by the evaluator's evaluation. There is a further complication that comes when we ask: must the subject take her evaluator also to be conscious and self-conscious? In the analysis above I have offered the most minimal characterization: the subject must be conscious of she, herself as the object of awareness of another, whom she takes to be an evaluator – whatever that requires. I have not committed myself to whether in feeling self-conscious a subject *must* think of the other as self-conscious, nor whether she *must* think of the other as thinking about *her* as a self-conscious object. I am inclined to think that most cases of OSC *will* involve the more committed forms of self-consciousness, and that a full explanation of the relation between OSC and certain forms of the other self-conscious emotions *will* require us to appeal to the more committed forms of self-consciousness. And, there is nothing in the analysis offered that prohibits additions that will capture such extra elements. However, there are some advantages to keeping as basic the more minimal formulation offered here. In particular, we may not want to rule out certain cases as cases of OSC, even though they are cases in which the subject does not take the evaluator to represent her as a self-conscious subject. Consider Hermione in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*. She stands, at the end of the play, taken to be a statue by those around her. Leontes, her husband who falsely accused her of infidelity years before, comments on the statue saying "Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing so aged as this seems" (Act v, Scene 3). Hermione might surely feel self-conscious at his perusal, and embarrassed by his remark. It is true that were she to feel self-conscious and embarrassed by his earlier accusations of adultery she may have to think of him as thinking of her as self-consciously wanton. We would then need to appeal to a subject's awareness of herself as the self-conscious object of an evaluator's evaluation in order properly to capture the emotion. But for the simpler case, where only her wrinkles are the focus, the more minimal analysis will do.

I want to consider a third objection, really only to set it aside as a pointer to future work. We might wonder how promising the suggestion that OSC is a kind of *ur*-emotion, with respect to the other self-conscious emotions, can be, given that the phenomenology and bodily feeling associated with ordinary self-consciousness – the awareness of one's skin and posture, the

feeling at the back of one's neck, the heightened awareness of one's voice, etc. – is so different from those associated with guilt, shame, and pride. It might be objected that, if the latter emotions of guilt, shame, and pride were indeed transformations of ordinary self-consciousness, we would get more continuity in the phenomenological features of feeling self-conscious and feeling shame, guilt, or pride, than we do.

It is true that there seems little in common between the phenomenology of guilt and OSC. However, the suggestion that the bodily feelings of shame and the bodily feelings of pride are quite separate from those of OSC is less obvious. Shame is associated with heightened awareness of one's body and the desire to hide or shrink it away from the gaze of others. Hubris is also associated with an awareness of one's body, but in contrast to shame, with a comfort with one's body taking up space under the gaze of others – there is a puffing up, rather than shrinking away. It makes sense to think that if the elements of one's self-conscious awareness of others get filled in in a certain way – if one is criticized, mocked, or sneered at – one's feeling of self-consciousness may tip over into a sense of shame. What was a neutral, but enhanced, awareness of one's externalities may become painful and uncomfortable and one may, as a result, want to screen oneself from the gaze of others. If, in contrast, we are praised or lauded, in a way that results in us feeling hubristic, we may enjoy the gaze of our evaluators and relax, allowing our body to take its full space, in full view. Although more work is required to meet the anxiety expressed in the objection, it does seem to me that we can expect ways of explaining the transformation from OSC to other emotions which will make the transformations in phenomenology involved plausible also. As earlier acknowledged, guilt and personal pride are perhaps not so clearly characterized by a distinctive phenomenology, and the affinities are not so clearly available. I do, however, think that they are there. The right place to start in linking OSC with guilt and personal pride is, I think, to consider feeling self-conscious by oneself, where oneself is the supposed evaluator having internalized the evaluations of others. However, it is clear that a development of this suggestion *really* is the job of another paper.

Finally, it has been suggested to me – often – that the concern with feeling self-conscious is a product of being *British*. I am assured that other nationalities do not tend to suffer in this way: it is only the British that suffer to any extent from the feeling of others thinking about them, that shift around nervously when in groups, rather than getting on with the business of connecting and enjoying their fellow human beings. So is OSC, therefore, too parochial an emotion for more than parochial interest?

I do not think so. It may be that the British find more occasions for feeling self-conscious – that they more often, and in more situations, take themselves as up for evaluation, and it may be that the British find self-consciousness more often more painful, because they tend to read the evaluations as unfavorable, and therefore more salient, than others. But surely ordinary self-consciousness is quite universal. One only has to look at teenagers across the globe, whether carefully observing, withering, or strutting, to see the pains and pleasures of feeling self-conscious.