

A Qualitative Examination of the Role of Shame in the Mother-Daughter Relationship

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Abstract

I will present findings from an original grounded theory-based study that investigates the phenomenological experience of the emotion of shame, as well as how experiences of shame may be shared, passed, and/or related between mothers and daughters. This study examines a range of memories and emotional experiences connected to feeling ashamed, including but not limited to self-consciousness, pride, humiliation, and disgust. Mothers and daughters will be asked about the role of shame in their relationship with one another and how this relationship may or may not have contributed to the role of shame in their lives. Participants include pairs of mothers and daughters culled from women ages 18+ who are interested in sharing their narratives. Data is collected through extensive in-person interviews with four pairs of mothers and daughters. The primary instrument employed is a questionnaire I developed to probe experiences of shame in one's relationship with oneself and in one's relationship with one's mother or daughter. Questions explore various aspects of shame, including early memories related to not living up to standards, recent experiences with self-exposure and self-disgust, and incidents



of feeling belittled, humiliated and disgraced both within and outside of the mother-daughter relationship. In addition, some questions have a projective quality, in order to elicit more unconscious thoughts and feelings of mothers and daughters. This study utilizes a grounded-theory approach that employs the constant comparison method developed by Glaser and Strauss, intersubjective consistency, and bracketing. I will also analyze the interviews using Carol Gilligan's Feminist Listening approach in order to more fully understand how participants speak about themselves and perhaps dissociate from their experiences, as well as to gain insight into the interplay of various voices within each individual. Statistical

analyses will be utilized to examine the prevalence of various themes and language use



Biography:

Sarah Telzak is a second-year PhD Clinical Psychology student at Adelphi University's Derner School of Psychology. She obtained her B.A. in Psychology and Religion (double major) from Wesleyan University in 2011, and her M.A. in Developmental Psychology from Teachers College, Columbia University in 2017. Previously, she worked as an assistant research scientist at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development at NYU, where she completed classroom-observation evaluations. She is a current Psychology extern at Mount Sinai Beth Israel, where she conducts both group and individual therapy.

Speaker Publications:

1. "Biomarkers and bacterial pneumonia risk in patients with treated HIV infection: a case-control study"; PLoS One . 2013;8(2):e56249. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0056249. Epub 2013 Feb 15 9.

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