

Review of David M. Halperin & Valerie Traub, eds., *Gay Shame*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009.

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This collection of essays resulted from a conference at the University of Michigan in 2003 but did not appear in book form until six years later. Eight years later, I was offered the opportunity to review the book via an electronic copy available through software that I ultimately could not make work. Nine years later, I got a printed copy of the book, but then lost it in a stack of work that I meant to get around to someday, so that this review appears ten years after the original conference! For my part in that protracted delivery, I am ashamed, which was an appropriate thing for me to be feeling as I read the book for review.

Halperin and Traub's collection of essays is, IMHO, important yet often off-putting, promising yet occasionally disappointing, and reads like a patchwork quilt in which the pieces are badly matched. Most of the book's 29 chapters were part of the 2003 conference, but a few of the essays were apparently published elsewhere before this book's collection could be pulled together. Chapters differ enormously in length, from as short as two pages (Helmut Puff on "The Shame of Queer History") to as long as thirty-five (Don Kulick and Charles Klein on "The Politics of Shame among Brazilian *Travesti* Prostitutes"). In addition, pp. 383–390 list the rich audiovisual materials that support and expand upon various chapters — from gallery art and photography to film — all presented to the reader in an accompanying DVD. In other words, the book as a whole feels chaotic, just like shame, causing us to wonder how in the hell we got to this mess in the first place, and yet so enjoying what we are discovering about ourselves and others that we want to continue. Reading this book is not for the faint-hearted.

I am a gay man living in Palm Springs, California. I am old enough not to be seduced by the promises of The White Party (celebrated here every Spring with over 30,000 gay males in attendance for four days, followed a week later by Palm Springs Women's Weekend, aka the Dinah Shore Classic, with 5,000 lesbians in attendance) and by the annual Gay Pride Parade in November (complete with several local high school marching bands). I am also self-aware enough not to be caught off-guard when I fall into deep puddles of internalized shame. I can't remember, back when I was working as a psychotherapist in private practice, ever seeing a client who did not carry pocketsful, sometimes bucketsful, or even ocean tankers full of shame. Shame is part of the human condition, and *Gay Shame* makes an enormously helpful and deeply nuanced contribution to our understanding, as academics and as members of diverse communities, about the rich and profound lessons we can each learn from our shame as we grow through and beyond it. We are devotees, every one of us, of the "holy trinity", identified by Halperin and Traub as sexuality, shame, and identity. This trinity is the condition in which humankind makes its debut on its way out of Eden, and the first place in Genesis in which we can see our real selves in the text.

In Halperin and Traub's complex collection, I found myself shying away from the contemporary (and often desperate) claims of "gay pride", and equally suspicious of the self-effacement and self-flagellation of "gay shame", often instead agreeing with the authors of these many essays that the term "queer" opens up opportunities for understanding that are shut down by the terms "pride" and "shame". In his *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, Darwin described the shame affect as consisting of *blushing*, confusion of mind, downward-cast eyes, slack posture, and lowered head, and he noted observing the shame affect in human populations worldwide. At least for the moment, adopting the language and concept of queerness opens up new avenues of thinking and healthier introspection that are ordinarily shut down by shame, including "gay shame".

Ioane Tuupo, a Samoan pastor and academic in Hawai'i, says: "Tala fa'afagogo or storytelling communicates our thoughts from the past". This idea relates to the Samoan proverbial expression, "E lele le gogo ma si ana i'a." That proverb connects the storyteller to the listener, the receiver of the stories, meaning that, at the end of the day, each and every one of us receiving the message will fly away with something. In the same way, shame is something we do alone, and each of us does it in a unique way. Reading this book made me understand that my responsibilities for converting shame to queerness are not yet accomplished, at the same time that it helped me realize that I have indeed moved away from the shame I was taught as a "nelli boy" growing up in small town Oklahoma. Perhaps this explains why my three favorite chapters in this book were the introductory one by Halperin and Traub ("Beyond Gay Pride"), the one by Ellis Hanson ("Teaching Shame"), and the one by Don Kulick and Charles Klein ("The Politics of Shame among Brazilian Travesti Prostitutes").

Gay Shame needs to be read slowly and introspectively. Though it took a long time a-birthing, it is an important asset to those who teach in the fields of Gender and Sexuality, Gay and Lesbian Studies, and Queer Studies. Those who work in more traditional biblical studies will need to be more creative in using this book. We are, in a sense, shamed by the Bible's focus on shame. The concept convicts us, and thereby causes us to turn away. Though Genesis 2:25 tells us that Adam and Eve were *not* shamed by their own nakedness, the word-group for shame ("disconcerted", "disappointed", "confounded") occurs in the Hebrew Bible most frequently in the Wisdom Literature and in the prophets (especially Isaiah and Jeremiah). David captures the pervasive Hebraic perspective when he says, "Let me not be put to shame, O Lord, for I have cried out to you" (Psalm 31:17). Proverbs emphasizes the shame of public humiliation for undisciplined behavior (Proverbs 13:18; 18:13; 25:8). In the New Testament, Paul uses the concept of shame most frequently with the immature Corinthian believers, urging them not to shame themselves (1 Corinthians 4:14; 6:5; 15:34; 2 Corinthians 9:4) or him (2 Corinthians 7:14; 10:8). Because the Bible in fact ramps up the shame created among its readers (and particularly among the clergy, who have often made violent use of shame to force the laity into submission), this book cries out for a strong theological response, one that queers Christianity in the noblest and most constructive of ways.



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