

THE SHAME OF TEACHING

Rosie Miles, Wolverhampton University, UK

Notoriously, George Bernard Shaw wrote, 'He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches' (1903).¹ This paper argues that in the context of successive Research Assessment Exercises over the past thirty years, and the concomitant prestige and funding associated with them, being publically committed to teaching within Higher Education has become a matter of shame.

Academic identity formation (at least in the Humanities) is bound up in this process, in that the *sine qua non* of entrance to a job in academia is the PhD which trains new academics to have become researchers with great focus and intent. Once they have a job, however, a substantial number of academics are likely to find themselves engaged in any number of competing activities – not least teaching – for which they have likely had a lot less training. More significantly, academics are not encouraged through their process of identity formation to see themselves as teachers/lecturers, or to regard this aspect of their work with anything like the same value or prestige. Drawing on a distinct body of work that has emerged in the US within English Studies (my discipline) I will trace how a 'class-shame system [operates] within the academy'² which is entirely bound up with the research-teaching binary, the relative hierarchies of institutions, professional status and the differing activities which academics undertake.

I will also draw on a wide range of discussions of shame, ranging from Charles Darwin to queer theorists such as Eve Sedgwick and Sally Munt, to explore shame's characteristic demeanours.³ Shame is always shame in the eyes of the other (even if the other is internalised) and the 'eyes down' gesture of the shamed literally enacts and embodies the disconnect from the other which shame can bring about. I trace how this can be seen in some academics who 'fail' to live up to the hegemonic paradigm of there being only one model of academic success (i.e. research stardom).

I aim to lead the discussion finally to a consideration of what the unashamed academic self looks like. The academic self who reconstitutes her/his self on the other side of experiences of shame must attempt to do so in ways that are not solely dependent on the gaze that has the power to shame (or not). The model of *academic becoming* I wish to valorise embodies, values and celebrates teaching and research together. This academic self is produced in full knowledge of the ways in which teaching has been figured as shameful, whilst refusing them utterly. I also argue that there is a need for multiple ways of being – and becoming – a successful academic to be articulated, repeatedly, within the academy. These articulations of a different model of academic selfhood from those that

¹ George Bernard Shaw, 'Maxims for Revolutionaries' in *'Man and Superman' and 'The Revolutionists Handbook'* (London: Constable & Co., 1903), p. 230.

² J. Brooks Bouson, 'True Confessions: Uncovering the Hidden Culture of Shame in English Studies', *jac* 25:4 (2005), p. 635.

³ Charles Darwin, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1872); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*', in *Gay Shame*, eds. David M. Halperin & Valerie Traub (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 1-16; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick & Adam Frank, eds., *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995); Sally Munt, *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

have prevailed will also not shy away from the recognition of how (negative) emotions can circulate within our professional cultures. The point is to put them to good use.