

# Introduction: Pride and Shame in America

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The present issue marks the second consecutive edition of *aspeers* that focuses on the cultural and political practices surrounding specific emotions. Last year's edition revolved around American Anger, and in its introduction, the editors identified the pervasiveness of anger in "conversations in the contemporary US, particularly in the *political sphere*" (2). This year's issue on Pride and Shame follows this approach, as we feel that, at the onset of a new decade, it is apt to reflect on how pride and shame have become two of the most explicitly political emotions of the last twenty years.

Despite being "self-conscious" emotions (Tangney 541), pride and shame not only affect subjective intrinsic processes such as the formation of thought, behavioral reactions, and the evaluation of experiences, but transcend into the cultural, social, and political realm. Pride, for example, may initially evoke some of the sociopolitical 'progress' made in recent decades, but both oppressive and oppressed identity groups have instrumentalized pride, and thus it is clear that pride has no fixed value. In this way, it is difficult to theorize pride.

Rather than engaging in a practice of academic citation, we have chosen to present a constellation of ways that pride appears across discourses. By placing these topics together, we mean to highlight the ambiguous signification of pride, instead of equating any two expressions of pride or providing a singular definition for the term. Depending on its different premises and contexts, pride might take many contradicting forms: There is pride in the genocidal, ecocidal practices of colonial empires, and there is pride in protecting indigenous lands from corporate exploitation. There is pride in starting a civil war to maintain slavery, and there is

pride in starting a riot for queer liberation. There is pride in loving oneself, and there is pride in hating an outgroup. There is also pride in the desire for one's own visibility in a world that still accommodates contentious opinions and beliefs.

Like pride, shame is an ambiguous signifier, thus producing an array of meanings at a personal and collective level, and it plays on the boundaries between public and private. Introducing shame on an individual level, Eve Sedgwick views it as a sensation “whose very suffusiveness seems to delineate my precise, individual outlines in the most isolating way imaginable” (qtd. in Holmes 2015, 416), ascribing to shame one of its significant features: isolation. This isolation finds its way into the politics of shame, which embraces various parallels to the construction of the social world and the development of culture. Amanda Holmes sees in shame a complexity that is “both radically social and deeply isolating” (2015, 419). Shame anticipates the way of behaving according to social constructs and norms, yet simultaneously provides a breeding ground for a practice of judgments between oneself and others.

This issue’s call for papers asked contributors to consider the following: “Do pride and shame [...] work as opposite ends on the same continuum—or is their relationship more complicated, as queer theorizations of shame might suggest? [...] Through which processes are pride and shame socially constructed, and what cultural work gets activated through them?” (“Pride and Shame”). In once again presenting fresh, upcoming voices in the field of American Studies, we are proud to state that their articles speak to these complications.

Questions of pride, shame, visibility, and invisibility permeate all of our topical contributions to some extent. Pride and shame may often be conceptualized in relation to one another, but in her examination of the movie *Moonlight*, Jessica Walter highlights black queer modes of moving beyond shame, which complicate totalizing relational models of pride and shame. Similarly, Jay Lalonde’s article on Joshua Whitehead’s novel *Jonny Appleseed* shows how pride and shame oscillate meanings of empowerment and disempowerment for First Nation Two-Spirits, expressed through suffered oppression and self-healing resistance to modern settler societies that politically and socially exclude them. A dis/similar ostracization is also explored in Henrik Schneider’s discussion of the documentary film *Gen Silent*, which examines the exclusion of aging queer people from an idealized aging process, highlighting a topic that only becomes more prominent with the passage of time. Lastly, Johs Rasmussen examines how Ralph Ellison reconceptualizes John

Dewey's philosophy of pragmatic democracy in *Three Days Before the Shooting...* and argues that Ellison's appeal to democratic values features elements more radical than scholars usually attest. Overall, these contributions demonstrate the constructedness of pride and shame as ambiguous emotional responses with political implications: Pride may function to preserve normative modes of existence and shame may keep other modes from surfacing, while at other times, pride functions to empower oppressed groups and deliver them from shame.

### ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

In her topical article, “Beyond Shame in Barry Jenkins’s *Moonlight* (2016),” Jessica Walter analyzes the film’s indeterminacy with regard to black masculinity. Walter enters into conversation with the burgeoning field of black queer studies to discuss “down-low sexuality” (McCune 4–5, qtd. in Walter 16), the ‘fronts’ of hegemonic, hypermasculine black performance, and how the film’s main character Chiron moves beyond emotional isolation and feelings of shame. In an innovative approach, she splits the article into two main sections: sunlight/daytime that exposes the violent toxicity of hegemonic masculinity and moonlight/night time that enables an exploration of softness, vulnerability, and queerness between characters. Through Chiron’s character and the film’s aesthetics, Walter concludes that *Moonlight* is deeply rooted in black life—engaging in a culture of ‘knowing,’ queering temporality and relationships, and opening audiences to a world of complex black characters without recourse to stereotypes. Walter shows how shame can be overcome by embracing intimacy and vulnerability.

In “I Am My Own Best Medicine”: Joshua Whitehead’s *Jonny Appleseed* and Two-Spirit Resurgence,” Jay Lalonde argues for the queering of Indigenous resurgence discourses through the centering of Two-Spirit perspectives. Focusing on Two-Spirit figures, such as the novel’s eponymous protagonist, allows for ways to uncover and resist the colonial legacy of heteronormative and heteropatriarchal attitudes that inhabit and inhibit the Indigenous resurgence movement. Utilizing concepts such as double oppression and colonized sexuality, Lalonde shows how *Jonny Appleseed* (2018) reflects on the effects of residual and continuous colonial attitudes toward Two-Spirit people. Furthermore, by considering the concept of the Sovereign Erotic and analyzing the novel’s first-person narrative, Lalonde

demonstrates the vital role pride plays in reclaiming Two-Spirit identity and reimagining the struggle for Indigenous resurgence.

Henrik Schneider's "The Aging Queer Body" explores how aging people with non-heteronormative sexualities and gender identities are disadvantaged by US culture's celebration of youthfulness within its patriarchal belief system. The author elaborates how heteronormative ideology informs conceptualizations of aging and reproduction that expose non-conforming individuals, in particular elderly members of the LGBTQ+ community, to social sanctions that can affect their emotional and physical well-being. Schneider turns to the documentary *Gen Silent* (2011) to encourage a queering of normative concepts of aging that includes all genders and people of all sexualities.

Johs Rasmussen's article titled "Pragmatic Strategies of Resistance: Ralph Ellison's Radical Second Act" eloquently investigates Ellison's second novel *Three Days Before the Shooting...* (posthumously published in 2010) through the lens of John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy, which opens up radical conclusions that reimagine the US democratic experiment. By focusing on the character arc of LeeWillie Minifees, a black jazz bass player who publicly burns his own Cadillac on Senator Sunraider's lawn, Rasmussen is able to excavate a strain of Ellison's thought that heavily critiques late capitalist materialism and the ideology of white supremacy, both of which underpin US democracy. This analysis is made possible by a deep engagement with Dewey's pragmatic philosophy and Eddie Glaude's extension of Dewey's thought. Rasmussen thus locates Ellison as a thinker who makes US pragmatism "sing the blues" (Glaude, *Shade of Blue* 8) by identifying the ways in which *Three Days* reckons with the forces of capitalism and racism. He argues that Minifees's character reveals that radically imagined, politically dissenting actions by African Americans can compel white audiences to reconceptualize how democratic and economic processes might operate.

## ARTISTIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Reflecting on the process, we all agreed early on that we wanted to feature artistic contributions. It is clear to us that these contributions, in their many forms, provide a unique perspective on the discussion our issue aims to forward. In addition, we felt artistic contributions were well suited to address this year's topic more intimately than academic writing that—because of its appeals to objectivity—often maintains

a degree of distance from its subject matter. Even though this year's authors enter into the critical debate on pride and shame, by including artistic contributions we hope that we have fulfilled our initial aspiration to feature an even broader range of perspectives on the topic.

Carolin Jesussek's "The Queer" and Tara Gottschall's "Untitled" both thematize notions of pride and shame in the queer community, highlighting different methods of resistance in their struggle for recognition. Jesussek reflects on the reappropriation of formerly derogatory symbols as she obscures the badge Nazi Germany used to mark homosexual subjects. Gottschall's work is a representation of strength and solidarity in the face of ongoing discrimination and marginalization. Jingya Shao's two poems "The Wall 1.0" and "The Wall 2.0" connect current political narratives to markers of pride and shame that enforce inclusion and ostracization. They both relate the prideful, ostensible justifications for US border security to their underlying immigrant-shaming motivations. In "After Columbine: The Am.Erikan Dream," Erika Buchanan closes this issue's art section, providing a bold threefold reimagination of the American Dream in its contemporary appearance. She juxtaposes the myth of the American Dream to the realities of gun violence and mass incarceration.

#### **PROFESSORIAL VOICE**

For this year's professorial voice, we decided not to prioritize a connection to our topic, but the process of *aspeers*. Therefore, we have consulted two previous contributors, Dr. Konstantin Butz and Dr. Ewa A. Adamkiewicz, and interviewed them about their experiences since *aspeers*. We also asked them about how working with the journal has affected their careers in the field of American Studies. Naturally, both interviews eventually headed towards this issue's topic, Pride and Shame. In this vein, Adamkiewicz expands upon her 2013 contribution to *aspeers* on "White Nostalgia," and Butz offers an intuitive and refreshing take on the theme of Pride and Shame. Additionally, both spoke to the growing engagement with intersectionality and identity-based standpoints not only in academia but also in public and activist discourses across Germany. They articulate how their own writing and research has been transformed through their intensified involvement with both fields and their aim to innovatively expand them; in fact, Butz closes the first *aspeers* issue in 2008 with a piece engaging with "Intersectional Privilege and

the Lyrics of Early Californian Hardcore Punk.” We are very grateful for their thoughtful and thorough contributions to this year’s issue.

Butz has been a researcher and lecturer at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne since 2012. His contribution provides a detailed account of his long interest and participation in US punk and skateboard culture as a German growing up in Germany. Butz has recently published a co-edited volume with Christian Peters titled *Skateboard Studies* (2018) that stems from his dissertation (2012) on the subject. As a contributor to the very first issue of *aspeers*, Butz gives a valuable look back on the way *aspeers* accelerated the trajectory of his career and how the journal’s peer-review process introduced him to academia as a community having an ‘ongoing dialogue.’

When considering the theme of Pride and Shame, Butz describes how as a German growing up in the ‘80s he was trained to have an aversion to pride, particularly nationalist pride. To this end, Butz offers the use of critical theory and a hermeneutics of suspicion when analyzing groups who hold social, economic, and political power. In this way, he emphasizes the necessity of contextualizing the narratives, ideologies, and individual and collective expressions of pride and shame. He does this to articulate that although dominant groups can be read as using pride to claim superiority and discriminate and vilify groups labeled as inferior, groups who are marginalized and oppressed may use the rhetoric of pride for empowerment and moves towards parity. He additionally notes how the pride of minority groups can often bring out feelings of shame and reactive pride by dominant groups.

Adamkiewicz has had extensive experience with *aspeers*, both as a contributor and editor, and with the current issue’s topic of Pride and Shame as a researcher of the Black Lives Matter movement and the concept of white nostalgia. Her recently completed dissertation details narrative protest identities with a focus on Black Lives Matter. In her contribution, she utilizes her research to several ends: First, to show how the Confederate flag functions as a symbol of a pride that is entangled with nostalgia over a whitewashed past for white Southerners; second, to articulate the ways in which pride is entangled with self-respect for black people and the ways the Black Lives Matter movement has re-centered this notion of Black pride; and lastly, to highlight how the hashtag “Black Lives Matter” provokes affective reactions of both pride and shame in white people through an analysis of the phrase ‘all lives matter.’ Adamkiewicz’s answers bring to the fore how pride and shame are racialized across the US cultural landscape. She offers readers space to reflect on the

ways whiteness is recuperated through pride and the rejection of shame, but also how pride can be productively utilized for Black (and we might speculate also for Indigenous) liberation movements. Overall, her contribution complicates simplistic definitions of pride or shame or a binary between the two, as she juggles several ways these emotions are appropriated by different identity groups in the US.

In addition to offering readers an understanding of her academic career and the developmental place of *aspeers* in it, she writes about how experiences in the US on several occasions helped shape her research, and specifically how speaking with Americans aided her development as a self-reflective academic. Her contribution also highlights the recent recognition of and engagement with critical whiteness studies and other identity-related scholarship in the field of American Studies in Germany. She speaks to the importance of this turn to critically analyze normative cultural constructions and the importance of Black feminist scholars to her own development as a self-reflective scholar of race/ethnicity.

We conclude this introduction with a slight swerve back into academic citation in order to prepare our readers for the contributions to come. In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Axel Honneth states that emotions such as shame are “always accompanied by affective sensations that are, in principle, capable of revealing to individuals the fact that certain forms of recognition are being withheld from them” (136). With this issue of *aspeers*, we hope to touch upon what Honneth implies here. In this vein, we offer the suggestion that perhaps shame is so unsettling and uncomfortable, because it presents a conflict at the level of ontology (Being): As Spanierman and Cabrera note in *Unveiling Whiteness*, “shame involves a negative appraisal of one’s self, whereas guilt is linked to an evaluation of a particular behavior” (17). Thus, this particular case of white guilt reveals that to recognize the Other requires not only behavioral changes, but also a transformation of how one ultimately sees one’s own place and essence in the world. In this way, anti-racist work and other political work towards recognition forces those in positions of power and privilege into an ‘ontological conflict’ where their stories about themselves and their worlds are called into question (Blaser “Ontological Conflict”). As our contributors have illustrated, the relation between pride and shame is not as simple as their respective connotations might suggest. This year’s issue of *aspeers* continues the journal’s tradition of establishing lively discussions with young voices across Europe in the field of American Studies. In other ways, we allowed ourselves to divert from the well-tried path, but we are certain that our

esteemed readership will have no problem recognizing the format. On this final note, we wish to thank everyone involved, and hope for an inspiring read.

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