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SOCIAL NETWORKS, WHAT A SHAME! TAKING SHAME ONLINE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ONLINE INTERACTIONS

abstract

This paper presents a phenomenological analysis of shame in social networks. Initially, I examine Sartre's (1956) account of the look and shame along with Dolezal's (2017) reinterpretation. I then explore how shame is negotiated in online interactions arguing that, in social networking systems (SNSs), shame is banned. Since subjects are constantly visible when posting content, they tend to share material that minimizes the risk of shame's thunderstruck. Yet, this shameless self-presentation raises complex phenomenological intricacies regarding personal identity and self-identification: in SNSs individuals strive for self-completion in posts, attempting to solve their otherwise irresolvable self-individuation process.

keywords

social networks, Sartre, shame, look, freeze

1. Introduction Social networking systems¹ constitute an integral part of our everyday life, primarily due to their role as powerful social tools. By posting content, we offer others a glimpse of who we are based on our interests, likings and shared materials. Our daily existence now appears shredded into two dimensions: a ‘concrete’ one where we felt-bodily live our experiences, and a virtual one in which they seem disincarnated (Fuchs, 2014).

However, recent literature suggests that online experiences can retain a degree of emotional authenticity (Osler, 2020, 2024). While the body feels alienated in online interactions, “I can ‘hear’ the excitement in [...] messages, the over-enthusiastic tone, [...] [the] desire to talk” (Osler, 2024, p. 317). There is room for having empathy online, albeit to a certain extent. In this paper, I will explore the possibility that shame is taken online too: is there shame in SNSs? How does it structure online interactions? What are its consequences?

While I situate my work within the Fuchs-Osler debate on online emotions, my focus will be on Sartre’s (1956) concept of shame and its reinterpretation by Dolezal (2017). My paper is built as follows: a) I will present Sartre’s concepts of the look and shame, together with Dolezal’s phenomenological shame; b) we will understand how SNSs work and their psychological implications dwelling on *Stories* function, in order to c) give an account of shame in online interactions.

2. To look or to freeze Sartre conceptualized the look in relation to the body: to see someone is, first and foremost, to look at their body recognizing it as belonging to that person. Regarding the look, Sartre’s (1956) interest is to understand “What do I mean when I assert that this object *is a man?*” (p. 254). Consider my room, for instance. Here, I am surrounded by objects: these pens and books on my desk, this laptop I am writing on, this cup of coffee I am sipping... then, I glance out the window and see men and women walking, chatting and enjoying themselves. Do I look at the objects on my desk and at these women and men the same? From a first phenomenological stance, “at least one of the modalities of the Other’s presence to me is *object-ness*” (Sartre, 1956, p. 253): as subject, surely they appear opposed to me, thus objects. Yet, these *privileged objects* have something more: I *recognize* them as subjectivities in their turn.

I see books and pens, yet “this man sees the lawn, or [...] in spite of the prohibiting sign he is preparing to walk on the grass” (Sartre, 1956, p. 254). What I acknowledge is that this object

¹ From now on, SNSs.

has, exactly like me, *possibilities* of being. It is necessary stating that, in Sartre's (1956) account, being is *in-itself* while consciousness exists *for-itself*: while the being is in-itself, in the sense that it "is what it is", consciousness for-itself "has to be what it is" (p. lxv).

There is a clear ontological contrast between my pens and books – which are determined and finished in their presence – and me, that I still have to be who I am in a perpetual state of becoming. The things on my desk are completely whole, they do not strive toward anything else: their being "is full positivity. It knows no otherness; [...] it exhausts itself in being" (Sartre, 1956, p. lxvi). But what about me? As a human being, I exist "before being in an attitude of interrogation" (Sartre, 1956, p. 4) concerning me as the being I am. I inquiry into my condition, posing a pivotal question: *who* or *what* am I, and *why* do I exist? This questioning introduces a fracture in the being and "a certain negative element [...] into the world" (Sartre, 1956, p. 23): a laceration between the being I am and the nothingness separating me from who I will be.

Hence, to pose a question is to inquiry whether or not things could have been different, whether *I* could have been different, and here is where nothingness infiltrates: in this being I am, creating an ontological hole of nothingness between who I am and who I am going to be. In this sense, the "non-being always appears within the limits of a human *expectation*" (Sartre, 1956, p. 7, my emphasis): it is because I have anticipations and, in a sense, hopes and ambitions over my existence that I break the being that *is* with the nothingness that *is not* (yet).

Namely, Sartre's idea of the human is that of a rambling, unfinished, partial and unrealized being always *ek-sistencially* projected toward its possibilities (Webber, 2009). I am a fundamental lack of being, which inherently is a lack of myself. This ends up in a crucial phenomenological consideration: I myself am my own possibilities which will never fill the ontological void of nothingness that I am as a for-itself; this is the structure of the for-itself: to be its own possibilities in a lack of coincidence with self (see Sartre, 1956, pp. 73 ff.).

Back at my window, the phenomenological meaning of recognizing those who I look at as subjects is that they project their existence as I do: I recognize that their existence is as structurally fractured as mine. This man sees the lawn but at the same time "it is possible that he is dreaming of some project without exactly being aware of what is around him" (Sartre, 1956, p. 254). The existence of this man is dissolved in probability too.

Then, abruptly while staring, I realize someone is looking at me too. In this moment, when I see "the convergence of two ocular globes in my direction" (Sartre, 1956, p. 257), I feel that "I am suddenly affected in my being and that essential modifications appear in my structure" (Sartre, 1956, p. 260). Now, I feel a sort of uneasiness: I realize that I am not the only one who can look, wondering what are these *privileged objects* existing just like me, but "my fundamental connection with the Other-as-subject must be able to be referred back to my permanent possibility of *being seen*" (Sartre, 1956, p. 256).

The look, once again, entails suffering: it triggers essential modifications in my being. These have to do with the other's look embracing "my being and *correlatively* the walls, the door, the keyhole" (Sartre, 1956, p. 261, my emphasis): I end up being one of the many things in other's sight. At the same time, I apprehend a dramatic truth: these objects initially pertaining my world are decentralized towards someone else's existence. This world escapes me to the other's seeing and presence, and concerning me from the other's ontological perspective, I am there, one of the many things of his/her surrounding world. Recognizing the other as a subject means grasping myself as an object, which occurrence is better explained by the meaning of shame.

Sartre (1956) depicts shame as "by nature *recognition*" (p. 222): I recognize myself as structurally shameful in the sense that shame ontologically defines my being. What does this mean, and how does it happen? Take a look at this situation:

3. What a shame to be ashamed!

I have just made an awkward or vulgar gesture. This gesture clings to me; I neither judge it nor blame it. I simply live it. I realize it in the mode of for-itself. But now suddenly I raise my head. Somebody was there and has seen me. Suddenly I realize the vulgarity of my gesture, and I am ashamed (Sartre, 1956, p. 221).

The broad idea is that I am captured in a situation where I am doing something wrong or awkward. When I notice the other's look pointed at me, I am ashamed because I feel that I am doing something I should be ashamed of: I feel shame for what I am caught doing and, thus, *being*. This creates a new layer of ontological conceivability of me: while I usually act spontaneously (*pre-reflectively*), doing something that I "neither judge it nor blame it. I simply live it" (Sartre, 1956, p. 221, my emphasis), now I acknowledge that there is a I in others' sighting that, differently, is eventually judged and blamed. Therefore, "I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other" (Sartre, 1956, p. 222).

In this way, as Sartre (1956) continues, shame becomes structural of subjectivity because I end up recognizing that "*I am as the Other sees me*" (p. 222): shame becomes constitutive of myself, as I have to endure the ontological fact of *Being-for-Others*. Still, I cannot find myself corresponding to the idea the other has of me: shame is accompanied by a feeling of inadequacy due to me not corresponding to how the other has seen me to be. The other might look at me catching a bad gesture or an ugly expression I made, and "I could feel irritation, or anger before it as before a bad portrait of myself" (Sartre, 1956, pp. 222).

Thus, shame breaks something in me: after I am seen, I am not the same anymore as "the Other has not only revealed to me what I was; he has established me in a new type of being which can support new qualifications" (Sartre, 1956, p. 222). In the end, shame ends impacting my lived experiences because there could always be someone lurking in the shadows watching me. Thus, existence flows with a dreadful feeling of shame from underground. Clearly, this opened for a general scholarly accepted pessimistic idea of Sartrean phenomenology: human condition and relationships are bathed in the shame of being looked at and qualified. Still, recent literature seems prone to a more optimistic fashioned reinterpretation of Sartre's account of shame.

Dolezal's works on shame are mainly centered on its socio-normative implications, which aligns her works with Nussbaum's (2004) and Guenther's (2011) for instance (see Dolezal, 2017, p. 422). Still, her theoretical equipment remains inherently phenomenological. In fact, she starts with a structural reconsideration of Sartre's idea of shame. While "It has been argued that placing shame at the heart of the structure of human subjectivity and intersubjectivity is a sign of Sartre's general pessimism" (Dolezal, 2017, p. 423), Dolezal's (2017) ambition still is "to offer an alternative, and more positive, reading of Sartre's account of shame" (p. 423). Based on Sartre (1956) solely, if it is true that "I am this self which another knows" (p. 261), at the same time "I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging" (Sartre, 1956, p. 261). In this sense, the general tendency at intending Sartre's shame as a *griffe* of structural pessimism about human nature and existence is at least understandable. However, Dolezal points out something that sheds new light on Sartre's phenomenological pessimism.

On her account, Sartre reveals "the vulnerability at the core of our existence and the concomitant human need for connection to others" (Dolezal, 2017, p. 423). It could be true that the look comes with shame attached, but that also implies that relations structure humans lives. Obviously, this means accepting the inherent vulnerability that characterizes our condition. This is what phenomenological shame really is about: to *acknowledge* and *accept* our vulnerability. Shame – and, for what concerns Dolezal (2015), *body-(political)shame* – reminds us about our condition of ontological and existential uncertainty. Taking shame into a phenomenological account elevates it above some generic interpretations where is described

as a “global decrease of self-esteem or self-respect”, as Zahavi (2014, p. 210) initially – among others² (Lewis, 1992; Deonna *et al.*, 2011) – puts it. Differently, shame is now about “our deep human need for belonging” (Dolezal, 2017, p. 435).

However, Sartre’s (1956) view over shame opens up for a more nuanced argument. In fact, whilst shame reveals me that “I *am* this being” (p. 261), and the other’s look “is [...] an intermediary which refers from me to myself” (Sartre, 1956 p. 259), at the same time shame “reveals to me that I *am* this being, not in the mode of ‘was’ or of ‘having to be’ but *in-itself*” (Sartre, 1956, p. 262). This means that the process of self-individuation (see Sartre, 1956, pp. 102 ff.; Recchia, 2018, 2019) of the for-itself is *frozen*: shame encloses me in a staturary objectivity. Whenever I am looked at, I find myself trapped in the situation.

In this sense, shame is “an immediate shudder which runs through me from head to foot without any discursive preparation” (Sartre, 1956, p. 222), and while “I need the Other in order to realize fully all the structures of my being” (Sartre, 1956, p. 222), which in a Dolezian sense it could be about my vulnerability and belonging, it is also true that this happens by objectifications, new qualifications and judgements freezing my existence in the in-itself. If concerning me “I shall remain forever a consciousness” (Sartre, 1956, p. 262), for the other “I *am seated* as this inkwell is on the table; for the Other, I *am leaning* over the keyhole as this tree is *bent* by the wind” (Sartre, 1956, p. 262). My existence gets paralyzed: again, my projectivity for-itself is frozen in the in-itself.

In this exact point plays out Sartre’s (1956) enigma about the relation between subjectivity and otherness: “My original fall is the existence of the Other” (p. 263). Put it like this, the look and the consequent shame could surely be sign of a deep humanly vulnerability, yet they sound more like “the gun pointed at me” (Sartre, 1956, p. 264) because “The Other is the hidden death of my possibilities” (Sartre, 1956, p. 264). From both phenomenological and ontological standpoints, “for the Other I have stripped myself of my transcendence” (Sartre, 1956, p. 262): my existential projections are paralyzed by the thunderstruck of shame. I *am* seen there, and *that* is all that I *am*. Again, I *am frozen in the situation*.

Having established this theoretical framework for shame, I now turn to its manifestation in online interactions. Does shame online function similarly to that in face-to-face encounters, where I see two ocular globes pointing at me? If so, how does its structure adapt to the virtual sphere, and what are the implications for users navigating SNSs? Am I frozen in the same way?

First, how do SNSs work? They are describable as “a particular type of virtual community and of social software” (Heidemann *et al.*, 2012, p. 3866) useful to stay *connected* with people without the need to be in the same place; to do that, a mobile phone or a computer with internet access is sufficient. In fact, “Most OSNs [Online Social Networks] are Web-based” (Heidemann *et al.*, 2012, p. 3866, Table 1). Not a great inconvenience at all, knowing that more than 70% of the world population owns a phone, a number destined to increase exponentially in the next years (Degenhard, 2024). In this sense, nearly everyone has the chance to connect with someone; in fact, it is estimated that more than 5 billion people use SNSs (Kemp, 2024). These statistics are crucial because they underline how much they are pervasively present in our everyday life. This generates new forms of interaction: if previously it was necessary to be in the same place at the same time to embrace a satisfying interaction, SNSs resolve this problem by *virtualizing* the very same concept of relation (Bauman, 2003; Riva *et al.*, 2019). Among the others, there is a specific function depicting SNSs’ redefined idea of interaction: *Stories*.

4. What exactly are social networks?

2 For a broader reconstruction of shame analysis, see Anolli 2010.

5. My own Stories First introduced in *Snapchat* and then spread from *Instagram* to other SNSs³ even outside Meta Inc.,⁴ *Stories* confirms SNSs pervasiveness in our life. It is “a function that enables users to share temporary multimedia content, such as photos or videos, which are visible for a set amount of time before vanishing, often 24 hours”.⁵ *Stories* is a particularly emblematic name: a story is something belonging to us, personally and specifically.

The idea behind *Stories* is to give subjects the possibility of posting something not lasting permanently. ‘Classic’ posts, in fact, had a worrying increase of social anxiety (Scott *et al.*, 2018; Vannucci *et al.*, 2017), and while even *Stories* seem to have some repercussion in one’s self-depiction (Marengo *et al.*, 2024), they likely feel ‘safer’ to use: their content, at last, expires. Thus, *Stories*’ peculiarity is to give subjects the chance of sharing more unscripted and instantaneous moments just happening. This is very clearly depicted in Cardell *et al.* (2017): to them, to post a story means to be a *storyteller* (p. 157). According to their data, after the launch of the *Stories* function “92 percent of US teenagers ages 13–17 go online daily; half of these use Instagram” (Cardell *et al.*, p. 160). The instantaneousness of *Stories* makes those SNSs who have it “a site of impromptu behavior” (Cardell *et al.*, p. 161): we improvise our life on SNSs with the same spontaneity we live every day, which represents a consistent difference as ‘traditional’ posts more easily expose to editing and photo-counterfeiting leading to body-dysmorphia, bad social comparison and self-objectification (Mustafa & Akram, 2022; Wick & Keel, 2020), arguably exactly because of their content being watchable for a longer period of time.

Stories capture the spontaneity of life, offering glimpses into my thoughts⁶, actions and experiences – and *I want others to look at them*. In fact, the look is vital in SNSs as their entire mechanism is about others looking at what we post, in a sharing bubble often reaching people we even do not know of (Chowdry, 2016). The psychological implications of this are thoroughly analyzed in Sciara *et al.* (2023). Their argument starts with the so-called *Symbolic self-completion theory*: subjects tend to symbolically represent things adequate with their ideal perception of self. Using this theory in SNSs, it has been suggested that “posting on Instagram permits people to convey a specific image of themselves in the very moment they want to let others know, by communicating self-related content *on the spot*” (p. 965). Therefore,

By posting a single picture that lasts for a day, for instance, Instagram users usually tell their audience what they are doing, where they currently are, who they are spending time with, what goals they are striving for or have just achieved, or simply how they look like today (Sciara *et al.*, p. 965).

In this sense, subjects tend to continuously expose moments of their life to others because, with a positive self-presentation, “social networking sites are ideal channels to let others know about one’s *indicators of completeness*” (Sciara *et al.*, p. 966, my emphasis). The logic behind

3 I.e. *SoundCloud* (<https://help.soundcloud.com/hc/en-us/articles/4890653912091-Stories-Android>, retrieved February 3, 2024), *TikTok* (<https://www.tiktok.com/creators/creator-portal/en-us/tiktok-content-strategy/tiktok-stories-what-it-is-and-how-to-use-it/>, retrieved February 3, 2024), *Giphy* (<https://support.giphy.com/hc/en-us/articles/360045681972-GIPHY-Stories-Best-Practices>, retrieved February 3, 2024).

4 Meta Platforms, most known as “Meta”, is the American enterprise managing the most used social media applications or websites: *WhatsApp*, *Instagram*, *Facebook* and *Messenger* above all. The most recent one is *Threads*, useful for sharing thoughts on various threads, indeed. For more information on Meta, see: <https://about.meta.com/uk/> (retrieved February 3, 2024).

5 See: <https://www.socialpilot.co/social-media-terms/social-media-story> (retrieved February 3, 2024).

6 Depending on the social, it is generally possible to share a text-only story without any image or video, see i.e.: <https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/introducing-type-mode-in-stories> (retrieved February 3, 2024).

posting – whether it be *Stories* or even more ‘traditional’ posts – sounds like: ‘look! I have done it! I have accomplished what I was striving for, and now *I feel complete!*’.

Posting thus fosters a sense of self-completion, as subjects curate content that aligns most closely with their aspirational identity – “Self-symbolizing [...] demonstrated to effectively recreate a sense of completeness” (Sciara *et al.*, 2023, p. 967). These psychological considerations lead to major phenomenological implications.

On SNSs, I can be seen. You can be seen. I can look at you, and you can look at me. As previously said, SNSs’ biggest earn was deleting the need to be in the same place to engage with someone. This also implies that the look is directed to someone without the need of its actual presence.⁷ As a consequence, posting on SNSs implies that me in that photo, in that video, in that situation, is constantly watchable. This leads to a striking consequence: if the look freezes us in the situation, SNSs submit subjects to a constant immobilization possibility. You just have to raise your phone.

6. Look at me!

It may be useful to conceptualize posts as a screenshot of ourselves, a kind of coagulation of our being within a situation: I can be seen assuming this or that position; I can be seen doing this or that; I can be seen here and there. Here I visited Paris, and I wanted to take a photo of me with the Eiffel Tower that *everyone can look at*; here, instead, I felt really comfortable with myself and I wanted to take a selfie that *everyone can look at*. What stands out from this dynamic is that if previously it *happened* me to be looked at, in SNSs I *want* to be engaged by the others’ look.

Psychological research indicates that SNSs overuse is driven by the rewarding effects of likes, comments, and other forms of social validation (Kim & Lee, 2011; Ellison *et al.*, 2007; Valkenburg *et al.*, 2006). In order to exponentially increase these pleasant outcomes, we capture ourselves in the moment: in SNSs, it is not me that *I get caught* in the event but, rather, it is me that *I catch* in a situation I want to be looked at.

But what about the shame of the look? Sartre (1956) gives the idea that there are instances for us to be alone and not freezable: shame is primarily “*before somebody*” (p. 221). Yet, on SNSs the I incapsulated in the post is open to a constant look: you only have to raise your phone, again. Hence, the consequence for me to be always observable is to be vulnerable to the freeze at all times as well. SNSs’ entire functioning depends on the fact that there have to be posts of someone, that is to say there must be someone to look at. This creates a compelling *spiral of identity freezing*: I look at someone and immobilize them within posts, just as I, too, am paralyzed. In posts I am blocked, completely captured.

The other’s look looms over us like an elusive Big Brother, reminding me “that I am vulnerable, that I have a body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place and that I can not in any case escape from the space in which I am” (Sartre, 1956, p. 259). In a nutshell, my suggestion is that with SNSs’ posts being always visible, subjects are constantly watchable and opened to the frozen shame of themselves.

This issue raises a crucial phenomenological question: if SNSs submit us to a constant state of frozen shame, why do I still post? We could just not raise our phone anymore! We pointed out that SNSs can be relevant for one’s identity accomplishments: I post the best of me so the other looks at my achieved identity-goals. While this makes posts interesting – we can say ‘I am this!’ or ‘I am that!’, because in posts it is exactly what we are: ‘this’ or ‘that’ –, on the other hand it also testifies how shame is differently conceived in online interactions.

⁷ This topic is tackled by Mazzarella (2022). Specifically, his work deals with the Metaverse and tries to understand presence’s status in the virtual reality.

My suggestion is that shame in SNSs is present in a subtly sense. If posts open the I captured at a constant exposition to others' looking, it is arguable that what I expose is a I coagulated in a post of which I am not ashamed of being watchable at anytime. In other words, it must be a I that does not make me feel ashamed if continuously subjected to the freezing look of the other, whenever they raise the phone.

In this sense, shame is banned from SNSs: *look, I am shamelessly myself in this post!* This becomes clearer when the psychological concepts we acquainted are integrated with phenomenological insights, revealing that the freezing effect in SNSs carries a deeper ontological and existential significance. Sartre's phenomenology helps once again: if the for-itself cannot possibly end in a coincidence with the self, as this is an ontological privilege not belonging to humans, at the same time "Consciousness is in fact a project of founding itself; [...] of attaining to the dignity of the in-itself-for-itself or in-itself-as-self-cause" (Sartre, 1956, p. 620). This is a phenomenological nuance that we cannot possibly argue here, and for which we need to defer elsewhere (Bantel, 1979; Howells, 2014), but the broad idea is that while the for-itself ends up frozen in the in-itself due to other's look and shaming or because of *bad faith* (see Sartre, 1956, pp. 47 ff.), existence is the fundamental tendency of the for-itself at a self-identification in the in-itself nonetheless.

In other terms, our existence is driven by the pursuit of self-identification – an attempt to define ourselves fully, once and for all, in-itself. My existence is the dream of being self and the doom of being it only in the mode of non-being: every possibility is insufficient, as previously said. This might be Sartre's most controversial take, but at the same time it sophisticatedly underscores the complexity and inherent contradictoriness of human existence: whenever enclosed in the in-itself, the for-itself is suffocated and ashamed, but still the wholeness of the in-itself remains its ontological proneness.

SNSs highlight this phenomenological *impasse* in a renewed fashion: whilst posting makes us constantly watchable, at the same time the coagulation in posts engenders a sense of ontological fullness – 'look! This is who I completely and shamelessly am! And you can look at me whenever or however you want, this is the entirety of myself!'

Phenomenology suggests that the meaning behind our posting is that it makes us feel wholly ourselves: when coagulated in the post, that is who we are in-itself. If the for-itself is the streaming of existence and the in-itself the stationary completeness of determinacy which we tend to, the instantiation of the for-itself in an immobile post gives the impression of an ontological wholeness in-itself. That is *really* who I am, totally and entirely: I post the me that can be continuously looked at and frozen without be hit by shame's thunderstruck.

I am in a bar, there are plenty of people around me. They all are on their phone, scrolling their favorite SNSs' feed. Suddenly, it appears them a post of me: 'look! This is exactly who I am!'.

7. Shame openings

I would like to conclude my argument by highlighting some plausible research openings that this kind of phenomenological shame may engage with. First, it could contribute to a phenomenological understanding of body-dysmorphia and self-objectivating arising from SNSs usage (Ryding & Kuss, 2020; Brasil *et al.*, 2024; Lamp *et al.*, 2019): in fact, there could be a layer of shame from underground – or perhaps from the horizon (Dolezal, 2022)? – shredding one's life because of the constant pression of a wholly-like self-exposition. In this case, the existence sickens from the failings of not being determined enough, while others *appear* to be completely in-themselves: 'look! He/she is better than me in being him/herself, how can I be determined like that without the shame of being constantly looked at?'.

Secondly: while in this paper we mainly focused on media-centric (photos or videos) SNSs, there are other systems whose interaction has the specific aim of creating 'concrete' relations.

Consider dating apps, for instance: while posts are evidently published with the aim of being looked at, their final objective is to make those who are frozen *desirable* to be acquainted with (and perhaps *unfreeze*, in a sense?). Shame here is understandably widely present, as testified by diversified literature (Blake *et al.*, 2022; Rodgers, 2020; O’Gorman *et al.*, 2024). Nonetheless, phenomenological shame could account for some common outcomes related to these types of online interactions: the other *matching* us expects us being up to the expectations generated by the subject he/she is looking at. This phenomenon may help explain the notable rise in cosmetic procedures, which appear linked to SNS-induced shame of not being enough (Northrop, 2013; Vaughan-Turbull & Lewis, 2015): we try to self-coincide with the I shamelessly exposed to others’ constant looking. It is the phenomenological tendency of the for-itself to in-itself coincide with self, once again.

Furthermore, this could explain why a relevant part of the violence happening in SNSs – like cyberbullying, derision and marginalizations – is perpetrated through the ashaming mechanism (Basak *et al.*, 2019): in the posts where the subject is instantiated and constantly watchable, there is a break for shame to fill in. Arguably, the post in which we freeze is not as shameless as we initially believed, creating an opening for a shame-centric violence to enter: ‘here, look! What an awkward face you have! Oh! What a silly posture you assumed!’. On the flip side of the coin, this same mechanism may explain the potential benefic effects of SNSs for those who stick to close friends online interactions. In fact, it was demonstrated that having a strong focus on close friends online guarantees an increase in self-esteem especially because of a lowering of self-control (Wilcox & Stephen, 2013). From a phenomenological perspective, this lowering of self-control could be attributed to a deeper decrease of *self-shame* attention: while online public look implies controlling every glimmer for the shame to enter, our close friends access a more spontaneous and less self-shame controlled version of us, which results in a deeper appreciation and flourishing of our pre-reflectively authentic lived experiences.

In this paper, my aim was to ground a phenomenological analysis of shame in SNSs. I structured my work into three parts: in the first, I exposed Sartre’s phenomenology of the look and shame, while at the same time giving an account of their Dolezal’s reinterpretation. Secondly, I briefly explained the workings of SNSs, particularly focusing on the *Stories* function; lastly, I inquired shame implications in online interactions, concluding that the look and the consequent freeze in posts has a deep ontological meaning: to make us whole by eradicating shame.

I hope to have shed light on a new form of shame that may also shape our ‘offline’, disconnected lives. Perhaps the distinction between online and offline realities has become obsolete, as they are now largely inseparable – an existential condition already described as *Onlife* (Floridi, 2014). This further underscores the critical importance of a phenomenological investigation of online interactions, as it gives an account of our renewed way of intending lived experiences.

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8. Conclusion

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