

# *Shame: The Master Emotion?*

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## *Acknowledgements*

As Visiting Scholar in the School of Management, I was asked to deliver a lecture as part of the 1999 University of Tasmania University Forum Lecture series (in three different venues) on the work I have been doing on the role of emotions in organisational life. The announcement of those lectures read:

Shame, a sense of worthlessness, of powerlessness, of defect, seems to lie at the core of the human psyche. It seems to lead to lying and deception in an effort to preserve the self. Shame seems to drive violence and war, even when, in a different form, it is used in an effort to deter people from inappropriate and aberrant behaviour. In this presentation, Professor Poulson will discuss the nature of shame, exploring these and other issues in an examination of the possibility that shame is the “master emotion.”

This paper is based on those lectures. Some portions of both the lectures and this paper have been adapted from the chapter on shame and work which will appear as a book chapter in a forthcoming work (Poulson, 2000). I thank the University Forum program and the School of Management for the opportunity afforded me. I also thank all those in the audiences at Hobart, Launceston, and Burnie not only for their attention but also for their contributions to this work in the form of excellent questions and lively discussion.