Cultural Variations in Shame's Responses: A Dynamic Perspective
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Pers Soc Psychol Rev published online 29 July 2014
DOI: 10.1177/1088868314540810

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What is This?
Shame is widely considered to be maladaptive for people’s intrapsychic and interpersonal well-being. The emotion has been repeatedly found to predict externalizing consequences, including externalization of blame, anger, resentment, hostility, and aggression. However, most of this research has been conducted in North America and parts of Europe. In contrast, cross-cultural, cultural psychological, and anthropological research paints a very different picture of shame. Specifically, in parts of Asia, Africa, and South and Central America, the emotion promotes less externalization of blame, anger, and aggression. Instead, shame is often valued in these contexts as a positive, moral force that promotes restorative behaviors such as self-improvement and prosocial actions.

This article proposes a theory of shame that attempts to account for these discrepant findings, highlighting a particular manner by which shame can play a constructive role in people’s lives. The article consists of two major parts: The first part proposes a dynamic motivational perspective on shame and outlines the manifestations of shame at the psychological and cultural levels. In this new perspective, shame entails an active avoidance motivation that is dynamic over time, first involving behavioral inhibition and then incorporating behavioral activation. The second part reviews the literature on shame’s consequences in light of this theoretical framework. Studies across psychology and anthropology find that shame is related to three behavioral tendencies: (a) externalization, (b) restoration, and (c) withdrawal.1 The article concludes that observed variations in shame’s consequences are due to variations in the form of activation-based motivation enacted during the shaming event. Behavioral inhibition associated with shame, however, is found across cultural contexts. Finally, implications and future directions for research on self-conscious emotions, other moral emotions, and motivation are discussed.

Past Conceptions of Shame and Its Consequences

The study of shame in psychology largely grew out of psychoanalytic work on shame and guilt, which based the two emotions in the ego ideal and superego, respectively (Lewis, 1971; Piers & Singer, 1953). This work served as the precursor for the major perspective on shame, first outlined by Lewis (1971) and then advanced most notably by Tangney and her colleagues (e.g., Tangney, 1991; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). These researchers posited an attributional difference between shame and guilt, reflecting global versus specific attributions, respectively (also see Janoff-Bulman, 1979, on the attributional differences between characterological self-blame [global self] and behavioral self-blame [specific behavior]). Shame involves a negative evaluation of oneself (e.g., “I am a bad person”), in contrast to a negative

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evaluation of a specific behavior (e.g., “I did a bad thing”), which occurs in guilt. In shame, one is condemned as a “bad,” “immoral,” or “irresponsible” person, whereas in guilt, a specific behavior is condemned as a “bad,” “immoral,” or “irresponsible” action. Moreover, Tracy and Robins (2006) added to this distinction the possibility that one’s flaws are perceived as stable and immutable in shame but unstable and mutable in guilt.

A more controversial distinction between shame and guilt concerns their respective “public” and “private” nature: One perspective suggests that guilt represents internal, “private” judgments of oneself and one’s behaviors, whereas shame represents external, “public” judgments from others of oneself and one’s behaviors. Support for this distinction is mixed: Like embarrassment, shame is highly concerned with other people’s evaluations of oneself (e.g., Sabini, Garvey, & Hall, 2001). However, unlike embarrassment, shame often occurs in the absence of others, thereby representing an internalized morality, and is why shame and guilt, but not embarrassment, are typically considered “moral emotions” (this “private” vs. “public” nature of shame will be discussed in greater detail below).

Functional definitions, which explain psychological phenomena in relation to how they serve the individual, and social functional accounts in particular, speculate the role that shame may play in maintaining interpersonal relationships and regulating social interactions. Evolutionary perspectives suggest that shame is a basic emotion universal to all human beings (Tomkins, 1963), arising from a pan-primate form of shame that manages social relationships (Fessler, 2007) and appeasement-related behaviors (Keltner, Young, & Buswell, 1997). From a very different perspective, Scheff’s (1994) sociological perspective argues that shame signals a threat to a social bond and regulates conformity in a society.

Overall, the literature conceptualizes shame as a negative, global appraisal of oneself, one that can occur in the absence of other people, and that is viewed as stable and immutable. Accordingly, although it is possible to rectify the “bad” behavior implicated in guilt, the same possibility is absent in shame when confronted with the belief that one is a “bad” person. From this perspective, responses motivated by shame are defensive in nature, including withdrawal—distancing oneself from others and the implications of one’s transgressions—and externalization—blaming others for one’s feelings of shame.

However, evidence from the cross-cultural and anthropological literature suggests another, neglected side to shame, one that is valued and promotes self-improvement and prosociality. The “guilt equals good, shame equals bad” dichotomy prevalent in psychology breaks down in these contexts. Yet, the prevailing framework for shame does not allow or account for this constructive side of the emotion. The next section outlines a dynamic motivational perspective on shame based in self-regulation theory (Carver & Scheier, 1998) that builds on attributional and functional conceptions of shame and provides greater explanatory power regarding the variations in shame’s consequences.

A Dynamic Motivational Framework of Shame

Self-regulation theory posits the existence of two primary motivations: approach/activation motivation and avoidance/inhibition motivation (Carver & Scheier, 1998), elaborating upon Gray’s (1982) distinction between the Behavioral Activation System (BAS) and the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS). The BAS, representing approach motivation, is sensitive to reward and nonpunishment, and the BIS, representing avoidance motivation, is sensitive to punishment and nonreward. According to this perspective, the motivation to avoid a negative end-state, or an “anti-goal,” always involves inhibitory behavioral tendencies, whereas the motivation to approach a desired goal or end-state always involves activation behavioral tendencies (Carver, 2006, p. 106). This framework is similar to Higgins’s (e.g., Higgins, 1987; Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994) regulatory focus theory, which also distinguishes between two types of strategies: a promotion focus that involves a sensitivity to the presence or absence of positive outcomes (to approach a match with the desired end-state), and a prevention focus that involves a sensitivity to the presence or absence of negative outcomes (to avoid a mismatch with the desired end-state). Overall, self-regulation theory links the approach of a positive end-state to enacting behavior and the avoidance of an antigonal to restricting behavior.

In addition, the BIS and BAS underlie certain emotions (Carver, 2006; Gray, 1982; Higgins, 1987). Considerable work has focused on the dimensional structure of affect (e.g., Carver, 2001; Russell & Carroll, 1999) and whether affect runs along positive–negative valenced or approach-avoidance motivational dimensions. The latter perspective argues for two motivational dimensions whereby approach and avoidance motivations cannot be equated solely with pleasure and pain, respectively, but rather with the successful (or unsuccessful) approach of a positive, rewarding outcome, or the successful (or unsuccessful) avoidance of a negative, punishing outcome.

Higgins (1987) provided support for the existence of bipolar motivational dimensions in which elation is felt after meeting one’s hopes or ideals and dejection is felt when failing to do so. However, calm and “quiescence” is felt after successfully preventing an undesired outcome, whereas anxiety is felt when failing to prevent it. Harmon-Jones and colleagues (e.g., Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009; Harmon-Jones & Sigelman, 2001) also concluded that anger is an approach-motivated emotion and is associated with increased relative left frontal cortical activity, a neural correlate of the BAS. Sheikh and Janoff-Bulman (2010a, 2010b) found another negative emotion, guilt, to also be an approach-motivated...
emotion, based in behavioral activation and focused particularly on the failure to enact positive obligations and moral “shoulds.” Similarly, Amodio, Devine, and Harmon-Jones (2007) found that guilt is related to increased relative left frontal cortical activity. Some evidence also indicates that sadness is an “inverse marker” of positive affect and is consequently felt as the absence of successful approach (Carver, 2001). In all, strong evidence supports the presence of two bipolar dimensions of affect that reflect two types of motivation.

Following a self-regulatory perspective, Sheikh and Janoff-Bulman (2010a, 2010b) found that shame is associated with the BIS. In their comparison of shame and guilt, the authors distinguished between guilt’s focus on prescriptions and actions one “should do” versus shame’s focus on prescriptions and actions one “should not do.” Guilt is the recognition of a failure to do the right thing, to be a “good” person, whereas shame is the recognition of a failure to avoid doing the wrong thing, to be a “bad” person. The behavioral activation present in guilt is evident in the emotion’s focus on the good, which propels the desire to make amends and “right the wrong.” However, behavioral inhibition manifests in shame as a desire to shrink, hide, and escape the “bad” self, or what Carver (2001) calls, the “anti-goal.”

Interestingly, some self-regulation researchers have noted times in which avoidance motivation, involving behavioral inhibition, shifts to include behavioral activation. As Carver (2006) noted,

An avoidance loop tries to increase distance from the anti-goal; at some point an incentive becomes identified and an approach loop begins to engage. Once this happens, the person (with both loops active) is simultaneously trying to avoid the anti-goal and approach the goal. Thus, many cases of active avoidance of a threat also involve approach of an incentive. (p. 106)

Indeed, inhibition may sometimes not be enough for successful avoidance, and activating behavior can further help in avoiding negative end-states. For example, to rid my mouth of a bad taste entirely, not only will I stop eating, but I will also drink some water to cleanse away the bad taste. McGregor, Nash, Mann, and Phillips’s (2010) work on reactive approach motivation suggests that activation is a particularly effective response to uncertain or threatening situations, citing evidence that relative left frontal cortical activity and other markers of the BAS are associated with lower anxiety and attenuated reactivity to negative stimuli (e.g., Jackson et al., 2003).

Behavioral activation is then likely an effective response during shame. Emotions are processes that change over time during which individuals monitor the relative success of their goals and the most effective strategies to attain them (Kirkland & Cunningham, 2012). For example, Amodio et al. (2007) found evidence for a dynamic model of guilt in which self-reports of guilt for appearing prejudiced predicted changes in left frontal cortical activity across time. These shifts in activation motivation occurred as the relative effectiveness of strategies for appearing egalitarian changed. In the case of avoidance-oriented emotions such as shame, a motivational shift from BIS-related activity to BAS-related activity occurs when inhibition is judged to be insufficient and activation becomes a more effective strategy to achieve the relevant avoidance-oriented goal. Prior emotional experiences provide socially and culturally specific information on the effectiveness of particular strategies during an emotional event, including when to alter behavior to incorporate activation-based responses and which specific types of behaviors to incorporate (Baumeister, Vohs, DeWall, & Zhang, 2007; Carver & Scheier, 1998).

The Relational Phenomenology and Ethnotheories of Emotion

This section details the socially and culturally specific information guiding an emotion’s behavioral strategies (in shame’s case, withdrawal, externalization, and reparation). During shame, the following factors—shame’s relational phenomenology and the normative beliefs associated with shame, respectively—influence the type of activation-based strategies employed during a shameful event.

Relational phenomenology. Researchers have highlighted the importance of the interpersonal domain and the role of others, particularly those close and significant to the individual, in forming the self-concept and influencing related thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Higgins, 1987). As Andersen and Chen (2002) noted, “Significant others are crucial to self-definition and its vicissitudes as well as to affective and motivational experience, self-regulation, and interpersonal behavior” (p. 638). The real presence of others—including close, significant others—as well as the individual’s mental representations of others during an emotional event inform the emotion’s evaluative and behavioral responses. This experience of others (either real or imagined) is the relational phenomenology of an emotion.

Several studies across cultural contexts have noted that shame involves the perceived presence of an “other” or “imaginary audiences” (Baldwin, 1997). In particular, the literature has identified two types of others: a shamed other, in which significant others are shamed as a result of one’s transgression or failure, and a disapproving other, in which others are judging, rejecting, and disapproving of that transgression or failure. As discussed in more detail in the next section, the presence of shamed others motivates restorative tendencies, whereas the presence of disapproving others promotes externalizing tendencies.

At first glance, it may seem contradictory to define shame as an emotion involving a negative evaluation of oneself as a “bad” person, reflecting an internalized morality that does
not require the presence of others, while concurrently suggesting that other people are central to the experience of shame. Private self-evaluations reflect concerns about oneself, whereas one’s public image reflects concerns about others’ opinions even when they contradict one’s own views (Leary, Terry, Batts Allen, & Tate, 2009). For instance, embarrassment concerns only one’s public image because it reflects others’ perceptions of oneself as flawed, even if one does not believe this perception to be true (Sabini et al., 2001). On the other hand, shame reflects a similar concern for others’ opinions but differs from embarrassment because it necessitates some acknowledgment that others’ opinion about oneself is true (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Sabini et al., 2001). As Sartre (1956) aptly noted, in shame “I recognize that I am as the Other sees me” (p. 222). It seems as though private and public concerns converge in the phenomenology of shame: Others’ reactions are taken as true reflections of one’s flaws.

**Normative beliefs.** The normative beliefs specific to a culture, or ethnotheories (Lutz & White, 1986), regarding the nature and value of emotions supply a way of understanding one’s emotional experiences. These beliefs influence many aspects of an emotion, including how frequently it is experienced, its hedonicity, and its regulatory functions (Eid & Diener, 2001). As Goetz and Keltner (2007) stated,

> Normative beliefs are strongly related to the regulation strategies and implications of the self-conscious emotions. If a particular emotion is considered useful and valuable, there will be more positive outcomes associated with its experience and expression. If an emotion is considered undesirable, however, there will be more negative outcomes associated with its experience. (p. 165)

Variations in emotions within and across cultures, then, are influenced by the relevant ethnotheories associated with that emotion. In particular, the constructive versus detrimental consequences of an emotion occur as a function of the positive versus negative valence of those ethnotheories, respectively.

Ethnotheories of emotions guide the person’s behavioral tendencies during an emotional event. Ethnotheories that devalue shame render its experience particularly damming, unacceptable, and unmanageable—promoting detrimental consequences such as externalization, anger, and aggression. In contrast, ethnotheories that value shame promote the frequency of its experience and renders shame more manageable—leading to desirable consequences such as self-improvement and reparation.

The social and cultural factors of shame are mutually informing and co-creating. In other words, a bidirectional relationship exists between the two factors in which, for instance, shame-affirming ethnotheories promote the perceived presence of shamed others during a shame event and vice versa. However, both also have independent direct influences on the consequences of shame so that, for instance, the presence of shame-affirming ethnotheories or perceptions of shamed others alone can promote constructive consequences (as discussed later).

The next two sections further detail the relational phenomenologies and ethnotheories of shame to understand their role in shame’s behavioral tendencies. Individualism–collectivism (Hofstede, 1980) and the related psychological distinction between independent versus interdependent self-construals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) help explain the cultural differences in the type of relational phenomenology and ethnotheories relevant during a shame event. The following sections employ previous mappings of geographic regions and countries as relatively individualistic or collectivist to synthesize the cross-cultural research on shame. This does not mean, however, that collectivistic beliefs cannot be found in countries such as the United States, or individualistic beliefs in India. In fact, differences in the relational phenomenology and ethnotheories of shame in one culture can also help us understand divergent findings of shame in “Western” countries.

**Shame-affirming ethnotheories and the presence of a shamed other.** A substantial amount of research suggests that shame, although unpleasant, is valued in collectivist contexts. Researchers have long suggested that shame plays a particularly prominent role in collectivist cultures such as those in South and East Asia—to the extent to which they have sometimes been labeled as “shame cultures” (Benedict, 1946)—and that these contexts have relatively positive ethnotheories regarding the value of shame. In their cross-cultural comparison of 37 countries, Scherer and Wallbott (1994) found that participants from relatively collectivist cultures considered shame to be less negatively valenced than those from relatively individualist cultures.

These cultures largely hold ethnotheories extolling the positive, moral status of shame as an emotion necessary for developing a strong sense of morality and for society to function well. Fung’s (1999) ethnographic study of moral socialization found that Taiwanese parents viewed shame as an emotion that helps their children build moral character and equips them with the ability to cope properly with failures. Illustrating this positive value placed on shame, Fung also reported a cross-cultural study in which 43% of Chinese parents, but not their North American counterparts, agreed that preschool children should be shamed if they do not follow social rules. Similarly, anthropologist Okano (1994) described ethnotheories highlighting the positive value of shame in Japan, stating that “in the Japanese language ‘a man who does not know what shame is’ is equivalent to a ‘thick-skinned’ and ‘insensitive’ person who is practically unfit for society” (para. 16). Although caution should be taken in interpreting ancient texts to understand contemporary beliefs and values, researchers have also noted that Confucianism, a philosophical system historically predominant in China,
promotes positive connotations of shame. In fact, 10% of Confucian analects are devoted to the value of shame (Chu, 1972, cited in Fung, 1999).

Collectivist honor cultures also hold shame-affirming ethnotheories. Spain is a Mediterranean country that is relatively higher on collectivism compared with other European countries (Hofstede, 1980) and is considered an honor culture (Gilmore, 1987). Compared with individuals in the Netherlands, those from Spain hold more positive beliefs about shame, reporting, for example, that “shame is a proof of strength” (Fischer, Manstead, & Rodriguez Mosquera, 1999, p. 163).

The largely positive value of shame in collectivist cultures is also reflected in the relational phenomenology of shame in these contexts. Here, a person’s shame extends to close, significant others (Abu-Lughod, 1988; Benedict, 1946; Fung & Chen, 2001; Swartz, 1988). For example, in their studies of the socialization of shame among children in Taiwanese households, Fung and Chen (2001) reported the importance of what the authors call “shame-sharing,” in which one’s shame permeates and affects all members of the family unit. The authors observed that an important part of the shaming process included messages that others in the family are implicated in the child’s shameful behaviors. A typical shaming event described in the study involved a mother telling her misbehaved child that she is the one who would be shamed for not raising the child well. Several observations also included children being shamed for their siblings’ transgressions, presumably to instill collective responsibility for a family member’s behavior.

As such, shame is socialized in a relational context in which one’s own shame is shared by others—such as one’s parents and siblings—which then influences the relational phenomenology of shame in adulthood. Liem’s (1997) interviews with first- and second-generation Asian Americans and European American young adults found different relational phenomenologies of shame across the groups. Although the European American participants reported only the presence of others who were judging them, the first- and second-generation Asian American participants also described the presence of others—mainly family members—who were shamed as a result of the interviewees’ transgressions. Overall, it seems as though shame-sharing, in which one’s shame extends to others, reflects an interdependent self-construal prevalent in collectivist cultures in which the boundaries between oneself and others are permeable and one is dependent upon others and vice versa (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

**Shame-devaluing ethnotheories and the presence of a disapproving other.** In contrast to the shame-affirming ethnotheories in collectivist contexts, shame is particularly damming in individualist contexts that value personal achievement. In the United States, for instance, shame is under taboo today. The paradox . . . is that there is shame about shame . . . This is particularly amplified in a culture which values achievement and success. (Tomkins, 1980, p. 24; cited in Kaufman & Lev, 1984; see also Scheff, 1994)

In other words, shame’s global evaluation that one is “a bad person” is shame-inducing in itself.

Denying shame is often used in popular American discourse, particularly in identity politics, as a means of empowerment. For instance, the oft-said phrase, “I am not ashamed of who I am,” always has a positive connotation. Anthropologist Simon (2005) has also noted that the feeling of shame is often described in common parlance by English-speakers in the United States with other words such as “feeling weird” or merely “embarrassed” because of the negative connotations associated with the English word **shame**.

Interestingly, given that scientific theories contribute heavily to Western ethnotheories (Parkinson, Fischer, & Manstead, 2005), the psychological literature arguing for shame’s “maladaptive” nature may also inadvertently promote beliefs about the emotion’s unacceptability. Few “Western” psychologists even considered shame as a topic of inquiry until Piers and Singer’s (1953) and Lewis’s (1971) important distinctions between shame and guilt. And even when shame was implied in early studies on neuroses, psychoanalysts (e.g., Horne, 1937) noted its destructive relationship to an unbaiting desire for personal achievement (Kaufman & Lev, 1984).

Shame-devaluing ethnotheories reflect a different sort of experience of shame—one that is not embedded in responsibility toward others but rather involves confronting shame and its implications alone. There is little to no mention of a shamed other or shame-sharing in studies of shame conducted in North America and Western Europe. Rather, researchers have noted the importance of a different relational phenomenology: the presence of a judgmental or disapproving other. In their clinical analyses of shame and guilt, Piers and Singer (1953) and Lewis (1987) reported that the experience of shame involves someone else, or even an ideal form of oneself, looking down at one’s shameful state. In shame, one is an object of another person’s gaze (Sartre, 1956), the “self-in-the-eyes-of-the-other” (Lewis, 1987). Wicker, Payne, & Morgan (1983) found that reports of shame were associated with feeling “under scrutiny and control of others” (p. 36). In contrast to the importance of shamed others, researchers in North America have described the development of shame arising from the presence of detached, judgmental significant others. In particular, Schore (1998) suggested that shame arises in the primary attachment relationship when a toddler’s excitement is met unexpectedly with maternal detachment, a developmental precursor of the presence of a disapproving other in shame (Herman, 2012).
Inhibition and Variations in Activation

At first glance, it would seem as though collectivist cultures should regard shame as more destructive given that it affects a greater number of individuals. Indeed, shame in these contexts is likely a painful experience. However, the extended network of others implicated by one’s shame and their dependence on the shamed individual also creates a sense of obligation and responsibility toward those who are shamed by one’s transgression. This responsibility motivates restorative behaviors such as self-improvement to bring oneself—and by extension, others—out of the shameful state. The obligation inherent in shame-sharing focuses the person on social relationships and the social context rather than on one’s internal attributes, making it easier to effect change and make reparations.

Individualist contexts, however, hinder the constructive side of shame. Instead, the presence of a disapproving other highlights the damming nature of the emotion, promote externalizing tendencies to deny one’s shame and place the blame on another. Tangney and Dearing (2002) suggested that the phenomenological presence of a disapproving other fosters hostility and anger and stated that

... although shame is not more public than guilt in terms of the actual structure of the emotion-eliciting experience ... shamed individuals have a heightened awareness of and concern with others’ evaluations. A shamed person is acutely conscious of what other people might be thinking about them. From there, it’s a short step to attribute the cause of painful shame feelings to others who are perceived as disapproving. (p. 93)

A disapproving other reflects a stable, independent self-construal in which the individual is alone in his or her shame with no opportunity for change. Rather than fostering obligation and responsibility toward others as in the case of shame-sharing, a disapproving other increases feelings of isolation and rejection, which increase anger and aggression toward others (Leary, Twenge, & Quinlivan, 2006; see also Gausel, Leach, Vignoles, & Brown, 2012).

In all cases, shame is based in inhibition, but the type of subsequent activation-based behaviors depends on the normative beliefs and relational phenomenology associated with shame. A disapproving other and shame-devaluing ethnotheories promote externalization, anger, and aggression as a way to deny and attenuate one’s shame and its damming implications. However, the presence of a shamed other and shame-affirming ethnotheories attenuate shame-based externalization and instead motivate efforts to improve oneself and restore relationships, actions that require acknowledging and accepting one’s shame. Importantly, both externalizing and restorative tendencies have been found to be related to the BAS: Anger and aggression, as mentioned earlier, have been identified as approach-based and related to behavioral and neural correlates of the BAS (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009), and positive obligations have been related to an activation-based moral orientation (Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp, 2009).

Cultural Variations in the Behavioral Consequences of Shame

The following three sections review the diverse empirical work across psychology and anthropology on shame’s behavioral tendencies and synthesize the literature using a dynamic motivational framework. Overall, the results linking shame to externalizing consequences such as anger and aggression have been found primarily in individualist cultures (i.e., North America, parts of Western Europe, and Australia), whereas those linking shame to restorative consequences have been found primarily in collectivist cultures (i.e., South and East Asia, South and Central America, Africa). However, strong evidence suggests that shame is related to withdrawal tendencies across cultures. Although the current state of the literature has limitations that preclude definitive conclusions about the relationship between culture and shame’s consequences, this section provides preliminary support for a dynamic motivational framework for shame and offers the next steps needed in shame research.

Shame and Externalizing Tendencies

A large body of correlational and experimental studies has found that shame is associated with externalizing tendencies such as externalization of blame, anger, resentment, hostility, and aggression toward others. Externalization of blame involves attributing the cause of negative events to external factors (Tangney & Dearing, 2002) and given that anger, hostility, and aggression involve blaming others, these can also be regarded as particular instances of externalizing tendencies (Buss & Perry, 1992; see also Stuewig, Tangney, Heigl, Harty, & McCloskey, 2010, for evidence for the underlying role of externalization of blame in anger and aggression in the context of shame).

Almost all of the research on the relationship between shame and externalizing tendencies has been conducted in North America, Western Europe, and Australia. One of the most cited studies of this type, by Tangney, Wagner, and Gramzow (1992), found that individual differences in proneness to shame, as measured by the Test of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA; Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, 1989), were positively correlated with blaming, anger, and hostility. A follow-up study found that individual differences in externalization of blame mediated the correlation between proneness to shame and anger and aggression (Stuewig et al., 2010).

Research strongly suggests that shame underlies externalizing tendencies in the family context in North America. Scarnier, Schmader, and Lickel (2009) found that parental shame positively predicted “overreactivity” responses such
as anger, aggression, and punishment toward their children. Harsh, externalizing parental responses instill shame-proneness in children (Tangney et al., 2007), and this shame is also found to predict anger and aggression. For instance, shame positively predicted anger responses among children with histories of physical abuse (Bennett, Sullivan, & Lewis, 2005). Among adult survivors of child abuse, shame is positively related to physical and verbal aggression toward intimate partners (Harper & Arias, 2004; J. Kim, Talbot, & Cicchetti, 2009) and greater irritability, resentment, and suspiciousness of others (Hoglund & Nicholas, 1995), which is found particularly among men (Harper & Arias, 2004; Harper, Austin, Cerccone, & Arias, 2005).

Shame among men in North America is linked to similar externalizing tendencies in other contexts. Reid, Harper, and Anderson (2009) reported that men high on hypersexuality expressed greater shame-based anger toward oneself and others, as measured by the Compass of Shame Scale (Elison, Lennon, & Pulos, 2006). Moreover, Tangney, Stuewig, Mashek, and Hastings (2011) found that shame among male inmate populations positively predicted externalization of blame.

Shame is also positively related to externalizing tendencies among schoolchildren. Lotze, Ravindran, and Myers (2010) found that shame-proneness (measured by the Test of Self-Conscious Affect-C [TOSCA-C]; Tangney, Wagner, Burggraf, Gramzow, & Fletcher, 1990) among children with incarcerated mothers predicted observed externalizing behaviors at a school camp. Shame among children in school settings also predicts hostility and aggression toward others in Western Europe and Australia: Aslund, Starrin, Leppert, and Nilsson (2009) found that self-reports of being shamed by peers predicted physical and verbal aggression among teenage adolescents in Sweden. In a longitudinal study, Heaven, Ciarrochi, and Leeson (2009) found that shame (as measured by items from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule - Expanded Form (PANAS-X; Watson & Clark, 1994) among Australian grade school adolescents predicted hostility 1 year later, but not vice versa, suggesting a causal link between shame and hostility.

The relationship between shame and various externalizing tendencies in North America has also been found at the group level. Group shame (but not group guilt) as a result of a transgression by one’s in-group is positively related to hostility and derogation toward other in-group members (Piff, Martinez, & Keltner, 2012), which is presumably motivated to derogate those in-group members who brought shame upon the group (Lickel, Steele, & Schmader, 2011). Highlighting the similarities between individual-level and group-level shame, Piff et al. (2012) concluded, “Our studies show that many of the appraisal processes and consequences associated with shame on the personal level extend to the level of groups. Specifically, individuals will react antagonistically to an entire social group that has shamed them” (p. 646).

**Evidence of externalization in “non-Western” contexts.** Cross-cultural evidence suggests that shame is associated with externalizing consequences among Asian samples, but to a lesser extent than among American samples. For instance, Bear, Uribe-Zarain, Manning, and Shioml (2009) used the TOSCA-C and the Multidimensional School Anger Inventory (MSAI; Smith, Furlong, Bates, & Laughlin, 1998), a self-report measure of proneness to anger, to investigate the correlations among individual differences in shame, guilt, externalization of blame, and anger. Similar to the findings of Tangney et al. (1992), shame-proneness positively predicted anger-proneness among American children, which was mediated by externalization of blame. However, shame-proneness did not predict anger-proneness but positively predicted externalization of blame among Japanese children.

In a cross-cultural comparison among Japanese, Korean, and American children (Furukawa, Tangney, & Higashibara, 2012), shame-proneness, measured by the TOSCA-3, positively predicted externalization of blame for all three groups and positively predicted self-report anger-proneness, measured by the Children’s Inventory of Anger—Short Form (CIA; Finch, Saylor, & Nelson, 1987), for the American and Japanese children; however, no relationship between shame and anger was found for the Korean children. Similar to Bear et al. (2009), shame predicted aggression among the American children, as reported by classroom teachers, but not among the Japanese or the Korean children.

Shame also predicts less anger in South Asian contexts compared with shame in North America. In a comparison among American children and Nepalese Tamang and Brahman children, Tamang children were found most likely to express shame and least likely to express anger in response to vignettes describing scenes of public mistakes and mishaps compared with the American and Brahman children (Cole, Bruschi, & Tamang, 2002). Interestingly, the “East/West” dichotomy breaks down when comparing Brahman and American children, both of whom were less likely to express shame than the Tamang children but more likely to respond to the vignettes with anger. As mentioned earlier, variations in individualism and collectivism exist across social groups and contexts within a country. The Tamang, a highly communal social group, place greater value on shame compared with the Brahmans, who enjoy considerable privilege and high caste status in Nepal and are thus more likely to find shame’s indication of wrongdoing and failure as particularly damning and unacceptable (Cole, Tamang, & Shrestha, 2006).

All three studies that investigated the relationship between shame and externalizing consequences across “non-Western” cultures found less anger and aggression as a function of shame in these contexts. It is worth noting that this pattern of results may not only reflect the positive connotations of shame prevalent in collectivist cultures but also the negative connotations of anger as destructive to interpersonal relationships (and although individualist cultures also sometimes
Shame and Restorative Tendencies

A more favorable picture of shame is painted when considering its relationship to behaviors that repair the harm one has caused, restore interpersonal relationships, and promote self-improvement. Cross-cultural and ethnographic studies, mainly in parts of Asia, South and Central America, and Africa have reported positive relations between shame and restorative actions.

For example, in a comparison among members of the Rarámuri tribe from Mexico, native Javanese in Indonesia, Indonesian students, and Dutch students, differences emerged in shame’s relationship to self-improvement and anger as a function of cultural context (Breugelmans & Poortinga, 2006). Participants were presented with shame- or guilt-eliciting scenarios and asked to choose from a list of 29 descriptors to describe what they would feel in each scenario. Even though the Rarámuri do not linguistically differentiate between shame and guilt, few differences emerged across the four groups. One key difference among the groups, however, concerned the desire for self-improvement and changing future behavior. The Dutch and Indonesian students associated “changing future behavior” with the guilt-eliciting scenarios, whereas the Rarámuri and native Javanese associated it with the shame-eliciting scenarios. Moreover, the study showed that from a negative perspective (e.g., “I feel bad because the way Serbs do,” for instance, focuses on a wrong behavior and interpersonal harm, both of which have been regarded as key markers of guilt (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994; Tangney, 1991). Nevertheless, other items assessing shame were in line with definitions of shame involving a negative evaluation of oneself (e.g., “I feel bad because the way Serbs have treated Bosnian Muslims during the war has created a bad image”).

Self-improvement has been found as a result of failure and shame in East Asia. Heine et al. (2001) found that failure on a task prompted Japanese participants, but not their American counterparts, to persist longer on a follow-up task (see Heine & Raineri, 2009, for similar findings between Chilean and American participants). However, it is unclear whether shame underlies the effect of failure on task persistence. Direct evidence, however, of the shame-improvement link comes from a comparison between Filipino and Dutch salespersons’ responses to shame. Bagozzi, Verbeke, and Gavino (2003) found that shame among Dutch salespersons predicted the desire to disengage from their customers, whereas shame among the Filipino salespersons predicted the desire to be courteous to and engage in relationship building activities with their customers.

Ethnographic and qualitative studies also illustrate the link between shame and restorative consequences in parts of Asia and Africa. Indian and Bedouin women, respectively, report that they believe shame to promote individual and societal well-being (Abu-Lughod, 1988; Menon & Shweder,
Shame and restorative tendencies in “Western” contexts. Although most studies conducted in “Western” contexts have found guilt, not shame, to predict prosocial and restorative tendencies (e.g., Ferguson et al., 1991; Iyer et al., 2007; Tangney et al., 2007), some recent studies are beginning to uncover a positive side of shame in Western Europe, a relatively individualist context.

Studies have found that Dutch participants induced with shame (schaante) increased self-improvement and prosocial tendencies, even when controlling for guilt (De Hooge et al., 2000; De Hooge, Zeelenberg, & Breugelmans, 2010). De Hooge et al. (2008) reported that inducing shame increased prosocial tendencies, but only for “pro-selfs”—participants who tended to act more selfishly. Interestingly, in line with the literature reporting shame’s detrimental consequences in “Western” contexts, the authors also reported a main effect of shame on increased state anger.

Similarly, shame predicts restorative tendencies in an intergroup context in Norway: Gausel et al. (2012) found that self-reports of group shame, but not guilt, among Norwegian participants predicted restorative actions toward the outgroup. The relationship emerged only when feelings of rejection and inferiority were statistically partialled out.

The take-home message of the above studies stands in stark contrast to conclusions drawn by studies in the previous section. Here, shame seems to work as a positive force for self-improvement, repairation, and prosociality. From a motivational perspective, it makes sense that many of the constructive consequences of shame are found in South and East Asia, North Africa, South and Central Asia, and Eastern Europe, which have been identified as largely collectivist contexts (Hofstede, 1980) that endorse shame-sharing practices and shame-affirming ethnotheories.

However, this pattern of results does not mean that constructive consequences of shame are manifested solely in collectivist countries. A dynamic motivational perspective can explain divergent findings of shame in individualist contexts. As noted earlier, ethnotheories and relational phenom- enology have independent influences on shame’s action tendencies: shame can promote restorative tendencies in cultures that have shame-devaluing ethnotheories if the experience of shame involves the presence of shamed others. For instance, in studies on in-group failure in Norway, a Western European context, Gausel et al. (2012) induced shame by having participants read about past in-group atrocities committed by Norwegians toward the country’s Tater ethnic minority. The shame-induction ended by stating, “As a result, the Norwegian government publicly admitted its moral failure and began a public discussion of the country’s culpability.” In focusing on the group’s “culpability,” shamed others (one’s in-group) are highlighted, creating a sense of responsibility and potential for change. Contrasting findings are reported by Iyer et al. (2007), in which in-group shame did not predict restorative tendencies in the United States. The authors induced shame among American participants by asking them to read about problems faced by Iraqis in postwar Iraq created by the American occupation. They concluded with a description of how “Iraqi people blamed the Americans’ character for problems in postwar Iraq” (Iyer et al., 2007, p. 576). Given the focus on a disapproving other—the Iraqis—it is not surprising that shame did not predict restorative tendencies in their study. Rather, a dynamic perspective on shame would suggest the presence of anger and other externalizing tendencies in this context.

Shame and Withdrawal

Although activation-based behaviors associated with shame seem to be culturally variable, those based in inhibition are widespread. Most of the studies contrast the relationship between shame and withdrawal to that of guilt and reparative tendencies and conclude that while guilt motivates reparative actions (including apology, confession, and prosocial actions), shame motivates withdrawal tendencies (including feelings of shrinking and being small and motivates desires to hide, disappear, and avoid others; for overviews, see Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010b; Tangney et al., 2007). The following reviews the literature on shame’s link to withdrawal, with particular attention to cross-cultural and anthropological research indicating that behavioral inhibition in shame is also prevalent outside of “Western” cultures.

Experiences of shame recounted by American adults are marked by a desire to withdraw or hide (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Schmader & Lickel, 2006; Wicker et al., 1983). In Lindsay-Hartz’s (1984) interview study on shame and guilt, the urge to withdraw during shame is manifested in participants’ hesitance to talk about the emotion and its eliciting events, reflecting an “urgency to hide these shameful experiences from others, as well as from themselves” (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984, pp. 691-693). However, interviewees’ descriptions of guilt expressed instead an eagerness to talk about their feelings of guilt and guilt-eliciting events, what Lindsay-Hartz (1984, p. 693) interpreted as an urge “to confess” and reflecting “the desire to set things right.” Similarly, shame among North American children predicts withdrawal tendencies, including escaping the presence of others and avoiding their gaze (Barrett, 2005; Barrett, Zahn-Waxler, & Cole, 1993; Ferguson et al., 1991).

Contexts in which shame predicts greater externalization also highlight the emotion’s relationship with withdrawal.
For example, shame positively predicts interpersonal aggression among Americans with histories of childhood abuse (Harper & Arias, 2004; J. Kim et al., 2009) as well as concealing information about their abuse (Bonanno et al., 2002; Talbot, 1996). Bonanno et al. (2002) found that adult survivors of childhood abuse exhibiting facial markers of shame were less likely to disclose their histories of childhood abuse during an interview on distressing events.

Shame at the group level increases hostility as well as withdrawal. For example, Iyer et al. (2007) reported that group shame (but not group guilt) among Americans about the treatment of Iraqis during the Iraq War predicted endorsement for troop withdrawal from Iraq (but not compensation for Iraqis). The authors concluded that group shame promotes in-group withdrawal and motivations to “remove the group from the situation” (Iyer et al., 2007, p. 584).

Although externalizing and restorative tendencies differ across cultures, cross-cultural and ethnographic studies strongly suggest that shame-related withdrawal is present in both “Western” and “non-Western” contexts. Several of the studies that demonstrated shame’s constructive consequences in “non-Western” contexts also suggest that shame involves withdrawal. For example, Breugelmans and Poortinga (2006) found that although the Rarámuri and Javanese adults (but not the Indonesian or Dutch students) associated shame with a desire to “change future behavior,” all four groups associated shame with efforts to “hide” and “evade the looks of others.”

Shame is also acknowledged to incur withdrawal in East Asia. As mentioned in the previous section, Bagozzi et al. (2003) reported that Filipino salespeople were more likely to engage in self-improvement after a shame-inducing situation, whereas their Dutch counterparts were more likely to avoid, for example, small talk with customers. Yet, the authors’ found similarities in Filipino and Dutch experiences of shame that included the urge to hide. Factor analysis found that withdrawal tendencies (measured by items such as “I feel like shrinking”) were part of shame for both Dutch and Filipino groups. So it appears that the Filipino salespeople exhibited withdrawal tendencies as a function of shame but did not act upon this motivation.

Cross-cultural comparisons on the components of shame (e.g., appraisals, physiological changes, behavioral tendencies) highlight similarities in withdrawal tendencies across cultures. A comparison of shame among individuals in Peru, Hungary, and Belgium found that people in all three countries associated shame-eliciting scenarios with wanting to leave the shame-inducing situation (Fontaine et al., 2006). Hurtado de Mendoza, Fernández-Dols, Parrott, and Carrera (2010, Study 2) also found that although Spanish-speaking participants differentiate several components of American shame and Spanish verguenza, they nevertheless associate both emotion categories with the desire to disappear.

The ethnographic literature on shame also indicates that shame-based withdrawal tendencies also occur in contexts in which shame is viewed as a positive force. For example, although Taiwanese parents view shame as a valuable tool in the moral socialization process, they also recognize that the emotion can lead children to withdraw, give up on their efforts, and disengage from their responsibilities (Fung, 1999).

Lajya is viewed positively as central to female virtue, but also necessary for women’s self-control and restraint from “dangerous” behaviors that threaten the existing patriarchal structure (Menon & Shweder, 1994). In an interview study, participants were asked to recount the story of Kali, the powerful Hindu goddess who, during a fit of rage, accidentally steps on her husband. Upon realizing her transgression, Kali stops her rampage and bites her tongue—an Indian expression of shame. Among the themes reported in the interviews was the power of lajya as an “antidote to her [Kali’s] anger” and as the reason for Kali’s “self-control/self-restraint” (Menon & Shweder, 1994, p. 254). Here, shame’s inhibitory functions take the form of female restraint: Lajya is viewed to quell Kali’s rage and keep her (and, more generally, women’s) destructive forces in check.

In Ethiopia, migration due to social and economic factors also seems to function as an act of shame-induced withdrawal. Although Ethiopian culture values deference and subordination in social relationships, interviews with Ethiopian young men in stigmatized occupations show that the strong shame (yilunnta) associated with these jobs drives desires to immigrate to other countries—not just to improve their situation but also to escape the yilunnta (Mains, 2007). As one of the interviewees stated,

Everyone wants to go to leave Ethiopia. This is because work is not appreciated here. A person who does street work like shining shoes and washing cars will be insulted, especially if they are educated. Of course he can make more money in South Africa, but also there is no yilunnta there. (Mains, 2007, p. 669)

The young men talked about shame as a central cause of their desire to migrate elsewhere.

Shame also underlies practices of concealing one’s identity, body, and aspects of one’s private life in “non-Western” contexts. In Mainland China and Hong Kong, reports of shame among Chinese lesbian women negatively predicted coming out to others (Chow & Cheng, 2010). Several ethnographic studies describe how shame regulates covering and concealing women’s bodies: Hasham is concerned with “acts of deference” among Bedouins (Abu-Lughod, 1988, p. 107). Behavior arising from of hasham includes the most extreme and visible acts of veiling and dressing modestly (covering hair, arms, legs, and the outlines of the body) as well as more personal gestures such as downcast eyes, humble but formal posture, and restraint in eating, smoking, talking, laughing, and joking. (Abu-Lughod, 1988, p. 108)

Shame (aibu) among the Swahili in Mombasa is manifested in everyday practices of concealment, even of seemingly innocuous behaviors such as saying the name of one’s...
grandfather (Swartz, 1988). Similarly, Japanese shame (haji) is closely connected to restricting displays of sexuality and affection, concealing private thoughts, and avoiding eye contact, which, at an extreme, can lead to fears of interpersonal contact and anthropophobia (taijin kyofushô; Lebra, 1983).

Overall, the tendency to withdraw when ashamed is common in a wide array of cultures. Externalizing and restorative tendencies, however, seem to vary substantially across cultures. And although less research has been conducted on shame’s restorative tendencies, most of the studies find a relationship between the two in relatively collectivist contexts. Interestingly, studies reporting variations in shame’s externalizing and restorative tendencies also provide evidence that shame is related to withdrawal in both “Western” and “non-Western” contexts (e.g., Bagozzi et al., 2003; Breugelmans & Poortinga, 2006). The following section describes the limitations of existing research and, using a motivational perspective, suggests future research to move forward on fully understanding the adaptive versus maladaptive sides of shame.

Limitations of the Current Literature

Most studies investigating shame’s consequences are correlational and as such the directionality of the relationship is unclear. This is largely a problem for studies on shame and externalization given that, for example, Tangney et al.’s (1991) findings could also indicate that anger induces shame (which is less plausible in the case of studies linking shame and restoration). Heaven et al.’s (2009) longitudinal study is the only one reviewed that suggests a causal link between shame and externalization.

Some of the studies assessed the predictive value of shame by statistically partialling out its covariance with guilt, whereas others did not consider the covariance between shame and guilt, largely because it was not methodologically appropriate—the ethnographic studies, of course, do not control for guilt—or because they presumably did not measure guilt. It is unclear what is being assessed in studies that partial out shame’s covariance with guilt given that the two emotions, as negative self-conscious emotions, share similar features. Nevertheless, each of the above sections included studies that controlled for guilt as well as those that did not control for guilt, suggesting that variations in shame’s behavioral tendencies across cultures are not merely due to differences in statistical techniques across studies.

The literature reviewed has assessed shame with several measures. Most of the studies used (a) the English term shame or a synonym (or its translation; see section “Issues in Cross-Cultural Research on Emotion”), (b) a list of descriptors of shame’s characteristics, or (c) a version of the TOSCA scale. The first two methods have been used in studies reporting externalizing, restorative, and withdrawal tendencies of shame, implying that these methods are not biased to show one particular behavioral tendency of shame over the others. However, no study to date has reported a link between shame-proneness and restorative tendencies using a TOSCA scale. Notably, the TOSCA measures shame and guilt using some items about withdrawal and reparation, respectively. Given that these studies also partial out guilt (and thus the reparative tendencies), it is not surprising that a positive side to shame has not been found using this scale. Instead, the only two studies reporting positive correlations between shame and externalizing tendencies in collectivist cultures (albeit to a lesser extent than in individualist contexts) used a version of the TOSCA scale (Bear et al., 2009; Furukawa et al., 2012). Future cross-cultural studies on shame and externalization should also use other measures of shame (e.g., measuring shame in Japan with the term haji) to test whether they produce similar findings.

Final Thoughts

Issues in Cross-Cultural Research on Emotion

An alternative explanation for the variations in shame’s consequences is that shame that induces aggression is an altogether different emotion from shame that promotes restoration. The cross-cultural literature has been wrought with debates regarding the point at which variations across cultures suggest the existence of different, culture-specific emotions (Parkinson et al., 2005). For instance, the variations between the Arabic hasham and the English shame may indicate that these are in fact two different emotions. At what point are we comparing apples to oranges?

The constructivist position espoused most notably by Sapir (1929) and Whorf (1956) argues that linguistic categories create psychological phenomena. Given that hasham and shame arise from different linguistic systems, this perspective suggests that they are not referring to the same emotion. For example, Bedford (2004) suggested that terms for shame in English and in Mandarin Chinese may refer to different emotional experiences. The author’s interviews with Taiwanese women highlighted the existence of multiple versions of the TOSCA scale (Bear et al., 2009) to test羞耻的正反面。然而，至今没有研究报道了一种直接将羞耻的高分与修复性方向相关联的结论。不过，使用TOSCA量表的两种研究（Bear et al., 2009; Furukawa et al., 2012）表明，未来的跨文化研究应该使用其他羞耻度量来测试这些研究在使用不同术语（例如，在日本使用术语haji）时是否会产生类似的结果。

最终思考

跨文化研究中的情绪问题

另一种解释是，羞耻导致的攻击性是一种完全不同的情绪，而不是促进恢复的羞耻。跨文化研究充满了关于在什么情况下，不同文化的情绪变异可能表示存在的不同、文化特异性情绪的辩论（Parkinson et al., 2005）。例如，Bedford (2004) 建议，英语和汉语中的羞耻术语可能指代不同的情感体验。作者对台湾女性的访谈揭示了多种TOSCA版本（Bear et al., 2009）来测试羞耻的不同版本。
hypothesis, or at least its strong version, by the very nature of different linguistic (and, more broadly, cultural) systems, English shame is necessarily a different emotional experience from those captured by the Mandarin terms for shame.

A constructivist position on emotion, in which cultural processes such as language and psychological phenomena such as affect, interact and build people’s emotional experiences, is commensurate with a dynamic motivational perspective on shame. From this perspective, linguistic categories referring to shame (e.g., hasham; shame) contain information about the relevant relational phenomenology and ethnotheories that then motivate subsequent actions. For example, the English shame in North America would linguistically represent the experience of being a bad person in front of a disapproving other, have shame-devaluing connotations, and then promote withdrawal and externalization tendencies.

A contrasting perspective holds that psychological phenomena exist prior to language. To return to Bedford’s (2004) findings, Frank, Harvey, and Verdu (2000) reported that the Mandarin shame terms reflect different aspects of English shame: The authors constructed scenarios in English to reflect the eliciting events for each Mandarin term and, using a factor analytic technique, found that American participants grouped the scenarios in categories similar to the Mandarin shame terms. Reflecting the more universalist position, the authors concluded “individuals are capable of making differentiations that are imperfectly reflected in their linguistic categories” (Frank et al., 2000, p. 895).

Focusing on the similarities between apples and oranges, a universalist position holds that defining psychological features of emotion exist separate from language. For instance, cognitive appraisal theories define emotion as an appraisal with an accompanying motivation (Lazarus, 1991). This perspective is also consistent with a dynamic motivational perspective on shame. Here, the defining feature of shame would be an appraisal that the person is bad, incompetent, or immoral, which is inextricably tied to inhibition, a desire to hide and withdraw. Cultural variation in shame’s activation-based responses is due to secondary appraisals about the regulation strategies available to the individual. Ethnotheories, for instance, provide culture-specific information on how to cope—via hostility or self-improvement—with the shameful event. From this perspective, shame and xiu chi, for example, may feel different from each other—not because they have different primary appraisals and are thus different emotions—but because of differences in their secondary meanings regarding the relational phenomenologies and ethnotheories.

**Further Implications and Future Directions**

A dynamic motivational perspective can account for variations in the relationships between shame and other emotions. A prototype approach to the study of emotion concepts revealed that shame is clustered closely with guilt under a sadness category in English and Italian, but clustered in a fear category in Indonesian, Dutch, Basque, and Ifaluk (Edlestein & Shaver, 2007). Similarly, Li, Wang, and Fischer (2004) found that shame terms in Chinese were clustered into two categories—a shame related more to guilt and a shame related more to embarrassment (what the authors called “self-focus” and “other-focus” shame, respectively). Differences between these two categories of Chinese shame may reflect different relational configurations: A shame highlighting the presence of shamed others, creating a sense of responsibility, would have greater similarities to guilt than a shame involving disapproving others, which is likely more comparable with embarrassment. In effect, previously found relationships between shame and depressive symptoms (S. Kim, Thibodeau, & Jorgensen, 2011), and fear and anxiety (Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010b), for instance, may be culturally variable and due to differences in the phenomenology and ethnotheories associated with shame.

The article expanded upon the concepts of active avoidance, normative beliefs, relational phenomenology, and action tendencies present during a shame experience, but these concepts can also inform other aspects of shame as well as other emotions. For example, shame-affirming and devaluing ethnotheories likely influence other aspects of a shame experience besides its behavioral tendencies. The emotion regulation literature has described strategies influenced by cultural beliefs, including situation selection, modification, and selective attention (Mesquita & Albert, 2007). A fruitful avenue for future research involves testing ways in which these emotion regulation strategies interact with shame-affirming and shame-devaluing ethnotheories to influence other variations in shame, including the frequency of its experience, its expression, and how painful it feels.

Moreover, the article focused on the influence of ethnotheories on the behavioral consequences of shame. Yet, the consequences of shame likely also inform ethnotheories about the emotion. Individual experiences and observations of shame’s detrimental consequences may feed into and reinforce shame-devaluing ethnotheories, including lay and scientific theories, in a culture. In this sense, psychologists’ conclusions regarding the consequences of shame (and other emotions) have the potential to reinforce and actually perpetuate those very consequences.

The motivational and relational components of other emotion categories can also be understood with a dynamic motivational framework. Active avoidance has the potential to capture the motivational complexities of other avoidance-based emotions besides shame. For instance, sociomoral disgust is related to distancing from the object of disgust as well as condemnation of that object (Horberg, Oveis, Keltner, & Cohen, 2009), which likely reflects changes from inhibition to activation during a disgust experience.

Furthermore, the article provides implications for other self-conscious emotions. Although their focus is on oneself (hence the term self-conscious emotions), the relational phenomenology during an emotional event is also central for
these emotions in that all involve the (real or imagined) presence of others. Embarrassment, as noted previously, reflects the real presence of observers of one’s actions; guilt almost always has others as objects toward whom one is obligated; and pride involves others who are witnesses to one’s successes and fortunes. These relational configurations can account for some of the similarities and differences among shame, embarrassment, guilt, and pride and their respective behavioral tendencies.

Finally, the article provides implications for the ethical status of emotions. Although psychological researchers often draw conclusions about the role of certain emotions in practical ethics, this review warns against the temptation to render judgments of “goodness” or “badness” regarding an emotion due to the motivations it engenders. Anger, for instance, has been both maligned by psychologists as promoting “antisocial” behaviors but also viewed positively in the form of moral outrage as a response against perceived injustices (Averill, 1982). Psychologists have also rendered strikingly different conclusions about guilt: Freud (1930), for example, believed the emotion to be central to pathological neurosis, whereas recent psychological researchers have emphasized its central role in maintaining relationships (Baumeister et al., 1994; Tangney, 1991). Similarly, shame results in tendencies to withdraw, externalize, and restore—implying greater complexity in its relationship to ethical theories.

Conclusion

Drawing from theory on active avoidance, this article proposed that shame is associated with inhibition, promoting withdrawal tendencies, which then may include activation-based responses such as externalization and restoration. The relational phenomenology and normative beliefs associated with shame guide the motivational shift from inhibition to activation. The presence of a disapproving other and ethnotheories that devalue shame elicit externalizing tendencies. In contrast, the presence of a ashamed other and ethnotheories that value shame motivate actions such as acknowledging one’s failure, self-improvement, reconciliation, reparation, and changing future behaviors. Consistent with cultural differences in the relational phenomenology and normative beliefs associated with shame, a review of the literature showed that shame’s undesirable, sometimes destructive, side is seen more in “Western,” individualist cultures while its constructive side is found in more “non-Western,” collectivist cultures. However, studies suggest that withdrawal tendencies during shame occur across cultural contexts. A dynamic motivational framework synthesizes the diverse literature on the consequences of shame and provides new avenues for research on emotions and motivation.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, Mark R. Leary, and Yolanda W. H. Penders for their advice and help with the article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Shame has also been connected to “maladaptive” consequences such as depressive symptoms (see recent meta-analysis by Kim, Thibodeau, & Jorgensen, 2011), somatization (Pineses, Street, & Koenen, 2006), and low self-esteem (for a review, see Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Although important, these are not behavioral tendencies motivated by shame and, as such, will not be discussed in detail in this review.

2. Affect is defined as subjective feelings, involved not only in an emotional state (e.g., feeling angry) but also in any other feeling state (e.g., feeling sleepy; Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009).

3. The majority of studies on the cultural variations of shame are cross-country, not within-country, comparisons, which is why this review deals largely with cross-country differences in shame.

4. Following Lazarus (1994), state and trait emotions are “merely two sides of the same coin . . . when emotion is viewed as a state, we want to know what it is about the situation that generates anger, say, as distinguished from pride or another emotion. When emotion is viewed as a trait, we want to know what it is about the person that accounts for the recurrent response of anger, pride, or another emotion” (p. 80). State shame and trait shame refer to the same emotional phenomenon—shame—but differ in explanations of what brings the shame about—person or situation.

5. Recent findings that show the presence of an emotional experience in the absence of a linguistic term for that experience do not disprove the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and the constructivist perspective. Just because a specific linguistic category is not present, it does not follow that language more generally does not create experience. For example, although English does not have an equivalent word for xiù kui, English speakers still easily have an ability to linguistically represent this type of shame simply as, for instance, “a mix of shame and guilt.” A specific term for a phenomenon may elucidate its relative significance in a particular culture (Levy, 1983), but the lack of a linguistic term does not mean that the phenomenon is not represented in a language.

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