The personal management of shame and pride in workplace bullying

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Abstract
Shame and pride management were used to predict workplace bullying and victimization among a random sample of 1,967 Australians who responded to a national crime survey. Those who identified themselves as having bullied others were pride-focused, not shame focused. They were more likely to express narcissistic pride over their work success, lauding their feats over others, and were less likely to express humble pride, sharing their success with others. In contrast, victims were defined primarily by their shame over failures. They were more likely to both acknowledge and displace shame over failures in work tasks. Victims and bullies revealed impediments to social reintegration. Victims did not trust others, while bullies did not see victims as needing to see offender rehabilitation. The findings raise questions of whether competitive, hierarchical and performance oriented workplaces fail to provide incentives for workers to manage shame and pride in ways that promote collegial workplace relations.

Keywords
Shame, pride, workplace bullying, reintegration, forgiveness

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WORKING PAPER

The personal management of shame and pride in workplace bullying

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Introduction

The emotions of shame and pride are an integral part of the assessment of performance in the workplace. When a job is done well, pleasure and pride in accomplishing a difficult task is a common emotional response. Failure in completing such a task, on the other hand, is likely to generate disappointment. For most people, the feeling of disappointment will pass quickly, as new tasks are assigned. Some, however, take disappointment in the workplace as a reflection of their worth. Disappointment can lead to shame.

This paper examines shame and pride over workplace performance and links management of these emotions to workplace bullying. The theoretical perspective builds on Reintegrative Shaming Theory (RST) (Braithwaite, 1989) and is referred to as Shame and Pride Management through Reintegration (SPMR) (Ahmed et al., 2001; Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2011; Braithwaite et al., 2008). Theoretically, shame and pride have both socially adaptive and socially damaging forms. Socially damaging forms are more likely to emerge in socially stigmatizing and disintegrative contexts. They are relationally disruptive, paving the way for workplace bullying. Socially adaptive forms require social and emotional intelligence and a collective sensibility (Ahmed et al., 2001; Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2011; Braithwaite et al., 2008), and while they may not prevent bullying, they provide a base for its effective management.

Background literature on workplace bullying

Bullying refers to one individual or group repeatedly seeking to dominate another person, physically or psychologically, in jest or in order to control another’s behavior. A well accepted definition is: Bullying involves persistent, offensive, abusive, or intimidating behavior that makes the target feel threatened, humiliated, stressed, or unsafe at work (Di Martino et al., 2003). A substantial body of empirical research has shown the deleterious effects of bullying on people’s health and well-being at work and beyond, ranging from low job satisfaction, commitment and loss of confidence through depression, anxiety, mental and physical illness, and, in some cases, suicide (McCormack et al., 2006; Mikkelsen

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In a bid to explain workplace bullying, researchers have examined the characteristics of individual bullies (Sheehan, 1999; Zaft & Einrasen, 2003), the characteristics of their targets (Coyne et al., 2000; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001), workplace relationships (Einarsen, 1999), and workplace culture (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Einarsen, 2000; Leymann, 1996). Perpetrators have been linked with personal qualities such as impulsivity, emotional reactivity, cynicism, low tolerance for ambiguity and aggressiveness (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). Victims on the other hand are more likely to have low self-esteem, poor social competence, and to exhibit negative affectivity more commonly than most (Glaso et al., 2007; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007).

The likelihood that bullying episodes will flare up is increased if the workplace is characterized by role ambiguity, high work demands, interpersonal conflict, and tyrannical or laissez-faire leadership (Hauge et al., 2007; Skogstad et al., 2007). Communication openness, a supportive work environment and providing bullied employees with recourse within the workplace have been found to reduce bullying and the problems it poses for targets (Bilgel et al., 2006; Daniel, 2004; Oluremi, 2007).

As is the case with other work health and safety issues, the role of senior management has also come under scrutiny (Agervoid & Mikkelsen, 2004; Ferris, 2004). Where senior managers fail to firmly communicate that bullying is unacceptable, the problem is likely to continue. Management may tolerate bullying in order to achieve time-sensitive work targets (Ferris, 2004). Anti-bullying laws around the world attempt to respond to these challenges by requiring workplaces to promote a socially responsible work culture and to demonstrate that they have been responsive to complaints of workplace bullying. Enforcement, however, can be difficult with lack of evidence and inconsistent accounts of events (Ferris, 2004). Problems are compounded because perpetrators of bullying are often victims of bullying: Provocation, retaliation and self-defence are common workplace bullying narratives to defend against censure by those with authority (Braithwaite, 2013; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment, 2012). Bully-victims are most vulnerable to illness and adjustment problems (Coyne et al., 2004).

People, work, management and law

Bullying appears to be an outcome of one or many of the following: at the individual level, lapses or gaps in social competence, self-control and/or emotional intelligence; at the organizational level, poor role definitions, demanding and stressful work, absence of leaders who set standards, and more generally, insufficient attention to respectful team building by employers and employees alike; and at the societal level, law that is remote and difficult to enforce. These forces often work in concert to confuse the issue of workplace bullying. Feedback on behavior that is alleged to be bullying is then open to many interpretations. If individuals do not reach a point collectively of acknowledging that bullying actions have occurred and are unacceptable, it is unlikely that bullying will cease.

Acceptance of feedback is emotionally challenging for individuals and organizations. For individuals
feedback is personal and they must be ready to deal with emotions such as shame and pride. For organizations, delivering messages of disapproval and approval in a constructive rather than destructive way means finding ways that maximize the likelihood that shame and pride will be handled well. The issue this paper addresses is that when individuals are unable to manage these emotions in a socially adaptive manner - either because of their own capacities or because of organizational practices of delivering approval or disapproval, they are more likely to be embroiled in bullying events as offender or victim.

Present study

This study uses an extension of Reintegrative Shaming Theory to predict a relationship between how people manage shame and pride in the workplace and the extent of their involvement in workplace bullying and victimization. Reintegrative shaming theory explains how shaming or disapproving of individuals can be counterproductive if it breaks rather than builds social connectedness. The focus is on what a person or authority does to others. Shame and pride management through reintegration theory explains the psychological experiences of shame and pride and how individuals deal with them. The focus is on how individuals manage feeling ashamed. The central idea is that shame that is managed adaptively enables individuals to remain integrated with their social group, thereby avoiding bullying encounters. Eliza Ahmed and John Braithwaite (2011) later extended these ideas to pride management. Pride is the complementary emotion of shame (Scheff & Retzinger, 1991) which relates to how to manage positive feedback and success such that social bonds are not damaged in the process.

Reintegrative shaming theory

Reintegrative shaming theory (Braithwaite, 1989) differentiates disapproval given in a reintegrative way (reintegrative shaming) versus a stigmatizing way (stigmatized shaming). Disapproval that is denigrating qualifies as stigmatized shaming when criticism of the person is holistic, attributing to the individual a worthlessness that denies their human rights and dignity. The person is responded to not as an essentially good person who has done something we do not like, but as a bad person who does bad things. Such outcasting is not terminated through rituals or gestures of reintegration and reacceptance. This is contrasted with reintegrative shaming where harmful deeds are disapproved, while the worth of the person is affirmed, valuing their positive contribution and welcoming positive engagement in the future. Put more formally, reintegrative shaming disapproves of the specific behavior that breaches norms and standards of behavior, but does not disapprove of the whole person. It responds to behavioral correction with appreciation, inclusion or forgiveness (Braithwaite, 1989; 2002).

Reintegrative shaming is far more likely to result in a person desisting from inappropriate behavior than stigmatizing shaming (Ahmed et al., 2001). The reason is that stigmatizing shaming is debilitating, removing efficacy and hope for personal change. It also distances people from the networks of support that can keep individuals on track in adopting appropriate behavior. It follows...
from reintegrative shaming theory that feedback in a workplace needs to be given reintegratively for change to occur, whether in relation to bullying or some other aspect of performance.

It is not always the case, however, that the message once received is interpreted in a way that is consistent with what the sender intended, as the workplace bullying literature attests (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007; Lewis, 2003). Even in the most reintegrative social environment, individuals will vary in the degree to which they feel safe and connected to others, or want to feel safe and connected to others. Therefore they will vary in how they manage their feelings of shame in response to poor performance, and for that matter, in how they manage feelings of pride when they are rewarded.

Shame and pride management through reintegration

Shame means a threat to a person’s ethical identity, the identity that defines what one sees in oneself that is admirable and valued highly (Harris, 2001; 2007). Harris convincingly argues from a social identity perspective that we feel shame when we fail to live up to our ethical identity, regardless of whether others are observing us or not: Present or absent, others contribute to defining who we are and who we want to be: We notice when we do not measure up and we imagine what significant others will think of us. Ahmed and Braithwaite (2011) extend this analysis to pride. Pride is felt when our ethical identity is affirmed because others tell us we have done well or we know we have done well because we have reached our goal. Both shame and pride need to be expressed in some way - in ways that are socially integrative or socially disruptive.

Drawing on the theoretical groundwork by Helen Block Lewis (1971) and Thomas Scheff and Suzanne Retzinger (1991), Ahmed (2001) has proposed two forms of shame management that have an impact on relations within social groups: acknowledgment and displacement. Acknowledgment means openly stating that one has failed to live up to the standards expected (by self and others) and committing to doing better next time. If harm has occurred, amends shall be made. Displacement of shame is used for discharging the negative feeling of shame through blaming others or striking out at others.

Each person is capable of feeling shame acknowledgment and shame displacement and vacillating between the two before settling on a position for discharging shame. Drawing on the principles of reintegrative shaming, predictions can be made as to when displacement is most likely and when acknowledgment is most likely. If we perceive the shaming to be stigmatizing and feel unsafe in the presence of others, we will be fearful and opt for shame displacement over acknowledgment. Braithwaite et al (2008) found that among Bangladeshi workers, a disrespectful work environment was related to workers showing high shame displacement and low shame acknowledgment in a hypothetical bullying scenario. They are referred as socially non-adaptive because those who adopt these strategies are more likely to bully others, a finding confirmed in the school bullying context (Ahmed et al. 2001). In the Bangladeshi study, victims of bullying scored higher than others on both acknowledgment and displacement. Victims were both honest and disapproving of their actions and angry with others when asked to pretend that they had “bullied” another. This finding was important in
revealing that in unsafe contexts, victims who adopt the high moral ground may alienate themselves from co-workers. Disrespectful working conditions generate a different set of norms around shame management from those we have called socially adaptive. They involve low acknowledgment and high displacement. In socially discordant settings, acknowledgment can be personally damaging because it leads to vulnerability that can be exploited by others.

Ahmed and Braithwaite (2011) extended ideas of shaming and social reintegration to Webb’s (2003) two types of pride management: narcissistic pride and humble pride. Narcissistic pride takes the form of self-aggrandizement and leads individuals to feel that they are better than others. Narcissistic pride is likely to be more common in circumstances where individuals feel the need to flaunt their personal superiority to shore up and defend their stature in the group. Braithwaite et al. (2008) provided empirical support for links between disrespectful work relations and high narcissistic pride and high narcissistic pride and bullying others.

Humble pride differs from narcissistic pride in that it flows from personal and internal satisfaction of having mastered a challenge central to one’s identity, while being aware of one’s limitations and of the importance of collaborative relationships to one’s achievements. Whereas narcissistic pride asserts domination over others, humble pride affirms connections to others. In their study of Bangladeshi workers, Ahmed and Braithwaite (2011) found bullying more likely with narcissistic pride and less likely with humble pride.

This paper presents the first opportunity to test these relationships in a western context. Self-reports of being bullied and bullying others were captured for the past year among Australian workers. Shame and pride management were measured using scenarios about work performance. This marked an extension of previous work in schools and workplaces (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2011; Braithwaite et al., 2008) where shame management was measured using bullying scenarios. Instead shame was measured in a scenario about failing to achieve a work objective. This change also meant that the scenarios for measuring shame management and pride management were complementary. Shame acknowledgment and displacement were measured in relation to failure to complete an assigned task; humble and narcissistic pride in relation to task success.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Individuals who are more likely to acknowledge shame in contexts of task failure are less likely to bully others.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals who are more likely to displace shame in contexts of task failure are more likely to bully others.

Hypothesis 3: Individuals who are more likely to express humble pride in contexts of task success are less likely to bully others.

Hypothesis 4: Individuals who are more likely to express narcissistic pride in contexts of task success
are more likely to bully others.

Predictions for the experience of victimization are less clear because we do not know about the context of bullying from the survey data. If Australian workplaces are socially discordant or highly competitive, generally speaking, the following hypotheses could be generated for population survey:

Hypothesis 5: Shame acknowledgment over task failure may make some individuals vulnerable to being a victim of bullying.

Hypothesis 6: Shame displacement over task failure may make some individuals vulnerable to being a victim of bullying.

Hypothesis 7: Humble pride over task success may protect individuals from being victims of bullying through its inherent inclusiveness.

Hypothesis 8: Narcissistic pride over task success may expose individuals to being victims of bullying through its inherent domination.

Finally, the present study advances on previous research in terms of its control variables. Social disconnection is common to shame displacement, narcissistic pride and bullying. In reintegrative shaming theory, social disconnection is engineered through stigmatizing actions – real or perceived, and threatening work contexts. It is possible, however, that some individuals hold beliefs that reject the value of social connection and are distrustful of others on a generalized basis. To put it in colloquial terms, shame and pride may be managed well and bullying resisted simply because a worker is an other-oriented person as opposed to a rugged individualist. There is some evidence to support this argument. Shin (2005) found that Korean and Australian teachers who emphasized competitiveness and achievement were more likely to displace shame, while those concerned about collective wellbeing were more likely to acknowledge shame. This paper provides opportunity to test the relationships of shame and pride management with bullying after controlling for general beliefs about the value of social connectedness.

Method

Sample

The Australian sample for ‘A Cross National Comparative Study: Australian and Japanese Attitudes to Crime’ comprised 1,967 randomly selected respondents who replied to a postal survey questionnaire (response rate of 36.1 per cent; for further details see Huang et al., 2012).

The survey sample was drawn from the Australian electoral roll. Voting is compulsory in Australia so the electoral roll provides reasonably good coverage for sample selection of the Australian population over 18 years of age. Sampling frames delivered as good a cross-section of the population as possible across Australian states and territories. Proportional sampling was applied according to the population of each state and territory.
The questionnaire was completed by the person who self-nominated as the head of household, and took on average between 30 and 40 minutes to complete. Questionnaires were returned by mail with postage pre-paid.

**Measures**

Measures were taken from the main module of the Attitudes to Crime Survey (demographic and social connectedness variables) and a supplementary module for only the Australian sample relating to workplace bullying (shame and pride management and bullying and victimization variables). All continuous variables were scored (or re-scored) such that higher scale scores indicated more of the scale characteristic.

*Demographic variables*

Based on previous studies (see Braithwaite et al., 2008; Einarsen et al., 2011), three variables were used as controls in the regression analyses: respondent gender, age, and personal income. Both age and personal income were used as continuous variables.

Male respondents (scored 1) were 46% of the sample (females coded 0). Mean age was 47.8 years; SD = 15.6). The median of personal annual incomes was A$25,000 (Mean = 31,902; SD = 30,959).

*Social connectedness variables*

In the context of surveying the needs of victims of crime, a single item measure for *Forgiving* asked respondents to indicate how important they believed it was for the victim to be able to forgive the offender. They responded on a five-point scale from “not at all important” (1) through “neither important nor unimportant” (3) to “very important” (5) (Mean = 3.39; SD = 1.06).

Using the same five-point scale, a single item measure for *Seeing rehabilitation* asked respondents to indicate how important they believed it was for the victim to see the offender rehabilitated (Mean = 3.48; SD = .99).

*Distrust* is a five-item scale that measures the degree to which individuals express lack of trust in (a) governmental agencies, (b) medical doctors, (c) lawyers, (d) professional counselors, and (e) people (“Ultimately, you can’t trust human beings”). The context for measurement was “in general,” but all could potentially be relevant as sources of help in cases of bullying. Scale scores are formed through averaging responses to each item on a five-point rating scale from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5) (Mean = 2.65; SD = .62; Cronbach’s alpha = .66).

Management of shame and pride

(1) Shame management was measured through the Management Of Shame State-Shame Acknowledgment and Shame Displacement (MOSS-SASD) instrument, a scenario-based self-report measure with strong psychometric properties (for details see Ahmed et al., 2001).
In this study, the MOSS-SASD items were contextualized by using one of the most common incidents (threat to professional status) that occurs in workplaces. Respondents were asked:

Suppose that you were required to solve an old and difficult problem at your workplace. You could not solve it successfully. How likely is it that you would feel the following: …

Respondents were then presented with a list of 10 shame-related reactions representing acknowledgement and displacement. Each was rated on a four-point rating scale (1 = not likely, 2 = may happen, 3 = likely, 4 = almost certain). Based on prior conceptualization and analyses of the survey data, a three-item Shame Acknowledgement scale comprised the average of ratings for these items: (a) Feel you had let down your co-workers; (b) Feel you had harmed your reputation; and (c) Feel insecure about what others thought of you (Mean = 1.98; SD = .73; Cronbach’s alpha = .81). The Shame Displacement scale comprised the average of ratings for these three items: (a) Feel angry with your co-workers; (b) Feel that you were being unfairly treated by being given such a task; and (c) Feel like placing the blame somewhere else for not being able to solve the problem (Mean = 1.37; SD = .48; Cronbach’s alpha = .71).

(2) Pride management was measured using a scenario based self-report measure – the Management Of Pride State (MOPS; for details on its psychometric properties, see Ahmed and Braithwaite 2011). The MOPS items were contextualized by using the same basic scenario presented for shame management with failure at a work task being replaced by success. The scenario represented the attribution of competence and enhancement of professional status. Respondents were asked:

Suppose that you were required to solve an old and difficult problem at your workplace. You solved it successfully. How likely is it that you would feel the following: …

Respondents were then presented a list of 20 pride-related reactions related to Narcissistic and Humble Pride (a complete list of items are available on request) to be rated on a four-point rating scale (1 = not likely, 2 = may happen, 3 = likely, 4 = almost certain).

Based on prior conceptualization and statistical analysis, a nine-item Humble Pride scale comprised the average of ratings to the following items: (a) willing to take personal responsibility for any mistakes you made along the way; (b) be modest with your co-workers; (c) feel proud of yourself without being arrogant; (d) be considerate to your co-workers’ comments on this solution; (e) respect all co-workers irrespective of status; (f) feel a sense of achievement without being arrogant; (g) feel an increased sense of self-confidence; (h) feel good about other co-workers who helped solve the problem; (i) respect the contribution of other co-workers to solving the problem; and (j) feel proud of your achievement (Mean = 3.20; SD = .48; Cronbach’s alpha = .86).

The Narcissistic Pride scale comprised the average of ratings to these six items: (a) feel superior over your co-workers; (b) feel like putting co-workers down; (c) feel like you had authority over your co-
workers; (d) feel dominant over your co-workers; (e) put your needs over your co-workers’ needs; and (f) expect admiration from co-workers (Mean = 1.45; SD = .40; Cronbach’s alpha = .68).

Dependent Variables: Bullying and Victimization

The Workplace Bullying scale is a modified version of the measure developed by Quine (1999). Respondents were presented with 17 ways of bullying others. They used a four-point rating scale (1=“never,” 2=“a few times,” 3=“sometimes,” and 4=“often”) to indicate first the frequency with which they had treated others this way in the past year, and next, the frequency with which they had been treated this way by others (see Appendix for a complete list of items).

Workplace Bullying scale scores were formed by averaging responses to bullying others over the 17 items (Mean = 1.18; SD = .28; Cronbach’s alpha = .90).

Victimization scale scores were formed by averaging responses to being bullied over the 17 items (Mean = 1.42; SD = .49; Cronbach’s alpha = .92).

Data Analysis Overview

The hypotheses were tested using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, partial correlations and hierarchical regression analysis. Because of the very high correlation between bullying others and being bullied by others (r = .50, p < .001), regression models predicting bullying controlled for being a victim, and regression models predicting being a victim controlled for bullying.

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to examine how the set of explanatory variables affected each other in predicting bullying, then in a separate analysis, victimization. The order of entry was the same for bullying and victimization: demographic controls were introduced on Step 1 of the hierarchical model; the bullying or victimization control was entered on Step 2; the social connectedness variables on Step 3; and the shame and pride management variables on Steps 4 and 5.

Empirically the most informative results were obtained by entering shame management on Step 4 and on Step 5, pride management. These are the results reported. Because there was no theoretical reason for entering shame and pride in a particular order, the order was reversed to find out which offered greater insight into how these variables worked together in predicting bullying and victimization. In predicting bullying, the pride variables dominated the shame variables. Therefore, pride was entered on the final step, Step 5, after shame was included in the model in Step 4. The same order was used for predicting victimization since pride was unaffected by the inclusion of shame.
Results

Correlational analysis

**Workplace Bullying and Victimization**

From Table 1, those who most frequently reported bullying others in the workplace were also most likely to report being the victim of bullying in the workplace ($r = .50, p < .001$). Because the overlap in bullying and being the victim of bullying was substantial, the correlations reported below were tested further through controlling for the extraneous variable; that is, we correlated bullying with the predictor variables controlling for victimization; and victimization with the predictor variables, controlling for bullying. Partial correlations are only reported when they produced substantively different findings from bivariate correlations.

**Demographic correlates**

From Table 1, bullying was more prevalent among males ($r = .18, p < .001$) and those with higher income ($r = .08, p < .01$). Age was not significantly related to bullying.

Victimization was more prevalent among younger age groups ($r = -.11, p < .001$), but no significant relationships were found with gender or personal income.

**Social connectedness correlates**

Those who engaged in bullying were less likely to see the need for forgiving an offender ($r = -.12, p < .001$), less likely to see the need for seeing an offender rehabilitated ($r = -.12, p < .001$) and more likely to distrust others, including professionals in counselling, law and medicine ($r = .22, p < .001$).

Those who were victims of bullying also were more distrustful, including of professionals who could potentially provide assistance ($r = .21, p < .001$). Being a victim of bullying was associated with being less likely to see benefits in forgiving offenders ($r = -.07, p < .05$), but this was one bivariate relationship that lost significance when bullying others was controlled ($-.01, ns$).

The social connectedness variables were significantly related to the shame and pride management variables sufficiently strongly and consistently to justify their inclusion as control variables. The pattern of correlations in Table 1 is consistent with the notion that those who care about social connectedness in terms of trust or forgiveness or rehabilitation will be more likely to acknowledge shame and less likely to displace shame, and be more likely to express humble pride and less likely to express narcissistic pride.

**Shame and pride management and bullying**

The bivariate correlations showed that bullying was more common among those who displaced their
shame into anger ($r = .22$, $p < .001$) and those who expressed narcissistic pride ($r = .39$, $p < .001$). Bullying was less likely to be carried out by those who expressed humble pride in the face of success ($r = -.12$, $p < .001$). Hypotheses 2, 3 and 4 were therefore supported at the bivariate level. Bullying was surprisingly more common among those who acknowledged shame ($r = .08$, $p < .01$). When victimization was controlled, however, the relationship became non-significant ($r = -.01$, ns). Correlations failed to show support for Hypothesis 1: The meaning and repercussions of acknowledging failure in Australian workplaces requires further analysis.

Shame and pride management and victimization

Victims reported that when they were faced with failure at a task at work they were liable to higher levels of shame displacement ($r = .24$, $p < .001$), thereby supporting Hypothesis 6. When faced with success, they reported higher levels of narcissistic pride ($r = .24$, $p < .001$), thereby supporting Hypothesis 8. For both these hypotheses, the correlations with victimization drop when bullying is controlled, but remain significant.

Victims of bullying reported higher levels of shame acknowledgment in response to failure at a task at work ($r = .17$, $p < .001$), thereby supporting Hypothesis 5. Victims of workplace bullying were neither more nor less likely to express humble pride ($r = -.03$ ns). Hypothesis 7, therefore, was not supported at the correlational level.

Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Hierarchical regression analysis provided opportunity to examine the relationship of pride and shame management together, and most importantly, to test if these variables had explanatory power after controlling for social connectedness.

**Bullying model**

Table 2, Model 1 reports that bullying was more prevalent among males ($\beta = .10$, $p < .001$) and younger respondents ($\beta = -.06$, $p < .05$). The maleness of workplace bullying was a consistent effect as additional variables were added in Models 2 through 5. The age effect faded as soon as victimization was entered in Model 2. Income did not significantly predict bullying.

In Model 2, prior victim experiences in the last 12 months proved to be the strongest predictor of bullying others ($\beta = .50$, $p < .001$).

Model 3 introduced the social connectedness variables. A victim’s need to forgive the offender played no role in predicting bullying. Needing to see the offender rehabilitated was linked to less bullying of others ($\beta = -.07$, $p < .05$), while distrust was linked to more bullying ($\beta = .08$, $p < .01$).

When shame management through acknowledgment and displacement were entered in Model 4,
displacement emerged as the shame variable associated with more bullying. Acknowledgment was not significant.

When the pride management variables were entered on Step 5 both were significant. Narcissistic pride ($\beta = .24, p < .001$) was significantly associated with greater bullying and humble pride ($\beta = -.06, p < .05$) was associated with significantly less bullying. Neither shame acknowledgment nor displacement were significant in Model 5, nor was distrust in others, including professionals. Pride management emerged as the dominant explanatory variables in the final model.

The final model accounted for 36 per cent of the variance in bullying in the workplace.

*Victimization model*

**INSERT TABLE 3 HERE**

In Table 3, Model 1 shows that among the demographic variables only age was significantly related to victimization: Younger respondents were more likely to be victims of bullying ($\beta = -.11, p < .001$). This finding remained significant as new variables were entered on Models 2 through 5.

In Model 2, prior experiences of being a bully in the past 12 months significantly increased the likelihood of being victimized though workplace bullying ($\beta = .52, p < .001$).

In Model 3, those being victimized expressed distrust, particularly in professionals who might be of assistance ($\beta = .12, p < .001$), a finding that remained significant in the final model. Seeing an offender rehabilitated was associated with experiences of victimization in Model 3, but not thereafter ($\beta = .06, p < .05$).

In Model 4, both shame management variables were significant predictors of victimization. Victimization was more common among those who displaced shame into anger ($\beta = .11, p < .001$) and who acknowledged failure in relation to completing the assigned workplace task ($\beta = .08, p < .01$).

In model 5, humble pride was expressed more by those who had experienced victimization ($\beta = .06, p < .05$). Narcissistic pride was not significantly related to victimization in the regression model.

The full model for victimization accounted for 30 per cent of the variance in victimization scores.

In sum, victimization was about shame management. Bullying was about pride management. Bullying is more likely to be found in respondents who are male, who have experienced victimization at the hands of bullies, who are not strong believers in seeing rehabilitation in offenders, and who respond to success at work with more narcissistic pride and less humble pride. Victimization is higher for younger respondents, for respondents who have bullied others, who express distrust in others (particularly professionals), who acknowledge shame and also displace shame, and who express humble pride.
Discussion

This paper postulates a link between workplace performance and bullying. The aspect of workplace performance under study is how individuals manage emotions of shame and pride around their failures and successes in the workplace. Those who are able to acknowledge shame and express humble pride were expected to be less likely to bully others. Those who displaced shame and expressed narcissistic pride were expected to be more likely to bully others.

Findings supported three of the four predictions of bullying at the correlational level. Bullying was related to high shame displacement, high narcissistic pride and low humble pride. No relationship was found between being unable to acknowledge shame over task failure and bullying others. Just as significant is the unanticipated finding that pride management was more important than shame management in the prediction of workplace bullying. The pride variables dominated shame displacement.

Among Bangladeshi workers, shame acknowledgment behaved differently from this study (Braithwaite & Ahmed, 2008; Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2011). It mediated between workplace relations and bullying, with respectful relations predicting high shame acknowledgment, which in turn predicted low bullying. Acknowledgment may well have different meanings in different social contexts. Shame acknowledgment over poor work performance may be different from shame acknowledgment if one hurts another, particularly if the social climate is not conducive to revealing personal vulnerability. It is of note that acknowledgment was the emotion management strategy that was most highly linked to other management strategies and the relationship was consistently positive. From the correlations in Table 1, those who tried shame acknowledgment, were also more likely to try shame displacement, humble pride and narcissistic pride.

The findings in relation to victimization were in accord with expectations at the correlational level except in relation to humble pride. Victims of bullying were more likely to displace shame, acknowledge shame and express narcissistic pride. Victims were neither more nor less likely to express humble pride. When the pride and shame variables were included together in the regression model predicting victimization, shame management was more important than pride management, the reverse of the findings with bullying. Humble pride emerged as having a small but significant relationship with victimization, when all other variables were controlled, while narcissistic pride was non-significant. The importance of shame management over pride management in predicting victimization is in accord with the study of how workplace relations affect the emotional management and bullying activities of Bangladeshi workers (Braithwaite & Ahmed, 2008). Victims both acknowledge and displace shame more than others.

Theoretically and empirically, shame management has been at the heart of being a bully or a victim at school (Ahmed et al., 2001; Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004; Ahmed, 2006). In the school context, the relationship between bullies and victims has been marked by differences in shame management:
Children who are victims expect that bullies will acknowledge shame. Children who bully shy away from acknowledgement and opt for displacement instead. At school, victims and bullies subscribe to different codes for expressing shame. Whole-of-school approaches work through providing the safe climate in which children can converge on building skills in acknowledging shame when they have hurt someone and restraining the desire to displace shame through blaming or hitting out at others. It is in the context of safe space and pro-social norms in schools that willingness to acknowledge shame and not displace shame become socially and personally adaptive.

What happens then to these ideas when transferred to workplaces? The data from this study and the Bangladeshi studies suggest that some key parameters are different. Acknowledgment still matters in preventing bullying when a worker’s action hurts another (see Braithwaite & Ahmed, 2008), but appears to be less widely internalised as a work norm. The mean score for acknowledgment, like displacement, was quite low in this study. Perhaps for most workers most of the time workplace failures do not generate shame. Perhaps it is shrugged off as a common event that everyone has to deal with as a matter of course. What is more, deviation from this norm might be conceived as unnecessarily making an issue of one’s failure. This may be how outsiders perceive bullies and victims. Bullies and victims can be interpreted as having shame and pride management problems, with some similarities and some differences. Those who bully make an issue of failure through displacing shame; but also use success for self-promotion and domination of others, displaying narcissistic pride. Those who are victims make an issue of their failure through both shame acknowledgment and displacement, while sharing their success with others (humble pride).

The findings of this study lead to a relational hypothesis about workplace bullying: Bullies and victims aggravate each other's shame and pride management responses to personal failures and successes. First, they both displace shame, meaning they are likely to blame others for failures, and this may include, of course, each other. Beyond this common characteristic are differences that may further aggravate the relationship. Victims are prone to acknowledge shame over failures particularly if they let others down. Bullies on the other hand flaunt their success over others with narcissistic pride. Acknowledging failures versus boasting successes, building collegiality versus dominating colleagues are sources of stress as bullies and victims come into contact. Without a circuit breaker, tensions are likely to spiral. Repeated spiraling domination is the pattern of long term bullying.

And what of context? Shame management through reintegration theory has both a normative and explanatory dimension. The explanatory aspect of the theory is psychological and that is that shame and pride are emotions that need to be discharged and there are various means for doing so. The normative aspect of the theory is that when social space is safe for individuals, they can discharge shame through acknowledgment and express pride humbly. The strategies are adaptive for individuals and for the social group because social bonds are nurtured, not broken. Sometimes, however, safe space is not present. We suspect this is so in many workplaces.

When social norms of the workplace are not respectful of others and do not speak to a team culture,
acknowledgment of failure or wrong-doing can be socially self-destructive. It is a practice that leaves individuals vulnerable to exploitation. To a newcomer who expects to be operating in safe space, the realization that acknowledgment is personally dangerous can be shocking, perhaps even morally confronting. A similar argument can be made in relation to humble pride, the socially congenial counterpart of shame acknowledgment. A work culture that rewards individual competition and performance above teamwork and collective achievement will be alien for those who promote humble pride and reject narcissistic pride. In work cultures that are individualistic and competitive, and where hierarchies distance managers and workers, narcissistic pride may offer an alluring pathway to success.

Last, mention should be made of the control variables, a set of three variables representing an individual’s disposition toward connectedness to others: the belief that a victim needs to find a way to forgive an offender; the belief that a victim needs to see an offender rehabilitated; and beliefs about who you can trust with a focus on health and legal professionals (this scale was measured as distrust and therefore represented social distance as opposed to the social connectedness of the other two measures). These personal beliefs were related to shame acknowledgment, humble pride, narcissistic pride and bullying relatively consistently, suggesting that a person’s personal disposition matters in analyzing workplace bullying.

Of most interest theoretically is that in the final regression analyses, bullies were less likely to appreciate the need of victims to see offenders rehabilitated. Victims were more likely to distrust others, particularly professionals. These findings suggest that both bullies and victims face impediments for social reintegration at work. Bullies may refute the need of their victims to see them mend their ways. Victims are unlikely to trust those with institutional roles that could be supportive of stopping the bullying. The findings raise the question of whether new pathways need to be found to curb bullying and heal victims.

Limitations

This study strives to locate bullying and victimization as relational problems associated with shame and pride management. In interpreting the findings of this and previous work, we suggest that associated with shame and pride management are competing moral and social norms about how work is done, how failure is dealt with, and how success is celebrated. Further evidence that teases out causality and provides measures at the individual level and at the work unit level is required to test this hypothesis more rigorously. At present it is best offered as a hypothesis for others to explore.

An omnibus survey methodology as used in the present study has the advantage of collecting data from a large random sample and providing a snapshot of the bigger national picture, something that is difficult with studies that focus on bullies or victims or even organizations. While the penetration into the community asking for the views of randomly identified bullies and victims is an exciting feature of this work, compromises are made. The cross-sectional nature of the data has been mentioned. This limitation is evident in asking the simple question: does distrust invite victimization or does
victimization make people distrust others? (Probably both are true in reality.) Second, bullying and victimization require a level of contextual analysis that is not possible in a large-scale survey. The core data on workplace bullying were collected as a three-page module that was part of a survey controlled by a larger consortium of research institutions. Knowing the circumstances in which bullying and victimization took place would have entailed detailed questioning beyond the allocated three pages.

**Conclusion and Implications**

This study places the spotlight on how individuals manage shame and pride emotions around workplace performance and how this may incite bullying and victimization. Shame and pride management is the responsibility of individuals: They are in control of their emotional management, not others. Some view shame and pride as stable traits of individuals, and argue that how shame and pride are managed are dispositions and individuals can learn to manage them in a more pro-social way (Tangney et al., 1992). This may be true. But our argument is different. Context matters. Where work norms, incentive schemes and management styles create hierarchical and competitive work environments, a message is sent to workers about how they should manage their pride and shame if they want to get on. That message does not encourage shame and pride management that builds teams and promotes a healthy work environment, that is, shame acknowledgment and humble pride. Instead it promotes shame displacement and narcissistic pride and fuels workplace disharmony.
References


### Appendix: Workplace bullying and victimization items

Statements about what could happen in your workplace. In the past year, how often has this happened?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Freezing out/ignoring/excluding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Destructive innuendo and sarcasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Unjustified criticism of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Attempts to humiliate in front of co-workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Unreasonable pressure to produce work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Shifting of goal posts without telling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Constant undervaluing of efforts</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Attempts to belittle work</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Intimidatory use of discipline procedures</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Verbal threats</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Removal of areas of responsibility without consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Attempts to demoralize as a person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Unreasonable refusal of applications for leave, training, promotion</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Physical threats</td>
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<td>17</td>
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Table 1: Zero-order correlations (n = 1050) among all predictor and dependent variables

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<th>Seeing offender rehabilitate</th>
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***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .0
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***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05
Table 3. **Standardised beta coefficients from hierarchical regression analysis in predicting victimization. Sample size (listwise deletion) = 1050**

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