

## CHAPTER 13



# Proneness to Shame and Proneness to Guilt

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An important but understudied component of personality is how people react to their own failures and transgressions. To err is human, to occasionally sin is ... inevitable. People vary considerably in how they feel when they recognize that they have failed or behaved badly. For example, given the same event—say, hurting a friend’s feelings—an individual prone to guilt would be likely to respond by ruminating about the offensive remark, feeling bad about hurting a friend, and being compelled to apologize and make up for it. A shame-prone individual, instead, is likely to see the event as proof that he or she is a bad friend—indeed, a bad person. Feeling small and worthless, the shame-prone person may be inclined to slink away and avoid the friend for fear of further shame.

Shame and guilt are siblings (together with pride and embarrassment) in the family of “self-conscious emotions” that are evoked by self-reflection and self-evaluation. This self-reflection is not always engaged in purposefully, and the emotional response does not always reach the conscious level of awareness. Nonetheless, as people reflect on themselves, these emotions provide immediate punishment (or reinforcement) of behavior and, importantly, a countervailing

force to the reward structure based on more immediate, selfish, id-like desires. In effect, shame and guilt can be considered moral emotions that function as an emotional moral barometer, providing immediate and salient feedback on our social and moral acceptability. When we fall short of important standards, aversive feelings of shame, guilt, or both are likely to ensue.

This chapter summarizes recent theory and empirical work on individual differences in proneness to shame and guilt. Shame proneness and guilt proneness are stable personality dispositions representing the propensity to experience these moral emotions across time and situations.

### **The Difference between Shame and Guilt**

The terms *shame* and *guilt* are inextricably linked in the minds of most people, but a number of attempts have been made to differentiate between them. The three major approaches to differentiating between shame and guilt involve distinctions based on: (1) the types of events that evoke the emotions, (2) the public-versus-private nature of the emotion-eliciting situation, and

(3) the degree to which the person construes the emotion-eliciting event as a failure of self or of behavior.

There is surprisingly little empirical evidence that shame and guilt differ reliably in terms of the types of situations that elicit them. Analyses of personal shame and guilt experiences provided by children and adults revealed few, if any, reliably shame-inducing or guilt-inducing situations (Keltner & Buswell, 1996; Tangney, 1992; Tangney, Marschall, Rosenberg, Barlow, & Wagner, 1994; Tracy & Robins, 2006). Researchers agree that guilt is more narrowly linked to moral transgressions, whereas shame is evoked by a broader range of situations, including both “moral” and “nonmoral” failures (Ferguson, Stegge, & Damhuis, 1991; Sabini & Silver, 1997; Smith, Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002), but most types of events (e.g., lying, cheating, stealing, failing to help another, disobeying parents, etc.) are sometimes cited by people in connection with feelings of shame and sometimes in connection with guilt.

A frequently cited distinction between shame and guilt highlights the public-versus-private nature of the emotion-eliciting situation (e.g., Benedict, 1946). From this point of view, shame is the more “public” emotion, arising from exposure to disapproving others, whereas guilt is a more “private” experience that arises from internal pangs of conscience. However, empirical tests have not supported this distinction (Tangney et al., 1994; Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996). For example, a systematic analysis of shame and guilt events described by several hundred children and adults (Tangney et al., 1994) indicated that both emotions were typically experienced in the presence of others. “Solitary” shame experiences were no less common than “solitary” guilt experiences. Moreover, the frequency with which others were aware of the respondents’ behavior did not vary as a function of shame or guilt. Similarly, although achievement and personal events are each more private than relational and familial events, the former were more likely to elicit shame rather than guilt in a study of personal emotion narratives (Tracy & Robins, 2006). Several other studies (Smith et al., 2002) provide ample evidence that actual public

exposure is no more likely to evoke shame than guilt.

The most widely used basis for distinguishing between shame and guilt—focus on self versus behavior—was first proposed by Helen Block Lewis (1971) and more recently elaborated by Tracy and Robins (2004) in their appraisal-based model of self-conscious emotions. According to Lewis, shame involves a negative evaluation of the global self, whereas guilt involves a negative evaluation of a specific behavior. Although the self-behavior distinction may, at first glance, appear subtle, research supports that this differential emphasis on self (“I did that horrible thing”) versus behavior (“I *did* that horrible *thing*”) sets the stage for different emotional experiences and different patterns of motivations and subsequent behavior.

Shame is typically the more painful, disruptive emotion because the self, not simply one’s behavior, is the object of judgment. When people feel shame about the self, they feel “small,” worthless, powerless, and exposed. Even though an actual observing audience need not be present, they often imagine how one’s defective self would appear to others. Lewis (1971) described a split in self-functioning in which the self is both agent and object of observation and disapproval. Regarding motivations or “action tendencies,” shame is apt to prompt efforts to hide and defend the diminished, defective self and to escape the shame-inducing situation (Ketelaar & Au, 2003; Lewis, 1971; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney, Miller, et al., 1996; Wallbott & Scherer, 1995; Wickert, Payne, & Morgan, 1983).

Guilt, on the other hand, typically wreaks less havoc. Although painful, guilt is less overwhelming because the object of condemnation is a specific behavior, somewhat apart from the self. Instead of feeling compelled to defend the naked core of one’s identity, people stricken with guilt are drawn to consider their *behavior* and its consequences. People feeling guilt often ruminate over the misdeed, feeling the pain of remorse and regret. Regarding action tendencies, whereas shame often motivates hiding, guilt often motivates reparative action (e.g., confession, apology, efforts to make amends for the wrongdoing) (de Hooze, 2008; de Hooze, Zeelenberg, &

Breugelmans, 2007; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney, Miller, et al., 1996; Wallbott & Scherer, 1995; Wicker et al., 1983).

There is broad empirical support for Lewis's (1971) distinction between shame and guilt from a range of experimental and correlational studies utilizing diverse methodologies, including qualitative case studies, content analyses of shame and guilt narratives, participants' quantitative ratings of personal shame and guilt experiences, analyses of attributions associated with shame and guilt, and analyses of participants' counterfactual thinking (for reviews, see Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007a). For example, Tracy and Robins (2006) employed both experimental and correlational methods that revealed that, although both shame and guilt were positively related to internal attributions for failure, they differed with respect to attributions on the dimensions of stability and controllability. Whereas guilt was related to unstable, controllable attributions for failure (e.g., a behavior), shame was related to stable and uncontrollable attributions (e.g., the self).

Why is the notion that shame is a more "public" emotion so pervasive and persistent? Research shows that when experiencing shame, people may *feel* more exposed and more aware of others' disapproval (Tangney et al., 1994). It is a short leap from thinking what a horrible person one is to thinking that others are probably noticing this, too. The reality is that situations causing both shame and guilt are typically social in nature. But people are more aware of themselves and the possibility of negative social approval when experiencing shame. From this perspective, shame is the more "egocentric" and selfish emotion. In contrast, a person experiencing guilt focuses not on the self but rather on a specific harmful behavior, thinking specifically about its impact on others. In this sense, guilt is a more "other-oriented" emotion. Far from private, guilt is as social an emotion as shame. But a key consequence of the focus on self versus behavior is the nature of interpersonal concerns that ensue. With shame, it's all about oneself and what others might be thinking about oneself. With guilt, it's about one's behavior and the effect of that behavior on others.

### Emotion States versus Emotion Dispositions

The research summarized thus far has focused on emotion *states*—situation-specific experiences of shame and guilt. Importantly, there are two types of moral emotional states: anticipatory and consequential (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007b). Shame and guilt can influence people even before they engage in a negative behavior. People can *anticipate* their likely emotional reactions (e.g., guilt, shame, pride) as they consider behavioral alternatives. Thus shame and guilt can exert a strong influence on moral choice and behavior by providing critical feedback regarding anticipated behavior (feedback in the form of *anticipatory* shame or guilt) and actual behavior (feedback in the form of *consequential* shame or guilt). Moreover, anticipatory and consequential emotional reactions work together in a recursive feedback loop. Anticipated or "forecasted" affective responses to behavior not yet enacted are inferred from past consequential emotions to similar behaviors and events.

In the realm of moral emotions, researchers are also interested in *dispositional* tendencies to experience shame and guilt in the face of failure or transgression. By definition, shame-prone (or guilt-prone) individuals are more susceptible to both anticipatory and consequential experiences of shame (or guilt) relative to their peers. Guilt-prone people are inclined to anticipate guilt in response to a range of *potential* behaviors and outcomes, as well as inclined to experience guilt as a consequence of *actual* failures and transgressions.

Notably, shame-prone and guilt-prone people do not walk through life in a constant state of shame or guilt. Rather, when they encounter emotion-relevant situations (e.g., failure or transgression), shame-prone people are inclined to respond with shame, and guilt-prone people are inclined to respond with guilt. In this way, shame proneness is conceptually distinct from "internalized shame" defined by Cook (1988) as an "enduring, chronic shame that has become internalized as part of one's identity and which can be most succinctly characterized as a deep sense of inferiority, inadequacy, or deficiency." Internalized shame is thus

akin to low self-esteem, whereas proneness to shame is the propensity to experience episodic shame states in response to failures or transgressions.

### **Assessing Individual Differences in Proneness to Shame and Guilt**

How are shame and guilt proneness measured at the dispositional or trait level? Often researchers look to people's self-reports to assess dimensions of personality or affective style, but in the case of guilt and shame, self-reports can be problematic because most people have difficulty recognizing the distinction between them. Research indicates that feelings of shame and guilt frequently co-occur, that it is difficult for people to verbalize the difference between the two, and that, in Western contexts at least, people are apt to avoid the term *shame* altogether, using *guilt* to refer to either or both emotions. Thus simply asking a person, "In general, do you feel guilt rarely, sometimes, often, or very often?" may tell us something about his or her propensity to experience guilt, shame, or both. Fortunately, a number of researchers have tackled this measurement challenge, although much more work needs to be done at the trait level and especially at the state level.<sup>1</sup> Here, we focus on measures at the level of trait or emotion disposition—proneness to shame and proneness to guilt.

#### ***Measures Assessing Only One Disposition***

Much of the pioneering work on moral emotions, and thus the early measures, focused exclusively on the propensity to experience guilt without consideration of shame (Buss & Durkee, 1957; Klass, 1987; Kugler & Jones, 1992; Mosher, 1966; Zahn-Waxler, Kochanska, Krupnick, & Mayfield, 1988). These measures utilized a range of formats—selection of a single adjective, ratings of descriptive statements, forced-choice alternatives, ratings of emotional responses to specific situations, and qualitative analysis of narratives. Because these measures do not take into account the difference between shame and guilt, the assessment is apt to confound the propensity to experience guilt with the propensity to experience shame

and is thus of little use in examining shame and guilt proneness in psychological and social functioning. Moreover, because correlates of shame proneness and guilt proneness sometimes differ in sign, measures that confound shame and guilt may produce null results, as the differential relationships cancel each other out, leading to erroneous conclusions (e.g., that guilt is not important to the context under study). For this reason, researchers are advised to use caution when considering measures that purport to assess the propensity to experience guilt without explicitly considering shame.

Fewer measures assess shame proneness without reference to guilt proneness. The most widely used measure of this type is the Internalized Shame Scale (ISS; Cook, 1988). Ironically, the potential conceptual confound here is not with guilt but rather with its strong conceptual and operational similarity to low self-esteem. Many of the items composing the ISS were drawn from Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale. Consequently, the ISS correlates very highly with self-esteem (Cook, 1991), raising concerns about its discriminant validity.

#### ***Measures Assessing (and Distinguishing between) Shame Proneness and Guilt Proneness***

Measures designed to distinguish between shame proneness and guilt proneness vary substantially in structure or format due to different conceptual distinctions between shame and guilt and to the unique challenges posed by the assessment of these two emotions in particular (e.g., people don't always use the emotion terms precisely; there is no identifiable facial expression for guilt). In selecting a measure, it is important to consider the measure's suitability for the population to be studied and the match between empirically supported distinctions between shame and guilt and the way in which they are operationalized.

#### ***Shame- versus Guilt-Inducing Situations***

An approach first introduced by Perlman (1958) assesses emotional reactivity to "shame-inducing" versus "guilt-inducing" situations, under the assumption that differ-



ent kinds of situations induce shame versus guilt. Measures by Crouppen (1976), Johnson and colleagues (1987), and Cheek and Hogan (1983) were designed under this assumption. In light of research showing no reliably shame-specific or guilt-specific eliciting situations, discussed earlier, researchers should consider the rationale for using such an approach.

#### *Global Adjective Checklists*

This approach draws on a list of shame- and guilt-related adjectives for which people are asked to make overall ratings of how much they experience each affective term or how well each term describes them. Examples of such measures include Hoblitzelle's (1987) Revised Shame-Guilt Scale (RSGS) and Harder and colleagues' (Harder, Cutler, & Rockart, 1992; Harder & Lewis, 1987) Personal Feelings Questionnaire (PFQ) and revised PFQ-2.

These measures have the advantages of high face validity and ease of administration. There are some limitations, however, that may outweigh the advantages. First, extended adjective checklists require advanced verbal skills. The RSGS, for example, includes vocabulary that is challenging for most college students. The PFQ measures utilize somewhat less sophisticated vocabulary. A second limitation is that adjective checklists rely heavily on respondents' ability to accurately distinguish between "shame" and "guilt" in an abstract context, which is questionable. Even among well-educated adults, providing meaningful definitions of shame and guilt is difficult (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). As a consequence, the correlation between shame proneness and guilt proneness assessed via global adjective checklists is typically in the .70s, raising concerns about multicollinearity and discriminant validity. Not surprisingly, research using measures such as the RSGS and PFQ-2 rarely identifies unique variance in proneness to shame and guilt that is differentially related to other theoretically relevant constructs. For instance, using the PFQ-2, Sherry (2007) found that secure attachment was negatively correlated with both shame and guilt proneness, whereas fearful and preoccupied

attachment were positively related to both emotional dispositions among lesbian, gay, or bisexual adults. The correlation between PFQ-2 shame and guilt was .73, affording little discriminant validity. A third, and perhaps most problematic, aspect of global checklists is that the process of filling them out is essentially a shame-like task—making global ratings about oneself (or one's general affective state) in the absence of any specific situational context (Tangney, 1995). Whereas this approach may be appropriate for the assessment of shame, which involves rather global negative assessments of the entire self, it is a problem when attempting to assess the tendency to experience guilt about specific behaviors apart from the global self.

#### *Scenario-Based Measures*

A third method for assessing shame proneness and guilt proneness is the scenario-based approach exemplified by the Test of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA) measures (Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, 1989) and the Adolescent Shame Measure (ASM; Reimer, 1995). In these measures, people rate how they would respond to a series of common hypothetical situations (e.g., "You make a mistake at work and find out a coworker is blamed for the error"). Importantly, the terms *shame* and *guilt* are not used, thereby avoiding confusion common among laypersons. Instead, responses reflect brief phenomenological descriptions of shame and guilt reactions (as described in the theoretical, phenomenological, and empirical literature). For the scenario described, the shame response is "You would keep quiet and avoid the coworker." The guilt response is "You would feel unhappy and eager to correct the situation." People rate their likelihood of responding in each manner indicated. Thus people may endorse both shame and guilt, which can co-occur in a given situation. Although scenario based, the distinction between shame and guilt here is not in the content of the situation but rather in the phenomenological reaction of the respondent.

The primary strength of this approach is that the structure of scenario-based measures is conceptually consistent with our current understanding of guilt as a behavior-specific negative appraisal within a given situational

context. Scenario-based measures provide a vehicle for assessing tendencies to experience guilt about specific behaviors, distinct from shame about the self, by avoiding the global nature of adjective rating scales that are more apt to tap into the characteristics of shame. A second advantage of the scenario-based approach is that the situation-specific phenomenological descriptions of shame and guilt do not require the respondent to distinguish between the terms *shame* and *guilt*. Third, the likelihood of a defensive response bias is lower than with adjective checklist-type measures. As Lewis (1971) and others have noted, repression or denial of shame experiences are not uncommon. Scenario-based measures may partly circumvent people's defensiveness because they are not directly asked to acknowledge tendencies to experience "shame" and "guilt" but rather to rate phenomenological descriptions of shame and guilt experiences with respect to specific situations that avoid use of the emotionally charged words *shame* and *guilt*.

Scenario-based measures are easily adapted for use with younger participants. There are TOSCA's for adolescents and for children ages 8–12 (see Tangney & Dearing, 2002), and Stegge and Ferguson (1990) have developed the Child Attribution and Reaction Survey—Child Version (C-CARS) for children as young as 5 years. Common to these measures is a range of age-appropriate situations (sampling from home, work/school, peer, and other domains) that are likely to elicit shame and/or guilt responses.

Of course, scenario-based measures have limitations. In general, they yield somewhat lower internal consistency estimates of reliability than adjective checklists, with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .71 to .86 for checklists versus .61 to .83 for scenario-based measures (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Coefficient alphas, however, are apt to underestimate reliability due to the variability introduced by the use of different scenarios. In contrast, test–retest estimates of reliability for scenario-based measures tend to be higher than internal consistencies, equivalent to those observed for global adjective checklist measures.

A second limitation is the necessary constraint on the types of shame- and guilt-

eliciting situations that can be used. Efforts are generally made to include scenarios from diverse settings (e.g., home, work/school, peer, and significant others) and to focus on diverse behaviors (e.g., missing an appointment, breaking something, hurting another person's feelings, failing a test). Nonetheless, such measures cover only a small subset of possible transgressions or failures. In particular, preference is given to situations and behaviors likely to be encountered by most respondents at some point in their day-to-day lives—ones that people can relate to easily and can readily imagine themselves. What is missing are less common, more idiosyncratic events (e.g., eating your roommate's food, behaving insensitively with a mentally ill family member) and more serious transgressions (e.g., hitting a child with a car, losing the family fortune in an ill-advised business deal) or events for which no reparation seems possible (e.g., involuntary manslaughter) that are irrelevant to most respondents but may dominate a specific person's emotional life. These events may lead individuals to experience "maladaptive" levels of guilt (Luyten, Fontaine, & Corveleyn, 2002). Stated another way, measures such as the TOSCA are less apt to capture intense but more circumscribed shame and guilt experiences focused in a specific domain (e.g., failures at dieting, marital infidelity, mistreating a vulnerable or stigmatized family member).<sup>2</sup>

A third concern is whether scenario-based measures such as the TOSCA assess emotional response tendencies (shame and guilt) as opposed to emotion-prompted behavior (hiding vs. amending). Some researchers have raised the possibility that in eschewing the use of the terms *shame* and *guilt* in favor of phenomenological descriptions, scenario-based proponents may have thrown out the emotional baby with the linguistic bathwater, as it were (Eisenberg, 2000; Ferguson, Brugman, White, & Eyre, 2007). A close analysis, however, reveals that only 25% (4 of 16) of guilt responses on the TOSCA-3 describe actual behavior (hiding for shame, amending for guilt). The rest refer to thoughts and feelings about what one should have done in the past or what one should do in the future. Only 2 of the 16 shame items describe behavioral responses. More important, the

shame items, such as “feel incompetent,” “feel inadequate,” “feel immature,” “think: ‘I’m terrible’” and the guilt items, such as “think: ‘this is making me anxious. I need to either fix it or get someone else to,’” “feel unhappy and eager to correct the situation” are anything but affectively barren. The TOSCA-C and TOSCA-A also hold up well under this same scrutiny. The TOSCA-SD, developed for inmates, however, is heavily weighted toward behavior, based on initial assumptions about the need to use concrete responses with this population. Based on several years of research with jail inmates, we believe it is feasible to employ language and concepts similar to those employed on the other versions of the TOSCA. Thus, the TOSCA-SD is currently under revision.

In summary, global adjective checklists and scenario-based measures each have pros and cons. Both approaches yield reasonably valid indices of proneness to shame, but scenario-based measures seem uniquely able to capture proneness to guilt about behaviors, independent of shame about the self.

### **Shame Proneness and Guilt Proneness Are Not at Opposite Ends of a Single Continuum**

Just as people may experience shame, guilt, or some combination of the two in response to a single event, at the dispositional level some people are prone to shame, some to guilt, and some to both. The correlation between shame proneness and guilt proneness is positive—about .42 for the TOSCA-3, higher among children using the TOSCA-C (about .6), and lower among inmates using the TOSCA-SD (about .2). We believe these two moderately correlated measures represent unipolar as opposed to bipolar dimensions (see Russell & Carroll, 1999). Specifically, high scores on shame proneness and guilt proneness carry meaning, but low scores are less informative, particularly for shame. There is no polar opposite to shame proneness. The unipolar, as opposed to bipolar, nature of these scales was underscored in our longitudinal study of jail inmates (Tangney, Mashek, & Stuewig, 2007). In a sample of 500 male and female inmates, psychopathy, a serious form of antisocial personality disorder (assessed by the Psychopathy Check-

list: Screening Version; Hare, Cox, & Hare, 1995), was unrelated to proneness to shame and only weakly negatively correlated with proneness to guilt ( $r = -.16$ ), showing that psychopaths are not prone to either shame or guilt. But low scores on the TOSCA do not imply a pathological *absence* of shame and guilt. Stated another way, it is meaningful for someone to score (1) higher than his or her peers on shame but not guilt, (2) higher than his or her peers on both shame and guilt, and (3) higher than his or her peers on guilt but not shame. Low scores on both are not terribly informative.

### **What Is Shame-Free Guilt?**

Theoretically, the adaptive features of guilt should be most evident when unaccompanied by the painful feelings of shame (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Similarly, shame unaccompanied by guilt may have unique negative consequences. To model this important unique variance, it is common to calculate semipartial (part) correlations that reflect “shame-free” guilt and “guilt-free” shame. For example, in one study the relationship of parental rejection to shame proneness ( $r = .15$ ) and guilt proneness ( $r = -.09$ ) changed substantially once the semipartial correlation was used ( $r_s = .27$  and  $-.24$ ) (Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005). Another way to think about the relationship of shame and guilt to constructs is as suppressors (Paulhus, Robins, Trzesniewski, & Tracy, 2004). As with self-esteem and narcissism, for instance, differential relationships of shame proneness and guilt proneness become evident once each is residualized on the other. These differential patterns of results have been found in many samples (Dearing, Stuewig, & Tangney, 2005; Paulhus et al., 2004; Tangney, 1991; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, 1992) and are theoretically consistent with the notion that it is the capacity to experience guilt about behaviors without the interference of shame about the self that leads to more adaptive intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes. For this reason, interpretation of the correlates of shame-free guilt (and sometimes guilt-free shame) may be necessary to identify relationships that might otherwise be obscured by suppressor effects.<sup>3</sup>

### **Psychological and Social Correlates of Proneness to Shame and Proneness to Guilt**

Proneness to shame and proneness to guilt are stable individual differences that have different implications for social behavior and adjustment. In brief, empirical research suggests that shame-prone individuals are vulnerable to a range of interpersonal and intrapersonal problems, when considering both zero order and residualized analyses. In contrast, proneness to shame-free guilt is unrelated to such vulnerabilities. Rather, guilt-prone individuals (and others in their social circle) are likely to benefit from this prosocial emotional disposition (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994; Tangney, 1991; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Here we summarize several lines of research indicating that guilt proneness is the more adaptive moral emotional style.

#### ***Other-Oriented Empathy versus Self-Oriented Distress***

Empathy serves crucial functions in interpersonal relationships (Eisenberg, Valiente, & Champion, 2004). Research has repeatedly shown that the capacity for other-oriented empathy is differentially related to proneness to shame versus proneness to guilt. Specifically, guilt proneness goes hand in hand with perspective taking and other-oriented empathy. Shame proneness, in contrast, has been negatively or negligibly related to individual differences in perspective taking and empathic concern. For example, in a study of delinquent and nondelinquent adolescents (Robinson, Roberts, Strayer, & Koopman, 2007), guilt proneness was positively associated with five measures of dispositional empathy, whereas no relationship between shame proneness and empathy was found. Shame was, however, positively correlated with problematic self-oriented personal distress. The same pattern of findings has been observed in studies of children, adolescents, college students, and adults from all walks of life (for a review, see Tangney et al., 2007a), consistent with the notion that the self-focus of shame is apt to inhibit empathic connectedness, whereas the behavioral focus of guilt facilitates other-oriented empathy. In fact, the differential relationship of shame

and guilt to empathy is apparent at both the dispositional and emotional state levels (Joireman, 2004; Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Tangney, 1991, 1995; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney et al., 1994).

#### ***Psychological Symptoms***

A wealth of research employing diverse measurement methods, age groups, and populations consistently links proneness to shame to a wide range of psychological symptoms, including low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, eating-disorder symptoms, posttraumatic stress disorder, and suicidal ideation (for a review, see Tangney et al., 2007a). Because guilt is also a negative self-conscious emotion, it has traditionally been thought to play a similar role in psychological symptoms. Empirical support for this assumption, however, has not been strong or clear-cut. Tangney (1996) argued that when one considers the distinction between shame about the self and guilt about a behavior, guilt should not necessarily be associated with poor psychological adjustment. It is much easier to repair or make amends for a specific behavior than for a flawed self. Feelings of guilt, however, may become problematic when fused with shame. Consistent with this conceptual analysis, studies utilizing measures that insufficiently distinguish between shame and guilt typically find that guilt proneness is associated with psychological symptoms (e.g., Harder & Lewis, 1987). On the other hand, measures sensitive to Lewis's (1971) distinction (shame about self vs. guilt about behavior) allow the examination of shame-free guilt. Such studies show that guilt is essentially unrelated to psychological symptoms. For instance, proneness to guilt and proneness to shame were both seemingly positively related to depression among college students; however, shame-free guilt was unrelated to depression, whereas guilt-free shame remained a significant positive correlate of depression (Webb, Heisler, Call, Chickering, & Colburn, 2007). In cases in which people have an exaggerated or distorted sense of responsibility for events, psychological problems associated with guilt may emerge (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Zahn-Waxler & Robinson, 1995), but psychological problems are generally unrelated to the propensity to experience shame-free



guilt when one legitimately takes the responsibility for one's failures and transgressions. A recent study comparing two clinical populations suggested that guilt proneness might be related to psychopathology. Rusch and colleagues (2007) reported that guilt proneness was higher in women with comorbid borderline personality disorder (BPD) and posttraumatic stress disorder as compared with women with only a BPD diagnosis. Furthermore, shame had an analogous though nonsignificant positive relationship with comorbidity. Because shame and guilt were not partialled out, however, interpretation of these results should be made with caution. It is unclear whether shame-free guilt would be stronger among those women with comorbid diagnoses.

### *Shaming, Blaming, and Maiming*

One robust empirical finding involves the differential link of shame and guilt to blame and anger. In addition to assessing proneness to shame and guilt, the TOSCA measures assess externalization of blame, initially included as filler items. Externalization of Blame (blaming the situation or other people for one's failure or transgression) has emerged as a reliable, valid scale in its own right. As expected, guilt-prone individuals are inclined to take responsibility for their blunders; externalization of blame has been consistently negatively correlated with proneness to guilt. But, whereas attribution theory would predict that shame-prone individuals would be inclined to blame themselves for their failures, studies consistently show a *positive* link between shame proneness and blaming others. How is it that shame-prone people (in attributional terms, people who make internal, stable, and global attributions for failures and transgression; see Tangney, 1990; Tracy & Robins, 2006) are also inclined to blame others? People suffering from the pain and self-diminishment of shame may become defensive and angry and attempt to deflect blame outward. Lewis (1971) described the "humiliated fury" unleashed by clients' shame in clinical practice, and Scheff's (1987) qualitative research describes a "shame-rage spiral" that can lead to blame, rage, and occasionally aggression.

In fact, research with individuals of all ages consistently demonstrates a link be-

tween shame proneness and externalization of blame, hostility, anger, and unconstructive expression of anger (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004; Andrews, Brewin, Rose, & Kirk, 2000; Bennett, Sullivan, & Lewis, 2005; Harper & Arias, 2004; Harper, Cercone, & Arias, 2005; Lutwak, Panish, Ferrari, & Razzino, 2001; Robinson et al., 2007). Shame-prone individuals may also express verbal or physical aggression, although the pathways and circumstances leading to such behavior are unclear (Stuewig & Tangney, 2007). Perhaps feelings of shame prompt a strong tendency to become defensive, shift blame, and attack others (verbally or physically) in order to escape the pain of shame. This proclivity to lash out may satisfy the short-term goal of regaining a sense of control and moral superiority, but at what cost? It is difficult to maintain healthy relations when friends, coworkers, and loved ones are frequently exposed to outbursts of anger. In contrast, guilt proneness is unrelated to anger—that is, guilt-prone people are as prone to anger as anyone else. But when angered, guilt-prone individuals are inclined to manage their anger constructively (e.g., through nonhostile discussion or direct corrective action), and they are *disinclined* toward aggression (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004; Lutwak et al., 2001; Paulhus et al., 2004; Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall, & Gramzow, 1996).

### *Risky, Illegal, and/or Immoral Behavior*

Because shame and guilt are painful emotions providing negative feedback for wrongdoing, it is often assumed that both motivate individuals to do the right thing. But research tells a different story. There is stronger empirical support for the moral function of guilt as opposed to shame (Stuewig & Tangney, 2007). Among all age groups, guilt proneness is associated with low levels of consensually immoral behavior, but there is little evidence for the presumed moral inhibitory functions of shame. If anything, shame-prone individuals have difficulty following the straight and narrow. In one study of incarcerated adolescent offenders and a comparison group from the community, shame-free guilt proneness was negatively related to anger and antiauthority and distrustful attitudes, whereas shame proneness

was positively related to anger and distrustful attitudes across groups (Robinson et al., 2007). Contrary to expectations, however, shame proneness and guilt proneness only marginally differentiated between the two groups. Using a sample of incarcerated individuals, Hosser, Windzio, and Greve (2008) found that shame was related to higher recidivism rates, whereas guilt was related to less recidivism. In a study of college students, Tibbetts (2003) entered a number of shame and guilt measures simultaneously into a regression analysis; the TOSCA Shame scale was unrelated to illegal behaviors, whereas guilt was negatively related to illegal acts. Similarly, in a longitudinal study, Stuewig and McCloskey (2005) found a negative relationship between guilt proneness and delinquency; shame proneness was unrelated to delinquency.

Shame proneness and guilt proneness are also related to substance use and abuse. Compared with individuals in community settings, adults in recovery programs had lower guilt-prone scores and higher shame-prone scores (Meehan et al., 1996; O'Connor, Berry, Inaba, Weiss, & Morrison, 1994). Among college students and jail inmates, shame proneness was consistently positively related to alcohol and drug problems. There was also evidence for a negative relationship between substance use problems and guilt proneness (Dearing et al., 2005). In a longitudinal study, shame and guilt proneness in the fifth grade predicted alcohol and drug use as reported at 18 years of age (Tangney, Stuewig, Kendall, Reinsmith, & Dearing, 2006). Children high in shame tended to start drinking earlier than those low in shame and were more likely to later use heroin, "uppers," and hallucinogens. Those high in guilt started drinking at a later age than those low in guilt and were less likely to use heroin, with similar trends for marijuana and "uppers."

Very few studies have examined the relationship of the moral emotions to other risky behaviors, such as needle use or risky sexual behavior, although one study of college students reported little relationship between reports of previous high-risk sexual behaviors and current state shame or guilt (Murray, Ciarrocchi, & Murray-Swank, 2007). In another study of recently incarcerated inmates, shame proneness and guilt proneness were

unrelated to risky intravenous-drug use during the year prior to incarceration, but guilt was negatively related to number of sexual partners and to an index of risky sexual behavior (Stuewig, Tangney, Mashek, Forkner, & Dearing, in press).

### **Understanding Adaptive and Maladaptive Effects of Shame and Guilt: Mediational Models**

Much evidence shows that shame and guilt are differentially related to a number of psychological and behavioral constructs. Research has begun to delve deeper by examining the mediational pathways that underlie these relationships. A number of studies show support for several hypothesized processes that may explain how shame and guilt influence social behavior. Notably, anger and externalization of blame appear to mediate the relationship between shame and aggression. Specifically, men's anger has been found to mediate the relationship between shame proneness and perpetration of psychological abuse in dating relationships (Harper et al., 2005). Stuewig, Tangney, Heigel, and Harty (2006) found that across four diverse samples (early adolescents, at-risk older adolescents, college students, and incarcerated adults), externalization of blame mediated the relationship between shame proneness and both verbal and physical aggression. Guilt proneness had the opposite effect in that proneness to guilt was negatively related to aggression in three of the four samples, partially mediated through other-oriented empathy and accepting responsibility.

Ashby, Rice, and Martin (2006) identified shame as a mediator of the effects of maladaptive perfectionism on depression in a sample of college students. Among men, internalized shame fully mediated the relationship. Among women, maladaptive perfectionism directly predicted depression, but there was also partial mediation through shame and low self-esteem. This finding is consistent with earlier empirical support of the relationship between negative perfectionism and both state and trait shame and the negative relationship between adaptive perfectionism and state shame (Fedewa, Burns, & Gomez, 2005).

In a sample of several hundred undergraduates, Williamson, Sandage, and Lee (2007) evaluated several mediational models to examine the implications of social connectedness for guilt proneness, shame proneness, differentiation of self, and hope. At the bivariate level, proneness to shame-free guilt was positively related to social connectedness and hope, whereas proneness to (guilt-free) shame was negatively associated with social connectedness, hope, and differentiation of self. Support was found for two of three alternative models. In one, social connectedness positively predicted guilt and negatively predicted shame. In turn, guilt proneness positively predicted both hope and differentiation of the self; shame negatively predicted both hope and differentiation of the self. In an alternative model, dependent variables (hope and differentiation of self) were switched with mediating variables (shame and guilt); this second model, with shame and guilt as dependent variables, fit equally well.

In sum, the bivariate correlates of proneness to shame and guilt have been pretty well mapped out. Research that examines more complex models involving mediation and moderation has just begun. We anticipate that future research will expand on this work considerably, clarifying the functional nature of the relationship of shame proneness and guilt proneness to a range of personality factors, psychological symptoms, and patterns of interpersonal behavior.

### **Where Do Shame-Prone and Guilt-Prone Styles Come From?**

Given the implications of shame proneness and guilt proneness described thus far, it is clear that these individual differences matter. How does one become shame or guilt prone? This remains largely a mystery. Few prospective studies have examined the development of shame and guilt proneness, especially starting in early childhood (Mills, 2005; Reimer, 1996). Whereas a large number of possible mechanisms have been proposed—including genetic/temperament factors (e.g., Dienstbier, 1984; Kochanska, 1993; Zahn-Waxler & Robinson, 1995) and socialization factors, especially parenting style (e.g., Barrett, 1995; Ferguson & Steg-

ge, 1995; Kochanska, 1993; Kochanska & Aksan, 2006; Lewis, 1992; Miyake & Yamazaki, 1995; Potter-Efron, 1989; Rosenberg, 1997; Zahn-Waxler & Robinson, 1995)—the research and measurement lags far behind theory (Eisenberg, 2000).

In the developmental literature, similarities between parents and offspring have been found for a number of attributes and behaviors (Serbin & Stack, 1998). There is good reason to expect intergenerational continuity for shame proneness and guilt proneness, as well. There may be a direct link between parents' affective styles and those of their children through behavioral modeling. Children observe how their parents react to negative events and may learn, via direct modeling, that a certain pattern of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses is appropriate in certain kinds of situations. To the degree that direct modeling occurs, one would expect a direct link between parents' affective styles and those of their children.

Little research has examined whether shame proneness and guilt proneness show continuities across generations. In one longitudinal study of fifth-grade children with follow-up in seventh grade, measures of shame proneness and guilt proneness were collected from children, parents, and grandparents. Children were interviewed a third time when they were 18. There was only very modest evidence of transmission of shame and guilt, with a weighted mean correlation of .09 across generations (Stuewig, Kendall, & Tangney, 2004). Although the direct relationship between parent and child was minimal, there may be important moderators of intergenerational continuity in shame-prone and guilt-prone styles. For example, age may play a role, such that the similarity between parent and child may be strongest at a similar developmental stage for each.

Perhaps families play other roles in the development of shame-prone and guilt-prone styles. Tendencies toward shame proneness may be perpetuated through family dynamics shaped by family members' affective styles that in turn reinforce individual members' characteristic emotional responses. The literatures on family systems and on codependence describe, for example, a *shame-based* family system that is characterized by maladaptive patterns of communication and extremes of family conflict or enmeshment

(Bradshaw, 1988; Fossum & Mason, 1986). However, little empirical research has been conducted in this area.

Another possibility is that parents' child-rearing practices are most important to the development of children's moral affective styles. In general, studies provide support for parental practices as a component in the socialization of moral emotions. In a study of 5- to 12-year-old children, Ferguson and Stegge (1995) found that children's guilt was associated with parents' reports of induction and parental anger in negative situations, whereas children's shame was associated with parental hostility, little recognition of positive outcomes, and a lack of discipline. Alessandri and Lewis (1993) reported that parents' specific (but not global) negative comments were associated with children's displays of shame, an unexpected result. Gilbert, Allan, and Goss (1996) found that recalled put-downs and shaming from childhood were associated with shame proneness in adulthood. Finally, evidence suggests that children of depressed mothers may be at risk for developing "maladaptive" patterns of guilt (Zahn-Waxler & Robinson, 1995).

Child maltreatment in its different forms (physical abuse, sexual abuse, harsh parenting, neglect) may leave children vulnerable to the development of a shame-prone disposition and less likely to acquire an adaptive guilt-prone style. Research indicates a link between retrospective reports of abuse and shame (Andrews, 1995; Andrews & Hunter, 1997; Hoggund & Nicholas, 1995; Webb et al., 2007). Alessandri and Lewis (1996) observed that mothers' negative behaviors were correlated with children's shame reactions during laboratory tasks and that girls with a history of maltreatment showed higher non-verbal shame than did girls with no history of abuse. Moreover, longitudinal research shows that negative or harsh parenting is associated with shame proneness (Bennett et al., 2005; Mills, 2003; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005).

Taken together, evidence supports a link between emotional or physical abuse and proneness to shame. Surprisingly, evidence for the relationship between sexual abuse and shame is less clear-cut, with some studies finding positive results and others finding null results (Alessandri & Lewis, 1996; Andrews, 1995; Andrews et al., 2000; Stuewig

& McCloskey, 2005). There are a number of possible reasons for these inconsistent findings, including small sample sizes and differences in operational definitions. An interesting hypothesis is that the specific findings may depend on the coping style and recovery process of the individual (Bonanno, Keltner, & Noll, 2002; Negrao, Bonanno, Noll, Putnam, & Trickett, 2005).

Finally, temperament may play a role in the development of proneness to shame and to guilt. The strongest support for a temperamental perspective on children's development of conscience has been reported by Kochanska and colleagues (Kochanska, DeVet, Goldman, Murray, & Putnam, 1994; Kochanska, Gross, Lin, & Nichols, 2002), who found that expression of behavioral and affective discomfort subsequent to misbehaving was related to temperamental qualities of fearfulness and reactivity. In one study, Kochanska and colleagues (2002) found that fearfulness at 22, 33, and 45 months of age was related concurrently to guilt (measured as observed discomfort after misbehaving) at each time. Furthermore, this measure of guilt (a composite from all three previous waves) mediated the relationship between fearfulness and a tendency to violate rules at 56 months. Toddlers who responded fearfully to risky activities were more likely to show discomfort after transgressing, which in turn led to lower likelihood of violating rules. These studies did not differentiate between shame and guilt, however.

### Gender and Culture

A consistent empirical finding is that women have higher levels than men of both shame proneness and guilt proneness. This gender difference has been observed, without exception, in studies involving over 3,000 individuals from early childhood through the elder years and from all walks of life (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Females' higher scores on both shame and guilt proneness could be due to a number of factors: Females may, in fact, experience shame and guilt more often and more intensely, females may be more willing and/or able to report on emotional experiences, females may be more self-reflective and hence more inclined to expe-



rience self-conscious emotions, and females may be more attuned to issues of morality, especially those involving interpersonal relationships (Gilligan, 1982). In short, multiple features of these self-reflective, moral emotions may account for higher shame proneness and guilt proneness among girls and women. Tangney and Dearing (2002) cautioned that females' higher propensity to "moral" emotions does not necessarily imply that they are more moral, as the moral benefits of proneness to guilt may be negated to some degree by the negative consequences of proneness to shame.

Theory and research presented thus far has been grounded in traditional Western cultural norms that emphasize ideals of individualism and responsibility for one's own actions, but non-Western cultures embrace more collectivist ideals of interdependence and group responsibility. Cross-cultural research highlights how culture may influence the intensity and frequency of moral emotions, as well as their causes and consequences (Lagattuta & Thompson, 2007). For example, Furukawa, Tangney, Higashihara, and Pak (2008) examined differences in proneness to shame, guilt, and pride among children residing in Japan, Korea, and the United States. Significant group differences were observed in children's propensity to experience self-conscious emotions. Specifically, Japanese children were more shame prone than children in the United States and Korea. In this sense, Japan may represent a "shame" culture (Benedict, 1946; Hogan & Sussner, 2001) in a way that is distinct from another Asian culture, Korea. Korean children were more prone to guilt than Japanese and American children (results inconsistent with the notion of a Western "guilt culture"). Regarding the correlates of shame proneness, it was hypothesized that shame would be less problematic among Japanese children relative to those raised in Korea and the United States, owing to the fact that shame is more normative and would therefore be less painful in the self-critical Japanese culture. There were, however, surprisingly few cross-cultural differences in the relationship of shame to aggression-related cognitions, emotions, and behavior. In the face of failure or transgression, shame-prone children in Japan, Korea, and the United States were all more inclined to blame oth-

ers and to feel anger relative to their less shame-prone peers. Notably, in no case did shame seem to inhibit aggression-relevant cognitions, emotion, or behavior. In short, although there were significant cultural differences in children's propensity to experience self-conscious emotions, the correlates of individual differences in shame and guilt were remarkably similar across these three cultures in at least one important domain—anger and aggression.

### Psychobiological Correlates

A recent focus of moral-emotions research is the identification of psychobiological markers of shame and guilt in response to laboratory manipulations designed to threaten the social self (Dickerson, Kemeny, Aziz, Kim, & Fahey, 2004; Gruenewald, Kemeny, Aziz, & Fahey, 2004; see Dickerson, Gruenewald, & Kemeny, 2004, for a review). Participants who wrote about incidents involving heavy doses of self-blame, compared with those who wrote about more mundane daily activities, evidenced increased levels of self-reported shame (and guilt) from pretest to posttest. Importantly, increases in shame (but not guilt or general negative affect) coincided with increased proinflammatory cytokine activity (Dickerson, Kemeny, et al., 2004).

Other immunological research is equally suggestive: Among HIV positive individuals, persistent feelings of shame (but not other negative emotions) were positively related to prospective T-cell decline, an indicator of compromised immune function (Weitzman, Kemeny, & Fahey, 2004). Experiences of shame have also been linked to elevated cortisol in studies of adults (Gruenewald et al., 2004) and children (Lewis & Ramsay, 2002). Importantly, Dickerson, Gruenewald, and colleagues (2004) noted that shame, cortisol, and proinflammatory cytokine system activation increased specifically in response to social-evaluative threat (negative social evaluation and rejection) but not in response to more general negative affect or distress. They hypothesized that individual differences in shame proneness may be correlated with individual differences in immunosystem responsivity and that state experiences of shame and related emotions

may be the mediating mechanism for biological response to social threat.

Such physiological markers may prove useful as a measurement tool of situation-specific states of shame. Physiological markers may also be useful as a means of objectively assessing individual differences in proneness to shame and guilt. Developmental research would be useful to shed light on whether shame proneness or guilt proneness leads to biological reactivity or vice versa.

## Conclusions

Life is full of daily negotiations between situational demands, our personal codes of ethics, and our interpretations of societal proscriptions for behavior. Shame and guilt are closely related yet distinct emotions that affect our perception of ourselves, that influence our social interactions, and that ultimately guide our moral behavior. This chapter reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature on shame proneness and guilt proneness and described the relative strengths and weaknesses of several assessment methods. Across multiple domains of social behavior and psychological adjustment, guilt proneness emerges as the more adaptive moral emotional style, and there is little evidence that proneness to shame helps people inhibit harmful impulses. Despite decades of research, we know little about the origins of individual differences in proneness to shame and proneness to guilt. It appears that parents do not directly transmit these emotional styles via genes or modeling. There is some evidence that harsh, abusive parenting can lead to the propensity to experience shame and that frequent use of “induction” (coaching children to be aware of others’ emotions) may foster a guilt-prone style, but much work remains. In particular, the field would benefit from longitudinal studies, tests of more complex models involving theoretically derived mediators and moderators, and additional work on measurement. Perhaps the most exciting development in recent years is the work on biological correlates of shame. This line of work may add importantly to our ability to more accurately measure shame and guilt and to our understanding of the roots of shame proneness and guilt proneness.

## Notes

1. For an in-depth review of the literature on the emotions of shame and guilt, including information on state measures of these emotions, see Robins, Nofhle, and Tracy (2007) and Tangney and Dearing (2002).
2. Recently, researchers have begun to develop measures of proneness to shame and proneness to guilt with respect to *specific domains*. For example, researchers concerned with the psychology of eating disorders have assessed feelings of shame specifically in reference to one’s body (Andrews, 1995). Trauma-related guilt cognitions, such as false beliefs about responsibility or preoutcome knowledge, are assessed by the Trauma-Related Guilt Inventory (TRGI; Kubany, Haynes, & Abueg, 1996).
3. It should be noted that the reliability of residualized scores is necessarily lower than the reliabilities of the scales themselves (because only systematic variance has been removed). Moreover, to the extent that shame and guilt legitimately share features (e.g., self-awareness, negative affect), the residuals may not reflect all features of guilt or shame. The emphasis here is on their unique characteristics.

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