Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin
http://psp.sagepub.com/

Situational Detenninants of Shame and Guilt in Young Adulthood

June Price Tangney

Pers Soc Psychol Bull 1992 18: 199
DOI: 10.1177/0146167292182011

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://psp.sagepub.com/content/18/2/199

Published by:

http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:

Society for Personality and Social Psychology

Additional services and information for *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://psp.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://psp.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations: http://psp.sagepub.com/content/18/2/199.refs.html

>> Version of Record - Apr 1, 1992

What is This?

Downloaded from psp.sagepub.com by Graeme George on April 2, 2014

Situational Determinants of Shame and Guilt in Young Adulthood

June Price Tangney
George Mason University

Undergraduates (N = 146) briefly described three shame-inducing situations and three guilt-inducing situations. Shame and guilt situations differed in both form and content. Shame descriptions were longer but less specific in content, and respondents were more likely to use the "projective" second person when describing shame than guilt. The observed content differences were generally consistent with current theory. Guilt was typically induced by specific moral transgressions, often involving harm to others. Shame was induced by specific moral transgressions as well as by nonmoral situations and issues (e.g., failure in performance situations, socially inappropriate behavior or dress). The analysis of interpersonal concerns indicated that both shame and guilt can arise from a concern with one's effect on another person. Concern with others' evaluations, however, were almost exclusively the domain of shame. Although there appear to be some classic shame-inducing situations and some classic guilt-inducing situations, the majority of situations appear capable of engendering either emotion.

A growing theoretical and empirical literature underlines important differences in the phenomenology of shame and guilt (Barrett, Zahn-Waxler, & Cole, 1991; DeRivera, 1977; Gehm & Scherer, 1988; Lewis, 1971; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney, 1989, 1990; Taylor, 1985; Wallbott & Scherer, 1988; Weiner, 1985; Wicker, Payne, & Morgan, 1983). Shame and guilt both involve negative affect, but the focus of the negative affect differs, leading to distinct phenomenological experiences. In guilt, the object of concern is some specific action (or failure to act) that violates internal standards. There is remorse or regret over the "bad thing" that was done, and a sense of tension that often serves to motivate reparative action. The tension, remorse, and regret of guilt can be quite uncomfortable, particularly when reparation is blocked for one reason or another. Nonetheless, the shame experience is far more painful and devastating. In shame, the object of concern is the entire self. The "bad thing" is experienced as a reflection of a "bad self," and the entire self is then painfully scrutinized and negatively evaluated. With this painful scrutiny of the self, there is often a corresponding sense of shrinking, of being small, of being worthless and powerless. Whereas guilt motivates a desire to repair, shame motivates a desire to hide —to sink into the floor and disappear.

Much of the current empirical literature on shame and guilt has been concerned with the question of these phenomenological differences (e.g., Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney, 1989; Wicker et al., 1983) and with the personality and behavioral correlates of proneness to shame and guilt (Barrett et al., 1991; Burggraf, 1989; Gessner & Tangney, 1990; Gioiella, 1981; Harder & Lewis, 1986; Hoblitzelle, 1987; Tangney, 1990, 1991; Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, in press; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, in press). Far less attention has been directed toward differences in the situational determinants of shame and guilt. This is somewhat ironic given that early theorists (e.g., Ausubel, 1955; Benedict, 1946; Freud,

Author's Note: This research was supported in part by the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (Grant #IR15HD25506) and by a faculty research grant from George Mason University. Portions of this article were presented at the 1989 meeting of the American Psychological Society, Alexandria, Virginia. Many thanks to Susan Burggraf, Hanne Hamme, and Barbara Domingos for their assistance with the initial data collection. I also wish to thank the Departments of Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of Maryland for providing access to participants. I am especially grateful to James Maxfield, Patricia Wagner, Richard Gramzow, Jr., Christopher Smart, and Judy Bach for the many hours, thoughtful discussion, and good humor coding these situations. L. Rowell Huesmann and Michael Mumford were very generous with their statistical expertise; and Susanne Denham, James Maddux, Steve Zaccaro, and two anonymous reviewers provided invaluable suggestions on an earlier draft. Address requests for reprints to June Price Tangney, Department of Psychology, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA 22030.

PSPB, Vol. 18 No. 2, April 1992 199-206
© 1992 by the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Inc.

Downloaded from psp.sagepub.com by Graeme George on April 2, 2014

from the SAGE Social Science Collections. All Rights Reserved.

1896/1953) tended to focus precisely on situational factors in distinguishing between shame and guilt. These earlier conceptualizations viewed shame as arising primarily from public exposure (and public disapproval) of some impropriety or personal shortcoming. Guilt, in contrast, was viewed as an internal reaction to some transgression or violation of personal moral standards. Thus, the difference between shame and guilt was seen largely in terms of the eliciting situation—whether one was exposed before an actual audience or before one's own conscience and, to a lesser extent, whether the situation involved a personal failure or breach of social convention or whether it involved a moral transgression.

The generally accepted reconceptualization shaped by Lewis's (1971) seminal work focuses less on situational factors and more directly on phenomenological differences—particularly regarding the position and role of the self. In guilt, the self is the *source* of evaluation, and some specific behavior is the object of that evaluation. In shame, the self is split into a focal object and an observing "other." Thus, the self is both the source and the *object* of evaluation, as one imagines how one would look to the other. In introducing the notion of the internalized "other," Lewis (1971) in effect downplayed the importance of the structure of the eliciting situation. One could presumably carry around an internalized, observing other—indeed, a full internalized, observing audience—for all manner of real or imagined shortcomings or transgressions. An actual audience is no longer seen as a prerequisite for the shame experience. And in fact, there is considerable evidence that enhanced self-focused attention (or heightened objective self-awareness) itself serves to highlight perceived discrepancies between our real and ideal selves (Duval & Wicklund, 1972).

Although situational determinants of shame and guilt have been downplayed in the recent literature, most of the current theorists have made at least occasional reference to situational factors. Lewis (1971) believes that the situations that evoke guilt are of one type—the individual's own aggression. Lewis, however, uses the term *aggression* in its broadest sense to include transgressions of one's internalized moral standards. Similarly, Lindsay-Hartz (1984) noted that respondents' descriptions of guilt experiences typically involve "a violation of the moral order." Taylor (1985) also suggested that guilt is most likely to arise in connection with "something forbidden"—often behaviors that involve harm to others.

There is general agreement that shame can be elicited by a wider range of situations than guilt. Lewis (1971) concurred with Ausubel's (1955) earlier observation that shame can arise from moral as well as nonmoral issues whereas guilt is primarily moral in nature. Lewis (1971) cites as typical shame-eliciting situations competitive defeat, disappointment, failure, social snubs, sexual rebuffs, invasions of personal privacy, and a failure to live up to the ego ideal, as well as moral transgressions. In addition, she notes a special connection between sex and shame. (Guilt, she believes, arises in connection with sex only when a moral transgression is involved.) Other theorists (Ausubel, 1955; DeRivera, 1977; Lynd, 1958; Taylor, 1985) have also cited failure, exposure, contempt from another, and socially inappropriate behavior as situations likely to engender shame.

Little empirical work has been conducted to examine these hypothesized differences in the situational determinants of shame and guilt, apart from Scherer's (Gehm & Scherer, 1988; Wallbott & Scherer, 1988) recent work on subjective evaluations of such events. In the current study, undergraduates' brief descriptions of shame-inducing and guilt-inducing situations were compared along both form and content dimensions. The aim of the analysis was twofold: first, to examine the degree to which the form of the descriptions reflects phenomenological differences between shame and guilt and, second, to explore the extent to which different types of situations give rise to shame and guilt, as suggested by theory.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 146 undergraduates attending one of two large state universities. Of these, 96% received credit toward a psychology course requirement in return for their participation; the remaining 4% were volunteers. Participants ranged in age from 15 to 30 (M = 19.1), and 70% were female. Regarding race/ethnicity, 73% were White, 7% Black, 17% Asian, and 3% other. Among the participants, 30% reported their primary religious affiliation in childhood as Catholic, 23% Protestant, 29% Jewish, and 6% other; 12% reported no particular religious affiliation.

Procedure

These data were collected as part of two larger investigations of the personality correlates of self-conscious affective styles. At the beginning of each study, informed-consent forms were distributed describing the general nature of the study and procedures. The terms *shame* and *guilt* were not mentioned explicitly. At several points, the voluntary and confidential nature of the study was emphasized. Participants were directed in completing questionnaires to use a unique ID number in lieu of their names.

At the end of the second session, participants were asked to describe in writing "three situations in which

Downloaded from psp.sagepub.com by Graeme George on April 2, 2014

you are most likely to feel guilty" and "three situations in which you are most likely to feel shame." A single line was provided for each description; consequently, the resulting descriptions were quite brief ($M = 5.4$ words).

Initially, 981 descriptions (503 guilt situations and 478 shame situations) from 170 participants were transcribed and randomly ordered. Codes identifying participants and situation type (shame vs. guilt) were omitted, and the entire set of descriptions was coded. Because of data analytic constraints (see below), only the 146 participants with complete data sets (i.e., three shame and three guilt situations) were retained for subsequent analysis. Therefore, the results reported here are based on 438 shame and 438 guilt situations. The pattern of results involving the entire set of descriptions, however, did not differ appreciably from the pattern for those reported here.

A team of five to six coders independently coded all situations along each of the dimensions described below, with the exception of length of description, a more objective dimension that was coded by only two individuals. The coding team comprised the author, a graduate research assistant, and three undergraduate research assistants for the duration of the project. A fourth undergraduate research assistant was involved in coding only performance-type content and interpersonal content. The situations were transcribed by an assistant not involved in coding. One of the coders had assisted in removing identifying codes from the transcribed descriptions several months before coding began. This was a routine clerical task that did not require reading the descriptions, and the coder reported no recollection of the descriptions and their identifiers.

The coding was conducted in stages. Coders met for an initial training period, which included discussion and refinement of definitions associated with two or three dimensions. The coders then independently coded all situations along those dimensions, meeting for periodic reliability checks. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved unanimously. The procedure was then repeated for successive sets of dimensions. The descriptions of shame and guilt situations were coded for the following form and content features.

For ***length of description***, two coders counted the words used in each situation description. The coders agreed for 98% of the descriptions. The few disagreements were due either to clerical error or to the treatment of hyphenated words. Hyphenated words were ultimately counted as a single word.

Degree of specificity was coded on a 4-point scale. A code of 1 was assigned to very general verbs or descriptions where one could image many possible behavioral examples (e.g., "Did something wrong," "Broke a rule," "Hurt someone") and where no specific object was mentioned. A code of 2 was assigned to more specific verbs with no specific object (e.g., "Lied," "Stole") or to a very general action with a specific object (e.g., "Hurt *my brother*"). A code of 3 was assigned when a more specific element was added to a description that would otherwise qualify for a code of 2 (e.g., "Lied *to my mother*," "Stole *a book*"). A code of 4 was assigned to the most detailed, specific descriptions—when more specific elements were added to a description that would otherwise qualify for a code of 3 (e.g., "Lied to my mother *about grades*").

Intercorrelations among the codes for degree of specificity assigned by the five coders ranged from .70 to .85, mean $r = .79$.

Type of grammatical subject was coded using three categories: (0) no references to either the first or second person (e.g., "Lied"); (1) specific or understood first-person subject (e.g., "*I* lied," "Lied to *my* mother"); and (2) specific or understood second-person subject (e.g., "*You* lied," "Lied to *your* mother").

Percentage exact agreement among the five coders ranged from 98% to 100% ($M = 99\%$); interrater reliabilities with the kappa correction ranged from .97 to 1.00 ($M = .98$).

Performance-type content was coded dichotomously (present or absent) to identify situations that explicitly or implicitly involved a clear performance component—that is, where the quality of one's performance, skills, and/or abilities was at issue. These situations were generally of a competitive nature or implied a comparison of the respondent's performance (either with the self or with others). Issues of a moral nature were not included. Examples of performance-type situations are "Taking a test," "Entering a competition," "Playing a sport," and "Giving a wrong answer." After some debate, we included "Sex" as a performance situation because, among late adolescents and young adults, performance issues often come to the fore in this area. We also included "Cheating" (e.g., "Cheating in school") unless the response clearly indicated a situation other than the performance type (e.g., "Cheating on taxes," "Cheating on a boyfriend"). Some descriptions were sufficiently ambiguous to be excluded. For example, "Being wrong" (in the absence of any additional information) was excluded because the respondent might be referring to a factual inaccuracy (performance) or to a moral wrong (not performance). "Not doing my work" was excluded because the respondent might be referring to schoolwork (performance) or more mundane chores (not performance).

Percentage exact agreement among the six coders ranged from 96% to 98% ($M = 97\%$); interrater reliabilities with the kappa correction ranged from .88 to .94 ($M = .90$).

Interpersonal content was coded dichotomously (present or absent) to identify situations that involved a clear

Downloaded from psp.sagepub.com by Graeme George on April 2, 2014

interpersonal component. Typically respondents were implicitly or explicitly concerned with the nature of the relationship—either with their effect on others or with others' evaluations of them. Examples of interpersonal situations are "Hurt a friend," "Said something silly on a date," "Lying" (because one typically lies to another person), "*Caught* cheating" (because one is typically caught by another). We excluded "Stealing" in the absence of any explicit interpersonal element because stealing from a store seemed a likely scenario and one sufficiently devoid of interpersonal concerns.

Percentage exact agreement among the six coders ranged from 91% to 95% (M = 93%); interrater reliabilities with the kappa correction ranged from .82 to .90 (M = .86).

Type of interpersonal concern was coded subsequent to interpersonal content. We felt that the initial dichotomous code did not capture some important qualitative differences in the types of relationship concerns inherent in respondents' descriptions. Accordingly, we recoded all interpersonal situations into three subcategories: (1) Concern with one's effect on others. This code was assigned to acts or situations which would involve harm to another and in which one could reasonably assume that the respondent was concerned with his or her negative effect on the other (e.g., "Hurting *someone*," "Lying *to someone*"). (2) Concern with others' evaluation of the self. This code was assigned to situations in which there was a clear explicit or implicit concern with another person's or group's evaluation of the self (e.g., "People making fun of me," "Acting inappropriately in a social situation," "Lying and *getting caught*"). (3) Ambiguous—interpersonal content but not clearly (1) or (2).

Percentage exact agreement among the five coders ranged from 76% to 84% (M = 81%); interrater reliabilities with the kappa correction ranged from .63 to .75 (M = .70). Situations that had already been assigned a noninterpersonal code were excluded from the calculation of these indexes of reliability.

Omission versus commission was coded using three categories: (0) ambiguous, (1) act of commission (e.g., "Cheated on a test," "Committed a crime"), and (2) act of omission (e.g., "Didn't go to church," "Didn't help a friend"). Use of the ambiguous category was quite rare. We included in the ambiguous category descriptions such as "Broke the law" that could include acts of commission (e.g., stealing) as well as acts of omission (e.g., avoiding the draft, not filing income tax returns) that seemed particularly relevant to college students. After some debate, we coded "Committing a sin" as ambiguous, despite the use of the word *committing*, because this phrase is often used to describe a failure to fulfill one's religious obligations (e.g., not going to church on Sunday, not praying).

Percentage exact agreement among the five coders ranged from 87% to 93% (M = 89%); interrater reliabilities with the kappa correction ranged from .69 to .84 (M = .75).

Specific content was coded using 24 mutually exclusive categories. These categories were selected using an approach similar to the iterative inductive procedures described by Glaser (1978) and Miles and Huberman (1984). An initial set of categories was derived from a review of a subset of situations. Successive subsets of situations were reviewed, and the content coding scheme was revised accordingly. It was possible to assign 74.5% of the situations to these 24 specific content categories. The remaining 25.5% represented unique content and were coded "other." Six of the 24 categories were used very infrequently (failure to live up to religious obligations, traffic violations, public speaking, excessive drinking, rape, and hostility/anger not elsewhere coded). The few situations in these categories (3.2%) were subsequently coded "other." In addition, we had initially made a distinction between failure at school or work and failure at a game, sport, or hobby. Few situations fell into the latter category, and so the two kinds of failure were combined into a single failure category. The final set of specific content categories appears in Table 2.

Percentage exact agreement among the five coders ranged from 82% to 89% (M = 85%); interrater reliabilities with the kappa correction ranged from .80 to .88 (M = .83). These indexes of reliability were based on the original set of 24 specific content categories.

Data Analysis

The majority of coded variables were categorical in nature; however, it was not possible to use log-linear procedures or a chi-square test of contingency to assess whether these categorical variables varied across shame and guilt descriptions, because the array of data involved several sources of nonindependence. Participants provided both shame and guilt descriptions, and so emotion was a within-subjects factor. In addition, each participant provided three descriptions for each emotion. Therefore, the 876 descriptions considered here were not independent, and it was necessary to treat subject, not description, as the unit of analysis.

For dichotomous variables (e.g., performance-type content), the Wilcoxon signed ranks test was used. For each participant, two variables were created indicating the number of descriptions involving performance content (for example) for shame and guilt, respectively. As participants provided three descriptions for each emotion type, these variables ranged from 0 to 3. Although these variables are conceptually ratio scales, the distributions were substantially restricted and skewed. Therefore, the nonparametric Wilcoxon test was employed.

Downloaded from psp.sagepub.com by Graeme George on April 2, 2014

For categorical variables involving more than two levels (e.g., type of grammatical subject), Friedman's two-way analysis of variance for ranks was first used as an omnibus test of association. For each level of the coded dimension (e.g., for grammatical subject: no subject, first person, and second person), two variables were created indicating the number of descriptions involving that code for shame and guilt, respectively. As participants provided three descriptions for each emotion type, these variables ranged from 0 to 3. Shame-guilt difference scores were then computed across each level of the coded dimension. These difference scores ranged from –3 to +3; higher scores indicated that more shame than guilt descriptions involved that code. The distributions of these difference variables were somewhat restricted and considerably kurtotic. Therefore, the nonparametric Friedman test was employed.

Where Friedman's two-way analysis of variance for signed ranks (applied to the difference scores) showed an overall statistically significant association between emotion (shame vs. guilt) and the multilevel coded variable (e.g., type of grammatical subject), the Wilcoxon signed ranks test was used to assess the particular categories in which significant shame-guilt differences were observed.

The distributions of summed variables derived from two dimensions—length of description and degree of specificity—were sufficiently normal to allow standard parametric analyses. For these dimensions, two variables were created for each participant indicating the mean score across the three shame and guilt descriptions, respectively. Paired *t* tests were then used to evaluate the statistical significance of observed shame-guilt differences (e.g., the mean number of words used to describe guilt vs. shame situations).

The analyses described here were employed to take into account the within-subject factors. The observations of interest, however, are the actual shame and guilt descriptions. Accordingly, in the following tables, nonaggregated frequency counts and score means are presented with respect to the situation descriptions.

Secondary analyses were also conducted to assess whether gender and religious background were related to respondents' descriptions of shame- and guilt-eliciting situations. Religious orientation in childhood, rather than current affiliation, was considered because the former is more closely tied to early socialization practices relevant to shame and guilt. Age and race were not considered because of the low variability in the sample. For example, although there was a considerable range in participants' ages, the distribution was highly skewed, with the vast majority between the ages of 18 and 22.

The simultaneous consideration of within- and between-subjects factors, coupled with dependent variables that were largely nonnormal, posed some real problems. There appears to be no nonparametric procedure that would estimate, for example, both the main effect for gender and the interaction effect of gender by emotion (shame vs. guilt). As noted above, the frequency variables (indicating the number of shame and number of guilt descriptions involving a particular type of content) are conceptually ratio scales, although their distributions were generally quite skewed. As an approximate test of the effects of interest, repeated-measures ANOVAs were conducted—one for each category (e.g., cheating)—with gender (or religion) as a between-subjects factor and emotion (shame vs. guilt) as a within-subjects factor. Multiple ANOVAs were conducted because the dependent variables are largely conceptually independent (Huberty & Morris, 1989). The reader is cautioned, however, that given distributional limitations, this analytic approach provides only a rough approximation of where gender and religious background might be relevant to shame and guilt experiences.

TABLE 1: Formal Features of Shame and Guilt Descriptions

Dimension	*Guilt Situations*	*Shame Situations*	
Number of words	4.74	6.09	$t = -6.46$**
Degree of specificity	2.32	2.16	$t = 3.34$**
Use of grammatical subject			$\chi^2 = 10.73$*
No subject	64.2% (281)	52.7% (231)	$z = -1.00$
First person	21.9% (96)	24.0% (105)	$z = -3.27$*
Second person	13.9% (61)	23.3% (102)	$z = -3.27$*

NOTE: Specificity was coded 0-4, where 4 indicates greater specificity. Percentages shown are column percentages (e.g., percentage of shame situations coded in a given category). Overall χ^2 is derived from Friedman's two-way ANOVA for ranks. *z*s are derived from Wilcoxon signed ranks test, testing row distributions.
*$p < .01$; **$p < .001$.

RESULTS

Formal Features of Shame and Guilt Descriptions

Undergraduates' descriptions of shame and guilt situations differed significantly along all three form dimensions (see Table 1). Respondents used more words to describe shame-inducing situations, but these longer descriptions conveyed less specific information than the shorter descriptions of guilt-inducing situations. The often vague, rambling, highly qualified shame descriptions (e.g., "After saying something to someone that you knew you shouldn't have") contrasted sharply with typically concise guilt descriptions (e.g., "Lied").

Shame and guilt descriptions also differed in the use of the grammatical subject. It was common for respondents to omit the grammatical subject in their descriptions of both types of situations, and this was particularly

Downloaded from psp.sagepub.com by Graeme George on April 2, 2014

TABLE 2: Specific Content of Situations Inducing Shame and Guilt

Content	*Guilt Situations*	*Shame Situations*	z
Lying	21.0% (73)	11.0% (31)	–4.08***
Cheating	22.7% (79)	6.4% (18)	–6.12***
Stealing	19.3% (67)	6.0% (17)	–5.12***
Infidelity	4.9% (17)	2.1% (6)	–2.05**
Not helping others	3.7% (13)	1.4% (4)	–1.86*
Breaking a diet	2.9% (10)	0.7% (2)	–2.04**
Failure (work, school, sports, etc.)	4.6% (16)	19.5% (55)	–3.94***
Embarrassment	0.3% (1)	8.9% (25)	–4.04***
Socially inappropriate behavior or dress	0.0% (0)	5.7% (16)	–3.30***
Sex	0.0% (0)	3.2% (9)	–2.52**
Doing something immoral or wrong (unspecified)	2.3% (8)	7.1% (20)	–2.19**
Hurting someone emotionally	8.9% (31)	17.4% (49)	–1.88*
Crime (unspecified)	2.6% (9)	2.5% (7)	–0.47
Hurting someone physically	1.4% (5)	2.8% (8)	–0.80
Disobeying parents	1.4% (5)	2.1% (6)	–0.30
Damaging objects	2.0% (7)	1.8% (5)	–0.56
Murder	2.0% (7)	1.4% (4)	–0.89

NOTE: Percentages shown are column percentages (e.g., percentage of shame situations coded in a given category). *z*s are derived from Wilcoxon signed ranks test, testing row distributions. Overall $\chi^2 = 194.1$, $p < .001$, derived from Friedman's two-way ANOVA for ranks.
$*p < .10$; $**p < .05$; $***p < .001$.

TABLE 3: Some General Content Features of Situations Inducing Shame and Guilt

Content	*Guilt Situations*	*Shame Situations*	
Nature of interpersonal concern			$\chi^2 = 41.64$***
No relationships	48.2% (211)	38.6% (169)	z = –2.74**
Concern with effect on others	29.9% (131)	18.7% (82)	z = –2.99**
Concern with others' evaluation of self	1.4% (6)	21.9% (96)	z = –6.73***
Type of concern unclear	20.5% (90)	20.8% (91)	z = –0.08
Performance (work, school, sports)			z = –1.90*
Yes	25.6% (112)	19.9% (87)	
No	74.4% (326)	80.1% (351)	
Omission versus commission			$\chi^2 = 24.99$***
Commission	77.2% (338)	61.0% (267)	z = –4.24***
Omission	13.7% (60)	8.9% (39)	z = –1.86*
Not clear	9.1% (40)	30.1% (132)	z = –6.06***

NOTE: Percentages shown are column percentages (e.g., percentage of shame situations coded in a given category). Overall χ^2s are derived from Friedman's two-way ANOVA for ranks. *z*s are derived from Wilcoxon signed ranks test, testing row distributions.
$*p < .10$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$.

the case for the more succinct guilt descriptions. However, when the grammatical subject was used in guilt descriptions, respondents tended to select the first person —owning the behavior and its incumbent responsibility. In contrast, when describing shame situations, respondents were as likely to use the "projective" second person (e.g., "When *you* lie to *your* mother") as the first person. This pattern is consistent with the observation that shame is generally a more painful and threatening experience than guilt (Lewis, 1971; Tangney, 1989; Wicker et al., 1983). In describing shame situations, many respondents seemed moved to distance themselves from the painful shame experience by adopting the grammatical second person.

Content of Shame and Guilt Situations

The types of situations that engender shame appear to differ somewhat from the types that engender guilt. Table 2 shows that the shame-inducing and guilt-inducing situations were differentially distributed among the 17 specific, mutually exclusive content categories. The types of situations more likely to elicit guilt than shame were lying, cheating, stealing, infidelity, and breaking a diet. There was also a trend suggesting that not helping others was more likely to elicit guilt. With the exception of breaking a diet, these situations involve transgressions that typically cause harm to another person. And in each case the transgressions are fairly specific.

The specific types of situations more likely to elicit shame than guilt were failure experiences, embarrassing situations, socially inappropriate behavior or dress, and sex. The other two shame categories in Table 2—doing something immoral or wrong (unspecified) and hurting someone emotionally—tended to include vague, nonspecific situation descriptions. Thus, the observed differences between shame and guilt situations in Table 2 appear to be in part a function of actual content differences and in part a function of the degree of specificity noted above.

The results in Table 2 suggest that although shame and guilt frequently arise in interpersonal contexts, the nature of interpersonal concerns differs. The interpersonal analyses in Table 3 show that a clear concern with one's effect on others was more often associated with guilt. In contrast, a clear concern with others' evaluations of the self was almost exclusively associated with shame.

The hypothesis that performance situations in general are more likely to engender shame than guilt was not borne out (see Table 3). In fact, there was a trend suggesting that performance themes were more preva-

Downloaded from psp.sagepub.com by Graeme George on April 2, 2014

lent among the guilt situations, but this was largely because cheating (a specific guilt-inducing transgression) was included in the performance category. When cheating situations were excluded, only 6.4% of the guilt situations involved performance themes, compared with 13.9% of the shame situations (Wilcoxon $z = -3.00$, $p < .01$). As shown in Table 2, it was *failure* in performance contexts, more specifically, that was most likely to engender shame.

Finally, acts of commission were much more prevalent than acts of omission for both shame- and guilt-inducing situations. Shame situations, however, were more ambiguous with respect to this omission-commission dimension, largely because of the lack of specificity inherent in many of the shame descriptions, as noted above. As a consequence, where a determination could be made, guilt situations were more likely than shame situations to involve a clear act of commission, and there was a nonsignificant trend suggesting that guilt situations were also more likely to involve a clear act of omission.

Variations in Form and Content as a Function of Gender and Religious Background

Few differences were observed in participants' descriptions of shame- and guilt-inducing situations as a function of gender or religious background. The number of statistically significant findings involving religion was no more than would be expected by chance. Regarding the main effect of gender, of the 27 comparisons performed, only 1 was statistically significant. Men were somewhat more likely than women to mention not helping others, $F(1, 143) = 4.17$, $p < .05$, a main effect that was largely due to a significant gender by emotion interaction, $F(1, 143) = 4.76$, $p < .05$. Men were more likely than women to mention not helping others when describing guilt-inducing situations, $t(143) = 2.40$, $p < .05$. Significant gender by emotion interactions were observed for three other content categories: lying, $F(1, 143) = 5.46$, $p < .05$; cheating, $F(1, 143) = 8.06$, $p < .01$; and performance content, $F(1, 143) = 6.57$, $p < .05$. Post hoc tests indicated that women were more likely than men to mention lying when describing guilt situations, $t(143) = -2.63$, $p < .01$, and less likely to mention cheating when describing shame-inducing situations, $t(143) = 2.77$, $p < .01$. Women were marginally more likely to mention performance content in connection with guilt, $t(143) = -1.79$, $p < .08$.

DISCUSSION

Previous research (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney, 1989) has indicated that even verbal, well-educated young adults have a great deal of difficulty defining and distinguishing between shame and guilt in the abstract. The results of the current study, however, suggest that college students have at least some implicit notion of a distinction between shame and guilt. Undergraduates' descriptions of shame- and guilt-inducing situations, though very brief ($M = 5.4$ words), differed in both form and content.

The observed differences in the formal aspects of descriptions of shame- and guilt-inducing situations are consistent with some of the phenomenological differences noted by Lewis (1971) and Lindsay-Hartz (1984). When recalling shame experiences, respondents appeared generally less articulate and less efficient in their verbal productions. Shame descriptions were longer, yet less specific in content, than guilt descriptions. This pattern is consistent with Lewis's (1971) characterization of the shame experience as more global, more primitive, and less verbal than the guilt experience.

Lewis (1971) and others (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney, 1989; Wicker et al., 1983) have also noted that shame is generally a more painful emotion than guilt. The pain of shame may have contributed to the longer, less articulate nature of shame descriptions. Respondents' verbal productions may have been disrupted by the recollection of such painful experiences. In addition, the painful nature of shame likely accounts for the observation that the "projective" second person was used more often for shame situations than for guilt situations. Respondents may have attempted to distance themselves from recollections of painful shame experiences by adopting the grammatical second person. By the same token, this analysis of the formal features of shame and guilt descriptions highlights the special link between guilt and responsibility. Respondents appeared more likely to "own" their behavior by using the first person than the second person when describing guilt-inducing situations.

An analysis of the content of shame- and guilt-inducing situations underlines the fact that shame and guilt are both interpersonal emotions—that is, both emotions typically arise in interpersonal contexts. There were, however, some notable differences in the content of situations eliciting shame and guilt—differences that are generally consistent with the current theoretical literature. As suggested by Lewis (1971) and Taylor (1985), guilt is typically induced by specific transgressions of a moral nature, particularly transgressions that involve harm to others. In contrast, shame appears to arise in connection with a broader range of situations than guilt, as suggested by Lewis (1971) and Ausubel (1955). Specific moral transgressions can induce shame, but so can nonmoral situations and issues. Nonmoral situations, such as failure in performance situations, exposure of socially inappropriate behavior and dress, and embarrassing situations in general, were frequently cited by

Downloaded from psp.sagepub.com by Graeme George on April 2, 2014

respondents in connection with shame but rarely in connection with guilt. The common theme running through many of these nonmoral shame-eliciting situations is an apparent concern with another person's evaluation of the self. Indeed, the analysis of interpersonal concerns indicated that both shame and guilt can arise in connection with a concern for one's effect on another person. Concern with others' evaluations, however, are almost exclusively the domain of shame.

Although these results indicate that there are some classic shame-inducing situations and some classic guilt-inducing situations, it should be emphasized that many types of situations were more ambiguous with respect to shame and guilt. Moreover, the majority of situations mentioned by respondents appear capable of engendering both emotions. What determines whether an individual will experience shame or guilt when faced with a given negative situation? One possibility is that the *objective structure* of the eliciting situation is less important than the manner in which the situation is *construed* (e.g., sex per se vs. infidelity vis-à-vis another) in determining whether shame or guilt results. A second, related possibility is that individual difference variables (e.g., shame-proneness or guilt-proneness) play an important role in determining the nature of individuals' affective responses to negative situations.

REFERENCES

Ausubel, D. P. (1955). Relationships between shame and guilt in the socializing process. *Psychological Review, 62*, 378-390.

Barrett, K. C., Zahn-Waxler, C., & Cole, P. (1991). *Avoiders vs. amenders: Implications for the instigation of guilt and shame during toddlerhood?* Manuscript submitted for publication.

Benedict, R. (1946). *The chrysanthemum and the sword*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Burggraf, S. A. (1989). *Assessing children's self-conscious emotional style: Reliability and validity of the SCAAI-C*. Unpublished master's thesis, Bryn Mawr College.

DeRivera, J. (1977). *A structural theory of emotions*. New York: International Universities Press.

Duval, S., & Wicklund, R. A. (1972). *A theory of objective self-awareness*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Freud, S. (1953). Further remarks on the defence neuro-psychosis. In J. Strachey (Ed. and Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 3, pp. 157-185). London: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1896)

Gehm, T. L., & Scherer, K. R. (1988). Relating situation evaluation to emotion differentiation: Nonmetric analysis of cross-cultural questionnaire data. In K. R. Scherer (Ed.), *Facts of emotion: Recent research* (pp. 61-77). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Gessner, T. L., & Tangney, J. P. (1990, March). *Personality and adjustment correlates of wit and witticism*. Presented during a poster session at the meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, Philadelphia.

Gioiella, P. P. (1981). *The relationship of relative shame/guilt proneness to the attribution of responsibility under no shame and shame arousal*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University.

Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Harder, D. W., & Lewis, S. J. (1986). The assessment of shame and guilt. In J. N. Butcher & C. D. Spielberger (Eds.), *Advances in personality assessment* (Vol. 6, pp. 89-114). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hoblitzelle, W. (1987). Attempts to measure and differentiate shame and guilt: The relation between shame and depression. In H. B. Lewis (Ed.), *The role of shame in symptom formation* (pp. 207-235). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Huberty, C. J., & Morris, J. D. (1989). Multivariate analysis versus multiple univariate analyses. *Psychological Bulletin, 105*, 302-308.

Lewis, H. B. (1971). *Shame and guilt in neurosis*. New York: International Universities Press.

Lindsay-Hartz, J. (1984). Contrasting experiences of shame and guilt. *American Behavioral Scientist, 27*, 689-704.

Lynd, H. (1958). *On shame and the search for identity*. New York: Science Editions.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Tangney, J. P. (1989, August). *A quantitative assessment of phenomenological differences between shame and guilt*. Presented during a poster session at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, New Orleans.

Tangney, J. P. (1990). Assessing individual differences in proneness to shame and guilt: Development of the Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59*, 102-111.

Tangney, J. P. (1991). Moral affect: The good, the bad, and the ugly. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 61*, 598-607.

Tangney, J. P., Wagner, P., & Gramzow, R. (in press). *Proneness to shame, proneness to guilt, and psychopathology. Journal of Abnormal Psychology*.

Tangney, J. P., Wagner, P., Fletcher, C., & Gramzow, R. (in press). *Shamed into anger? The relation of shame and guilt to anger and self-reported aggression. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Taylor, G. (1985). *Pride, shame and guilt: Emotions of self-assessment*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Wallbott, H. G., & Scherer, K. R. (1988). How universal and specific is emotional experience? Evidence from 27 countries and five continents. In K. R. Scherer (Ed.), *Facts of emotion: Recent research* (pp. 31-56). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Weiner, B. (1985). An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. *Psychological Review, 92*, 548-573.

Wicker, F. W., Payne, G. C., & Morgan, R. D. (1983). Participant descriptions of guilt and shame. *Motivation and Emotion, 7*, 25-39.

Downloaded from psp.sagepub.com by Graeme George on April 2, 2014