

From Appeasement to Conformity
Evolutionary and Cultural Perspectives on Shame,
Competition, and Cooperation

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Introduction

Like all living things, humans are the product of natural selection. By gradually modifying existing features over many generations, this process leads to divergence between related species. While many attributes of human morphology and psychology closely parallel those of our closest relatives, the nonhuman primates, in addition to such obvious traits as an upright stance and larger brains, we also differ from our primate kin with regard to several fundamental aspects of behavior. First, to an unprecedented degree, our species relies on socially-transmitted information (i.e., culture) to adapt to local physical and social environments (see Richerson & Boyd, 2004). Second, only humans routinely cooperate with unrelated individuals – among other creatures, cooperative behavior, to the extent that it occurs at all, is usually restricted to close relatives (Richerson & Boyd, 2004). Focusing on shame, in this chapter I will argue that these two attributes are key to understanding the existence and functioning of self-conscious emotions.

I begin by describing the pan-primate substrate upon which human shame is built. Arguing that this primordial facet of shame operates in hierarchical social relationships, I then suggest that our species' reliance on culture and cooperation favored the evolution of a new motivational system, one oriented not toward relationships between superiors and inferiors, but rather toward relationships among prospective cooperative partners. It is this orientation, I suggest, that lies at the heart of most human shame experiences, as shame functions to enhance conformity to cultural standards for behavior that form the basis for much cooperation; this perspective sheds light on the relationship between shame, the self, and decision making.

Taking seriously the notion that cultural information is central to human functioning, in the second portion of this essay I explore how the experience of shame may be influenced by

cross-cultural variation in the importance, and conceptualization, of this emotion. A comparison of the cultural construction of shame in a Western and a non-Western society illustrates the range of variation in this domain, and raises questions regarding the relationship between shame and guilt, and the origins of the latter. This comparison also draws attention to the larger societal consequences of employing shame as a mechanism of social control, a topic of importance given recent attempts to reintroduce shame-based sanctions into American public life.

Part I – Evolutionary Perspectives on Shame

Reconstructing The Evolution of Shame: Phylogenetic Origins

Darwin (1872) was among the first to recognize that the display behaviors accompanying many human emotions provide clues to their evolutionary origins. As a number of investigators have noted, the patterned and largely involuntary actions frequently seen in association with shame resemble the appeasement displays of many nonhuman primates (Fessler, 1999; Gilbert, 1989, 1992, this volume; Keltner & Harker, 1998; Weisfeld, 1997, 1999). When experiencing shame, people often lower their faces, avert their gaze, slump their shoulders, and adopt a stooped posture and bent-kneed gait. Conversely, pride, the opposite of shame, involves the inverse pattern of behavior, namely an elevated face, direct gaze, squared shoulders, erect posture, and stiff-legged gait (see Tracy & Robins 2004a). Direct gaze is a central element in the stereotyped behaviors evinced when primates challenge rivals. Thus, consistent with what Darwin termed the principle of antithesis (the notion that antithetical messages are best communicated using inverse forms), the clearest way of signaling that one acquiesces to a subordinate position is to avert one's gaze. Similarly, whereas animals adopt an expansive posture when threatening rivals so as to appear maximally intimidating, subordinate individuals employ a shrinking posture, making themselves appear small and non-threatening, in order to

appease those who threaten them. With remarkable fidelity, human shame and its opposite, pride, preserve the respective features of primate appeasement and threat displays, suggesting that shame and pride evolved from earlier emotions present in the common ancestors of humans and primates. Against this ethological backdrop, it is possible to infer the evolutionary development of human shame by exploring the circumstances in which shame is experienced.

Together with others' ethnographic and psychological investigations, my research in California and Sumatra (Fessler, 2004) suggests that, at the grossest level of analysis, a substantial fraction of shame-eliciting events can be divided into two categories. First, shame is prototypically elicited by situations in which i) the actor has failed to live up to some cultural standard for behavior, ii) others are aware of this failure, and iii) the actor is aware of others' knowledge in this regard.¹ Cultures differ in the extent to which they highlight or ignore aspects of human emotional propensities, and this is notably true with regard to shame, as many Western cultures attend exclusively to the aforementioned class of elicitors. Nevertheless, both in the U.S. and, more dramatically, in Southeast Asia, where this event is often lexically marked, the subjective state and display behaviors associated with shame can also be elicited by events in which the actor is subordinate to another person independent of any failure to adhere to social standards – simply occupying a lower position in a social hierarchy can cause individuals to experience this aversive state and display the corresponding behavioral pattern. This latter class of elicitors is congruent with the message of appeasement communicated by the pan-primate shame-like display -- viewed ethologically, when humans occupy a subordinate position, they

¹ There is debate as to whether an audience is a prerequisite for shame experience (cf. Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996). Two factors may have contributed to mixed reports in this regard. First, possessing a theory of mind, humans are capable of anticipating others' reactions to events, allowing for the auto-elicitation of shame via scenario-running wherein the actor envisions how others would evaluate the actor were they to learn of the actor's failings. Subjects may therefore report feeling shame in the absence of publicity not because publicity is not a key factor in shame elicitation, but because they recall powerful auto-elicited shame events. Second, much research on

often behave much like other primates in low-ranking positions do. This suggests that the feeling of shame elicited by subordinate status is the original or ancestral form of the emotion.

The conclusion that subordination shame is evolutionarily ancient is bolstered by the fact that recognizing that one occupies an inferior position in a social hierarchy requires far less cognitive complexity than does recognizing that others know that one has failed. To achieve the latter, actors must be able to themselves through observers' eyes and understanding what observers do or do not know about their behavior (cf. Tracy & Robins 2004b). While humans engage in such inferences effortlessly, the ability to assess others' knowledge and mental states, commonly referred to as the capacity to manipulate a theory of mind, is either absent or severely limited in nonhuman primates (Povinelli & Bering, 2002) (but see also discussion in Tracy & Robins 2004b). It is therefore likely that the common ancestor of humans and primates likewise lacked the cognitive capacity for a theory of mind, and hence that any emotions experienced by this species were not dependent on this capacity, making it all the more plausible that subordination shame is the original or primordial aspect of this emotion.

Reconstructing The Evolution of Shame: Prestige Has Replaced Dominance as the Basis of Social Hierarchies

To summarize the above, human shame is a bipartite emotion consisting of an ancient, or ancestral, component that is shared with nonhuman primates, and a novel, or derived, component that is likely unique to our species. These two aspects of shame, which can operate both in isolation and simultaneously, differ in that the former a) is cognitively simpler, b) focuses exclusively on questions of social rank, and c) does not intrinsically revolve around questions of conformity to cultural standards for behavior. With regard to the latter, it is noteworthy that,

shame employs Western subjects. Western cultures likely deemphasize shame relative to guilt (see text); because publicity is irrelevant to guilt elicitation, its role in shame may be clouded in research involving Western subjects.

compared to human societies, nonhuman primates are largely devoid of culture, meaning they lack the rich and parochial socially-transmitted rules and expectations that govern much of human behavior (see Frigaszy & Perry, 2003). Correspondingly, lacking cultural criteria whereby success is measured, for nonhuman primates social position is principally a function of dominance, the ability to forcibly displace a rival from a resource. Natural selection has presumably favored the evolution of the capacity to experience emotions that motivate animals to strive for dominance because access to resources (food, mates, refuge, etc.) is a primary determinant of survival and reproductive success. Viewed in this light, the aversive shame-like emotion experienced by subordinate individuals is part of a motivational system that leads actors to fight for higher rank. As any victim of schoolyard bullying can attest, dominance still plays a role in some human relationships and, correspondingly, our species maintains the propensity to experience an aversive emotion when placed in a subordinate position. However, while the biological significance of human dominance hierarchies is nontrivial, in most societies, these relations are overshadowed by prestige hierarchies. Whereas in dominance hierarchies a superordinate social position is obtained through force or the threat thereof, in prestige hierarchies select individuals are elevated to superordinate positions by observers – in short, a dominant position is taken from others, but a prestigious position is given by others.

Prestige hierarchies are an outgrowth of the human reliance on socially transmitted information. We elevate individuals who perform exceptionally well in a culturally-valued domain in part because, by deferring to them, we gain opportunities to observe, and learn from, their successful behavior (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). Much human social competition thus takes the form of attempts to excel at culturally defined activities – hierarchical social position is awarded by observers rather than wrested by force from adversaries. This difference, while

profound, does not change the fundamental adaptive utility of the hedonic aspects of shame and pride.² As is true of dominance, those who achieve high prestige have greater access to the resources that contributed to survival and, prior to the advent of contraception, reproductive success; it is thus understandable that natural selection has preserved in humans the motivational system that makes it aversive to occupy a subordinate position in the social hierarchy and rewarding to occupy a superordinate position.

The Shame Display in Non-Dominance Contexts: Vestigial Behavior or Functional Signal?

While the evolutionary shift from dominance hierarchies to prestige hierarchies has not altered the adaptive utility of the hedonic component of shame, the same is not true of the functional consequences of the associated display behaviors. In a dominance system, individuals who assess themselves as possessing inferior fighting ability relative to a rival benefit by signaling this assessment to the competitor – natural selection favors the evolution of appeasement displays because it is less costly to signal acquiescence than to engage in a fight that one is likely to lose. In contrast, in a prestige system, individuals who signal their inferiority do not gain the benefit of avoiding injury, since prestige competitions generally do not involve physical aggression. Moreover, such a signal often inflicts costs on the signaler because it advertises the individual's acknowledgment of inferiority to the larger audience, and it is observers who bestow or withhold prestige – we admire the competitor who, though bested, bravely vows to return to win another day, but we lose respect for the loser who slinks away from a contest in an inferior pose. Why then has natural selection not eliminated the largely involuntary shame display from all but dominance-related social interactions? One possibility is that selection cannot eliminate the display without altering other key aspects of shame. While

² The term 'adaptive' is used here in the biological sense, i.e., enhancing the probability of survival and reproduction; this differs from the clinical notion of enhancing individual happiness or social harmony.

this cannot be ruled out, a more compelling possibility is that the pan-primate appeasement display acquired additional utility in the course of the evolution of human shame, utility that outweighs the costs of acknowledging inferiority during prestige competitions. The key here is that, while shame can be elicited by subordination or defeat in social contests, competition is by no means necessary for shame elicitation. Below, I argue that we can understand many shame experiences in light of their implications not for competition, but rather for cooperation.

Conformist Shame, A Uniquely Human Emotion

To gain insight into the types of situations that elicit shame, I asked 281 Southern Californian native speakers of English to recount an event in which someone felt shame (for details of this and the material summarized below, see Fessler, 2004). Over half of the resulting stories involved situations in which the actor knows that others know that the actor has failed to live up to some cultural standard for behavior. Consistent with the argument developed above, some of these stories involved prestige competition (examples include losing a public athletic contest, being unable to keep up in the conspicuous consumption of prestige goods, etc.). However, at just over six percent, prestige competitions accounted for only a fraction of the stories in this category. Far more common, constituting over three-quarters of the stories, were situations in which no competition was evident (indeed, often no rival was present at all); instead, people reported feeling shame simply because they had failed to live up to some minimum standard for social acceptability (examples include being caught cheating on an exam, failing during a public ritual or performance, etc.). A similar pattern was present in my observations, collected in a Malay fishing village in Bengkulu, Indonesia, of 305 naturally occurring events in which people spontaneously described themselves or someone else as feeling *malu*, ‘ashamed’. Again, over half of the cases involved an actor’s recognition of others’

knowledge of the actor's failure, and again only a portion of these (12.8%) concerned prestige competition (many examples directly parallel those described earlier); the majority of events simply involved failure without overt competition (again, many examples parallel those in California, with the prominent addition of pregnancy out of wedlock). Hence, although shame can be elicited by subordination or defeat, the prototypical eliciting situation is not a competitive one, but rather a situation in which the actor has failed to conform to some cultural standard – rather than addressing issues of hierarchical ranking, shame often revolves around failing to meet some threshold for social acceptability.

Although any aspect of culturally shaped behavior can become an arena for social competition, most human behavior is not competitive. In every society, people spend most of their time engaged in economic, social, or leisure activities that do not focus on comparisons premised on hierarchical ranking. These activities are shaped by cultural understandings concerning the normal, appropriate, or reasonable way to behave. While competition is absent from such domains, social evaluation is not: humans constantly observe one another and measure each other's behavior in light of cultural standards.³ Correspondingly, while its prominence in consciousness varies considerably depending on the situation, we are aware of the presence of others who are, or could be, monitoring our own actions.

Attention is a finite cognitive resource – the more that is devoted to one task, the less available for other tasks. Why then do humans expend so much of this important resource in both a) monitoring the extent to which others conform to cultural standards, and b) monitoring the extent to which our own behavior is being monitored? Competitive concerns play a role here, yet it is likely that attending to the actions and social position of one's rivals constitutes only a

small fraction of all social monitoring, since a) monitoring occurs even in many domains and activities that are not competitive, and b) actors are cognizant of the presence of observers even when, due to their age, gender, or social position, the observers could not possibly be the actor's rivals. The key to understanding our obsession with watching one another's behavior lies in the fact that ours is a cooperative species. In the next section, I consider how the combination of opportunities and dangers presented by cooperative activities favored the evolution of a uniquely human form of shame, the emotion behind our attention to others' attention to our behavior.

Human Cooperation, the Problem of Defection, and the Role of Shame in Motivating Conformity

Cooperative interactions are those in which two or more individuals incur some cost, investing time, energy, or resources, or forgoing other opportunities, in order to behave in a fashion that will benefit all involved. When efforts, energy, and knowledge are pooled, the results are often not merely additive, but multiplicative. However, the fact that other parties invest in the interaction creates opportunities for exploitation – often, unscrupulous individuals can withhold all or some of their own contributions, freeriding on others' efforts. Defection of this sort inflicts costs on cooperators – at best, their efforts must increase to achieve the same success obtained in the absence of defection, and, at worst, the venture collapses completely.

Because cooperative ventures entail the potential for both rewards and exploitation, natural selection can be expected to have crafted the mind so as to maximize the likelihood of obtaining the former and minimize the likelihood of suffering the latter (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992). Monitoring others' behavior during cooperative ventures furthers these goals, as it often pays to be aware of how much each individual contributes to the activity (such monitoring is advantageous even when the observer is not a participant, as it is useful to gather information

³ While we are often unaware that we are actively monitoring those around us, this nevertheless must be true given that we readily detect deviations from normative patterns of behavior -- consider, for example, how starkly the

about prospective partners in anticipation of future endeavors). Results from experimental economic games in which participants invest real money in cooperative relationships demonstrate that the opportunity to evaluate others' behavior is a crucial determinant of the level of cooperation – people are more willing to behave cooperatively when their observations of one another give them reason to believe that others will do likewise (Fehr & Gächter, 2000). Correspondingly, it pays to be cognizant of the presence of others monitoring one's behavior, since maintaining a reputation as a trustworthy cooperator enhances the likelihood that others will enter into cooperative relationships with one. The power of the psychological mechanisms regulating reputation management is illustrated by the facts that a) looking obliquely into another person's eyes prior to participation in an economic experiment enhances cooperation (Kurzban, 2001), b) the presence of a robotic face increases such cooperation (Burnham & Hare, in press), and c) stylized eyespots suffice to induce individuals to behave more generously in economic games (Haley & Fessler, 2005). These effects presumably occur because, in ancestral populations, eyes facing in one's direction were a reliable indicator that one was being monitored, hence natural selection crafted the mind so as to enhance prosocial actions in the presence of this cue – we are so attuned to the possibility that someone might be watching us that we increase our cooperation in response to even a hint of the presence of an observer.

While the results discussed above do not speak directly to the question of whether cues of observability lower the threshold for the elicitation of shame, they do suggest that motivational systems influencing cooperative behavior, of which, I argue, shame is a part, are sensitive to the presence of social monitoring. However, as I explore below, the relationship between shame and cooperation is more extensive than the simple decision as to whether to cooperate or defect.

staggering drunkard, the gauche foreigner, or the muttering mentally ill individual stands out from the crowd.

Cooperation and the Problem of Coordination

Cultures vary enormously in how cooperative relationships are defined, and what is expected of the participants. Nevertheless, it is likely that all cultures condemn shirking, freeriding, or otherwise defecting in such a relationship, particularly when it is longstanding and involves members of the local group. Arguably, an important function of shame is thus to motivate reputation management behavior with regard to culturally constituted cooperative relationships. However, results from both California and Bengkulu (Fessler, 2004) indicate that, while defection in a cooperative relationship is central to some shame events, this category is dwarfed by a larger one in which the cultural standard at issue does not concern cooperation.

Earlier, I argued that two features that distinguish our species from closely related primates are the importance of cultural standards in shaping behavior and the extent of cooperation among unrelated individuals. While a key aspect of the connection between these two features is the existence of cultural understandings that define the nature and content of cooperative interactions, the effect of culture on cooperation extends far beyond overt rules governing how and when to cooperate. Although coping with the possibility of defection is a necessary condition for the maintenance of cooperation, cooperation itself can only take place after a more elementary problem, that of coordination, has been surmounted. Cooperative activities are contingent on the actor's ability to engage in actions that complement those of other participants – each actor must know both what to do and when to do it. The more individuals involved, and the more indirect their interactions, the more challenging coordination becomes.

Cultural information makes cooperation possible in part by defining the nature and timing of cooperative behavior. A determinant of an individual's attractiveness as a prospective cooperative partner is therefore the extent to which he or she possesses and is motivated to

conform to relevant cultural understandings. However, because there are many forms of cooperative activity, with new permutations always possible, it is often difficult to assess others' adequacy in this regard. One solution is to gauge the target individual's conformity to diverse cultural understandings in order to assess familiarity with, and motivation to adhere to, the cultural standards of the given group. Cultural standards are often baroque, with many rules being rarely, if ever, articulated. Standards are sufficiently extensive and difficult to acquire that only individuals possessing intimate familiarity with many aspects of the culture will be able to successfully conform to appropriate standards across the myriad domains of daily life. Likewise, only individuals who are deeply motivated to conform will expend the mental resources needed to maintain conformity across domains, whether through overt attention or through automatization following extensive repetition. Observing that someone consistently behaves appropriately in a variety of activities thus provides an initial indication that the individual likely both a) possesses the cultural knowledge relevant to a given cooperative enterprise, and b) is motivated to adhere to cultural standards in a manner that facilitates coordination.

The above argument sheds light on why we both monitor others' behavior and attend to the presence of others who can monitor us. Evaluating the degree of conformity to cultural standards provides valuable information to the observer: by updating one's assessment of others' command of, and motivation to conform to, social standards of behavior, social monitoring facilitates evaluating others' current potential as a partner in cooperative ventures. Equally important, humans are unique in that they not only hold cultural standards for behavior, they also enforce them, incurring costs in order to punish wrongdoers even when the violation does not impinge on them. Such costly prosocial behavior is itself explicable in terms of the strategic importance of reputation management. Cultures contain not only rules for behavior, but also

rules about enforcing rules for behavior. Incurring costs to punish wrongdoers is thus a form of conspicuous cultural conformity, a way of advertising that the actor both knows and adheres to local standards. Fitness-enhancing punitive behavior is motivated by a discrete emotion, moral outrage (Fessler & Haley, 2003); consistent with the above argument, subjects report more moral outrage at norm violations when observers are present than when they are alone (Haley, in prep.). The fact that people are motivated to punish those who violate cultural standards explains the survival of the ancestral appeasement display as a component of shame, as there is value in signaling to observers that one does not contest their moralistic aggression. In Bengkulu, individuals who fail to exhibit shame when others become aware of their wrongdoing are termed ‘thick-eared’, as they are unaffected by gossip or excoriation. Being ‘thick-eared’ is a form of higher-order norm violation, as it indicates both that one does not value cultural standards and that one does not care about others’ valuation of these standards. Not surprisingly given that shaming is a principal social sanction in Bengkulu, ‘thick-eared’ people are viewed as dangerous and, if they persist in violating important standards, may be killed. Hence, whereas recalcitrance simply adds fuel to the fire of moralistic punishment, acknowledgment of the wrongness of the violation, and the correspondingly deserved nature of the reduction in social status, is likely to have the opposite effect. Paralleling work by others (de Jong, 1999; Keltner & Harker, 1998; Keltner, Young, & Buswell, 1997), this perspective generates the prediction that the appropriate and timely presentation of the shame display should reduce the costs that morally outraged witnesses seek to inflict on those who violate important cultural standards. Moreover, this approach provides a solution to the puzzle raised earlier, namely why, if prestige hierarchies have largely replaced dominance hierarchies in human societies, and if shame’s appeasement display is costly in prestige competitions, both the display and the attendant behavioral

tendencies have nevertheless been retained – in a world in which norm violations evoke moralistic punishment, the appeasement facets of shame are an effective means of communicating acquiescence to moralistically hostile others.

Whereas the value of the shame display derives from its in-the-moment effects on others, the value of the hedonic component of shame stems from its prospective effects. The aversive nature of shame provides an anticipatory incentive to conform to cultural standards, and to be cognizant of the extent to which others are aware of any digressions. Because degree of conformity to moralized standards for behavior is likely predictive of both the probability that an actor will not defect in a cooperative relationship and the probability that the actor will behave in a predictable manner facilitating coordination, in ancestral populations, adherence to such rules will have often influenced an individual's survival and reproductive success; natural selection can thus be expected to have given particular weight to conformity to highly moralized cultural standards. While there is debate about the exact relationship between shame and embarrassment (see Keltner, 1995; Keltner & Buswell, 1996), it is plausible that selection created a division of labor, with shame motivating conformity to the most moralized cultural standards, and embarrassment motivating conformity to many cultural rules that hold less moral import.

Determinants of the Intensity of Shame

To summarize the argument thus far, in parallel with the rise of our species' reliance on cultural information, natural selection modified an existing motivational system, one that initially evolved to further rank-striving behavior, in order to drive individuals to behave in ways that advertise to others that they will constitute reliable cooperative partners. This suggests that a number of factors should govern the intensity of the experience of shame. While some of these

entailments are consistent with obvious characteristics of shame (and hence the theory adds little other than explanation), others are more subtle.

First, all else being equal, the more serious the rule violation at issue, the more it damages the actor's reputation as a cooperator, and hence the greater the aversive experience of shame that should accompany others' learning of it. Second, the greater the number of people who know of a given transgression, the larger the number of opportunities for cooperation that may be lost, and hence the more intense the experience of shame that should follow. Next, the identities of observers should affect the intensity of shame. The costliness of the reputational damage entailed by a given transgression is in part a function of the extent to which those who learn of it are attractive as prospective cooperative partners. At the grossest level, due to the problem of coordination described above, members of the actor's cultural group are more attractive as potential partners than are members of other groups; shame should therefore be more intense when observers are members of one's group. Within the cultural group, opportunities for cooperation are generally greatest with those nearest at hand, hence geographical proximity should be a determinant of shame intensity. Likewise, because opportunities for cooperation are greatest among individuals who interact often, the frequency with which the actor interacts with those who know of the transgression should affect shame intensity. Similarity often shapes the extent of cooperation between individuals, as those who are similar with respect to age, gender, etc. often face similar tasks and have similar objectives; the extent of similarity between the actor and those who know of the transgression can thus be expected to influence shame intensity. Individuals who excel in domains relevant to the actor's objectives are valuable prospective partners, hence knowledge of the transgression by such individuals is costly to the actor, and therefore likely to exacerbate shame intensity.

Overlapping with, but separate from, the attractiveness of observers as potential cooperation partners is the extent to which those who know of the transgression can influence others' assessments of the actor. Condemnation by a prominent figure may disproportionately increase the intensity of shame because such individuals are in a position to both disseminate information about the transgression to others and enhance the weight assigned to it by others. Lastly, even among those who lack social prominence, the capacity to disseminate information varies; because this attribute affects the reputational costs associated with a given transgression, the intensity of shame felt should be influenced by the density of the social network in which a given observer is embedded, the observer's ability and propensity to communicate with diverse members of the community, and so on.

Shame and the Self

The above discussion sheds light on differences between shame and guilt, the emotion with which, in individualistic cultures such as those of the West, shame is frequently conflated. Phenomenologically, guilt focuses on the actions that elicited it, while shame focuses on the actor – one feels guilt over what one has done, but feels shame over who one is (Tangney, 1995). The latter is an outgrowth of the fitness consequences that attend reputation management. To see why, consider the role of self-assessment in decision-making.

In many domains, determining which course of action is optimal is contingent on one's future prospects. Individuals whose prospects are dim have little to lose, and much to gain, by extensive risk taking; conversely, those whose prospects are bright benefit from a more conservative strategy (Daly & Wilson, 1988). Optimization thus requires an index of future prospects. Future prospects are a function of the consequences of past and current successes and failures, hence we can expect the mind to maintain a running tally in which, weighted for their

potential impacts on fitness, past and current events are summed. Self-esteem functions in this manner, and can be conceptualized as a constantly updated subjective index of the actor's future fitness prospects (Fessler, 2001; Kirkpatrick, Waugh, Valencia, & Webster, 2002; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). In ancestral populations, access to resources would have been contingent on inclusion in cooperative ventures, and such inclusion would, in turn, have been in part a function of the individual's reputation as someone who both knows and conforms to social norms. It therefore would have been adaptive to experience an intimate association between self-esteem and events impacting the actor's reputation. Consistent with this logic, the same motivational system that ties negative social evaluation to an aversive affective state also diminishes the individual's self-assessment of success to date -- shame entails both pain and a reduction in subjective self-worth, simultaneously providing an hedonic incentive to avoid additional social disapproval and a recalibration of that index of future prospects that is vital to optimal decision making (Fessler, 2001; see also Leary, this volume, Chapter xx).

Shame and Risk Taking

Because the optimal level of risk taking is in part a function of an individual's future prospects, the above argument entails the prediction that, in many situations, the experience of shame will increase risk taking.⁴ Although this proposition is potentially clinically important, to date, few studies have attended to this possibility. Previously (Fessler, 2001), I applied this reasoning to a case in which a trivial altercation escalated into murder. However, one difficulty with this and similar accounts is that intimate associations exist between, on the one hand, shame and anger, and, on the other hand, anger and risk taking. Shame and anger often both co-occur

⁴ This does not contradict my conclusion, discussed in the final section of this chapter, that employing shame as a mechanism of social control inhibits innovation and other forms of risk-taking. The key to this apparent paradox is the recognition that the active experience of a shame state is predicted to increase the propensity to take risks, while the desire to prospectively avoid such a state leads to increased conformism, and thus to decreased risk taking.

and exacerbate one another (Tangney, 1995), a pattern understandable in light of shame's role in social competition. 'Humiliation' refers to a social state wherein others either cause the actor to fail or intentionally draw attention to the actor's failure, leading, in both instances, to shame (cf. Gilbert, 1997). Humiliation seems to involve an awareness that others have benefited at the actor's expense, often by reducing the actor's standing in a social hierarchy. Experiencing harm at the hands of another is the prototypical elicitor of anger, the emotion that functions to truncate or deter transgressions by motivating the actor to inflict costs on the transgressor (reviewed in Fessler, Pillsworth, & Flamson, 2004). Because inflicting costs on others is risky, the functional objectives of anger are achieved by increasing the propensity to take risks, a pattern that is both readily observed and experimentally demonstrable (Fessler et al., 2004). In light of the effects of anger on risk taking, increases in risk taking following humiliation or similar conjunctions of shame and anger cannot be taken as evidence that shame enhances risk taking in and of itself.

To date, only a limited number of experiments have investigated the effects of shame on risk taking. Leith and Baumeister (1996) show that anticipating revelation of inability increases risk taking (although the authors interpret this as an effect of embarrassment, the elicitor is potentially congruent with shame). Likewise, Baumeister, Heatherton, and Tice (1993) demonstrate that ego threats (events plausibly interpreted as shame-inducing) increase risk taking in individuals with high self-esteem.

Part II – Cultural Perspectives on Shame

The Relationship between Culture and Experience

I have emphasized the importance of our species' reliance on cultural information when examining self-conscious emotions. However, nowhere in the above discussion have I examined

how the nature of such information can itself influence the experience, and motivational importance, of self-conscious emotions and facets thereof. It is to this topic that I now turn.

If the mind contains evolved mechanisms dedicated to the acquisition and use of socially transmitted information, cross-cultural comparison should reveal both marked differences in the experience and conceptualization of emotions and notable underlying similarities. Work in cognitive anthropology (reviewed in D'Andrade, 1995) and cognitive linguistics (cf. Levinson, 2003) indicates that, particularly when encoded in language, cultural information shapes the ease with which ideas or perceptions are processed. Because cultures address the nature, form, and expression of emotions, cultural information thus not only shapes the normative value of particular forms of emotion or emotion display but, more profoundly, also influences individuals' propensity to experience particular facets of emotions. In the following section, I illustrate this phenomenon by exploring shame in two disparate cultures.

Comparing Shame Across Two Cultures

The findings referred to earlier concerning Bengkulu culture derive from 32 months of anthropological fieldwork conducted between 1990 and 1993. Bengkulu is particularly relevant to the present discussion because shame is markedly elaborated in this culture and, correspondingly, is a common and salient element in discourse: when Bengkulu participants rated the frequency with which 52 emotion terms were used in everyday conversation, averaging across 80 participants, the term *malu*, readily translated as 'shame', ranked second; in contrast, when 75 Southern Californians performed a similar task using 52 common English emotion terms, *shame* was ranked forty-ninth (Fessler, 2004). Although language is not a rigid determinant of experience, nevertheless, together, the existence of lexical labels for particular emotions and the culturally-conceptualized relationships between such labels likely have

substantial impact on subjective experience. To compare cultural conceptions of shame across two disparate cultures, I therefore explored the synonymic relationships among shame-related emotion terms in Bengkulu and Southern California (see Fessler, 2004 for the complete study).

Using focus groups in Bengkulu and California, I composed large (over 400 items) lists of locally recognized emotion terms. I then asked literate individuals to provide a synonym for each term. Following Heider (1991), I generated maps of the relationships between emotion terms by pooling responses across participants within each culture, counting the number of times that a given word was used as a synonym for another term, and then linking synonymic terms using a numerical indicator of this connection strength. Results reveal that Californians have a relatively impoverished cognitive/lexical 'landscape of shame'. Consistent with earlier research (e.g., Crozier, 1990; Gilbert, 1997), there are intimate links between *shame*, *embarrassment*, and *humiliation*. However, beyond the additional term *red-faced*, this cluster of items has no further links, with the exception of a strong connection between *shame* and *guilt*. Moreover, whereas *shame* is not highly productive of first- and higher-order associations, *guilt* is part of a large complex of terms, anchored by *remorse*, focusing on regret over past actions and concern about harm suffered by others. The landscape of Californian shame is thus one in which this emotion is overshadowed by guilt and, consistent with existing work on the subject (see Lickel, Schmader, Curtis, Barquissau, & Ames, 2005; Tangney, 1995), the latter can be differentiated from shame in that guilt, but not shame, is prototypically associated with issues of harm to others.

In contrast to the Californian case, results from Bengkulu support the contention that this culture attends extensively to shame. The connections branching off of the term *malu* form two elaborate clusters, each distinct from the other. One cluster concerns feelings of failure and social unacceptability, as well as the contemptuous reactions of others toward individuals who are in

such a position. This rich set of terms simultaneously encompasses the social events and subjective experience associated with an awareness that others know of some grave misdeed on the actor's part, i.e., the same general set of circumstances as those prototypically associated with the English term *shame*. However, consistent with my earlier claim that Bengkulu speakers also use *malu* to describe the emotion experienced when occupying a position of inferiority independent of any failing, *malu* is also linked to a second large cluster of terms revolving around shyness and a reticence to act in the presence of others who are more important than oneself. Hence, whereas the first cluster of terms captures a culturally constituted landscape that expresses the derived form of shame, the second cluster of terms captures an analogous landscape that expresses the ancestral form, the emotion likely shared with nonhuman primates.

Because cultures differentially elaborate on or ignore features of the panhuman emotional spectrum, no single culture provides a privileged window into that underlying spectrum. Nevertheless, it is likely that Bengkulu culture, with its extensive focus on shame, presents a more complete portrait of this emotion than does Californian (and, more broadly, Western) culture, as the latter is relatively impoverished in comparison. Many non-Western cultures explicitly link shame, subordination, respect, and shyness (Fessler, 2004), suggesting that this is a core aspect of shame. Given that Californians are capable of understanding this association, this raises the question why some cultures ignore subordination shame. One possibility is that subordination shame is incompatible with the Californian ethos that combines ideals of a meritocracy with an individualistic, even libertarian orientation -- society is hierarchical, but it is (or should be) a prestige hierarchy in which everyone is free to compete for the admiration of others; individuals, who are of equal basic worth, are to achieve high status through others' freely-granted deference, not through their involuntary subordination. In such a culture, an

aversive feeling of inadequacy in the presence of a superior individual is an anathema – one should admire those who are superior, not feel subordinated by them.

The most marked feature of the Californian landscape of shame is the extent to which guilt and related affects are elaborated, to the point that they overshadow shame.⁵ In the analysis of self-reported shame events mentioned earlier, guilt-like features (e.g., concern over having harmed another, remorse, and a lack of focus on the opinions of observers) played an important role in over one-third of the cases. In contrast, not only were such features not present in any of the cases in which Bengkulu speakers referred to someone as feeling *malu*, but, moreover, guilt is largely absent from Bengkulu culture – there is no simple means of translating the concept into the Bengkulu dialect of Malay, and Bengkulu participants often expressed uncertainty when the concept was discussed in detail (see Fessler, 2004). In the following sections, I first discuss the implications of cultural variation in the relative importance of shame and guilt for an understanding of the origins of the latter emotion, and then turn to the question of the broader implications for society of relying on shame as a means of regulating behavior.

Implications of the Relative Predominance of Shame or Guilt

The patterns evident in the Bengkulu-California comparisons, namely the relatively rich conceptualization of shame in the former, and the predominance of guilt in the latter, are consistent with Wallbott and Scherer's (1995) finding that participants from collectivistic cultures like that of Bengkulu report shame experiences that are central to the profile of this emotion, while participants from individualistic cultures like that of California often report shame experiences that resemble guilt experiences. People from individualistic cultures thus

⁵ This observation does not conflict with clinicians' claims that, in the West, shame is an important factor in psychological distress and psychopathology (Lewis, 1987; Tangney, 1999; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Indeed, these circumstances may actually contribute to the pathogenicity of shame in the West, as the absence of elaborate cultural

seem more likely to conflate, equate, or blend shame and guilt than are people from collectivistic cultures. Correspondingly, although early anthropological efforts to dichotomize “shame cultures” and “guilt cultures” (e.g., Benedict, 1946) were rightly abandoned as overly simplistic, cultures nevertheless appear to differ substantially in the extent to which they attend to shame versus guilt, and the roles played by these two emotions in regulating social behavior.

The observation that guilt or guilt-like concepts are markedly absent from some cultures can be explained in two ways. First, it is possible that, although the propensity to experience guilt is a feature of our evolved human nature, this affect is nonetheless ignored by some cultures for reasons of history or ethos analogous to those proposed with regard to subordination shame in California. Second, the propensity to experience guilt may not be an intrinsic part of the panhuman emotional architecture, but rather may derive from culturally particular combinations of sympathy, empathy, regret, and sadness. Congruent with the first explanation, a number of evolutionists (e.g., Frank, 1988; Trivers, 1971) note that guilt is a potentially highly adaptive emotion. Guilt is often elicited by harm inflicted on a valued partner, ally, or relative. The prototypical outcome behavior, an attempt to compensate the harmed party, thus potentially preserves valuable relationships by mitigating damage to the relationship stemming from the eliciting action. If this action tendency is blocked, guilt often results in self-punishment, behavior that may have value as an honest signal of the desire to maintain the damaged relationship. Lastly, the aversive nature of guilt prospectively deters actors from repeating the costly error of damaging valuable relationships. However, congruent with the second explanation, whereas a) evolved social emotions generally are accompanied by stereotypic involuntary displays, and b) such a display would be particularly valuable in an emotion aimed at repairing damaged

models means that few institutional or conventional processes are likely to exist to assist individuals in coping with the experiences that elicit the problematic emotion (cf. Levy, 1973).

relationships (since the involuntary nature of the display would signal sincerity), yet, no such display exists for guilt (Keltner & Buswell, 1996). Evidence to date is thus insufficient to determine whether guilt is a discrete, evolved emotion or a cultural construct cobbled together out of more elementary universal components.

The Social Benefits and Costs of a Cultural Emphasis of Shame

The degree to which shame is overshadowed by guilt in cultures such as Southern California appears to have increased over the last century. Literary and historical accounts suggest there was previously a greater concern with public reputation, and a greater reliance on institutionalized shaming, ranging from the dunce cap to the stockade, as a means of punishing wrongdoers. Commentators bemoan the reduced concern with this emotion, and the decline in its use as a means of regulating behavior (cf. Davies, 2002; Hamill, 2003; Jackson, 2003; Karen, 1992; O'Neill, 2002). Underlying these arguments is the intuition that enhancing the attention paid to the experience of shame and increasing the use of shaming as a sanction will result in greater social cohesion and more cooperation, as people will be motivated to engage in fewer self-interested actions and more group-beneficial behaviors. Paralleling this movement, a number of legal scholars argue for reinstating so-called scarlet letter punishments, judicial sanctions that punish miscreants by publicizing wrongdoing (cf. Kahan, 1996; Kahan & Posner, 1999). These scholars argue that scarlet letter sentences are inexpensive, appropriately express society's moral condemnation, and effectively deter certain classes of crime. Correspondingly, some judges and state and local governments increasingly employ sentences and enforcement tactics explicitly or implicitly aimed at causing shame. Judges have ordered thieves to advertise their convictions using tee-shirts or signs, and drunk drivers to do likewise via bumper stickers; a number of municipalities maintain web sites or broadcast television programs identifying individuals who

are guilty of soliciting prostitutes or are delinquent in child support payments; and prosecutors increasingly employ the ‘perp walk’ wherein suspects in white-collar crimes are arrested at work and paraded in handcuffs before co-workers and television cameras (see Fessler, in prep.).

Studies of everyday behavior suggest that the motivational salience of shame can be reinvigorated in Western cultures. In addition to the economic experiments described earlier, studies indicate that people are more likely to wash their hands after using a restroom when an observer is present (Munger & Harris, 1989), and drivers of convertible automobiles are quicker to honk, and honk more frequently, when the convertible top is up, providing the illusion of anonymity, than when the top is down, exposing the driver to observers (Ellison, Govern, Petri, & Figler, 1995).⁶ Moreover, the pathway to social change is not difficult to discern, as increased use of scarlet letter sentences may create a ripple effect extending beyond the judicial system.

In contrast to incarceration or fines, scarlet letter sentences not only expose the public to the punitive process but, more importantly, invite the public to participate in it. Such punishments paint a target on convicted individuals, inviting others to hurl invective at them. These sentences thus convey the message that not only are public expressions of moral outrage or contempt in response to wrongdoing acceptable but, moreover, they are the mark of a good citizen. Indeed, consistent with the argument outlined earlier regarding the reputation-management aspects of moral outrage, it is dangerous not to react in such a fashion, since to display indifference is to risk giving the impression that one condones the misdeed, placing one in the same moral category as the convicted individual. Scarlet letter punishments thus not only familiarize the public with the use of shaming, they both legitimate and encourage, perhaps even

⁶ The fact that these differences in driving behavior occur despite the ready identification provided by the vehicle’s license plate is consistent with the argument, advanced earlier, that the evolved psychological mechanisms underlying much prosocial behavior are sensitive to cues that once accurately indexed the extent to which an actor’s behavior was observable, but which are often inaccurate in today’s evolutionarily-novel environments.

demand, active participation in it. By normalizing this experience, scarlet letter punishments make it more likely that people will view the application of shaming in non-judicial contexts as acceptable, and hence that the dunce cap and its ilk will return to U.S. culture.

The above suggests that social engineers could revitalize shame as a principal feature of behavior regulation in Western societies. Importantly, however, popular, academic, and judicial movements to increase both the cultural prominence of shame and the institutionalized use of shaming are taking place in the absence of any assessment of the long-term societal consequences of assigning shame a more central role in personal experience and behavior regulation. Although a systematic evaluation is beyond the scope of this chapter, in order to initiate a discussion of this topic, I will briefly review some factors worthy of consideration.

Shame and its opposite, pride, are quintessentially other-oriented emotions, as how one feels about oneself is contingent on others assessments. Advocates of efforts to increase the prominence of both shame and shaming are therefore likely correct in arguing that such changes would increase civility, cooperation, and prosociality in the U.S., since these behaviors are linked with both attention to others and the desire to make a positive impression.⁷ Cross-cultural comparisons are an imperfect source of insight in this regard, as many factors vary across cultures in addition to the prominence of shame. Nevertheless, observations support a link between shame and prosociality, at least at the local level. In Bengkulu, largely as a result of concern with others' assessments, social interactions are highly cordial, and hospitality is profuse. More broadly, Bengkulu villagers rely on others' sensitivity to shame to ensure

⁷ A reviewer of this chapter noted that this prediction seems to be at odds with published findings indicating that, unlike guilt, shame does not promote behavioral change in response to wrong-doing (see Tangney & Dearing, 2002). However, holding aside the question of the generalizability of such findings, it is important to distinguish between the effects of a particular shame experience and the deterrent power of shame as an aversive event. Individuals reason prospectively, and the knowledge that violations of norms governing cooperation will entail shame can often serve as a powerful incentive motivating prosociality.

participation in a variety of community maintenance and improvement projects. Shirkers become the target of gossip, and may be shamed via public announcements, a highly effective sanction. However, the effects of shame sensitivity need not be so overt – for example, in Japan, participation in recycling programs is enhanced through the use of transparent garbage bags that allow neighbors to discern whether one has diligently separated one’s various recyclables.

Limits on the extent of prosociality engendered through enhanced sensitivity to shame stem primarily from the factors described earlier as determinants of the intensity of shame. Bengkulu villagers endorse the Japanese aphorism that, when traveling, one should “leave one’s shame at home” -- the opinions of strangers living far from one’s home community carry little weight, and hence behavioral pre- and proscriptions can easily be disregarded. Qualified thusly, it is reasonable to conclude that resurrecting shame in American public life would increase prosociality, with commensurate increases in security, social cohesion, and harmony. However, such benefits are not free, but rather are accompanied by costs that, I believe, outweigh them.

In Bengkulu, the prominence of shame in personal experience and the frequency of shaming as a method of behavior regulation frequently lead individuals to focus not on achieving excellence, but rather on avoiding failure -- people are often more concerned with avoiding punishments than with reaping the benefits of social action. During inter-community competitions for village tidiness, leaders exhort their followers to work hard not so that they can be proclaimed the cleanest village, but so that they can avoid the ignominy of being named the dirtiest. At the end of each school year, children wait with anticipation to hear not whether they have excelled in their studies, but rather whether they have managed to avoid the disgrace of failing to advance to the next grade. Indeed, the concern with avoiding shame pervades educational and intellectual domains. School children sit passively in class. They do not answer

the teacher's questions for fear of shame -- if they are wrong, the teacher shames them, and if they are right, their peers shame them for being a know-it-all. This extends to the highest levels of academia -- rather than spirited debate, or even open discussion, academic panels, policy meetings, and conferences are often characterized by a wooden reiteration of the least controversial position or perspective.

The systematic application of shaming sanctions makes conformism the safest option. As a result, not only do people not seek to excel, they often do not innovate. Bengkulu villagers typically adopt new economic activities or medical or hygienic practices only after a majority of people in neighboring areas have done so. New inventions or business opportunities are forsaken out of concern with what people might say about unconventional behavior. These constraints impose real costs on the people of Bengkulu, as their health, welfare, and ability to compete economically all suffer due to a conservatism that is social, not personal, in nature.

Life in a rural Southeast Asian fishing village differs from life in the U.S. along so many axes that skeptics might complain that it is impossible to garner insight from cases such as the above into changes that might occur in the West were shame to be elevated in motivational prominence. Consider, therefore, the case of Japan. While early anthropological characterizations of Japan as a pure shame culture proved inaccurate, shame nevertheless holds greater motivational and social significance in Japan than in the U.S. (cf. Lebra, 1983). On the positive side, the intense attention to shame and social comparison in part contribute to a phenomenally low crime rate (Komiya, 1999). However, a high price is paid for security and prosociality. Consistent with the above description, Japanese education often does not foster innovation and creativity, but rather stifles it (Ramirez, 1999; Saeki, Fan, & Van Dusen, 2001; Yamada, 1991). Together with the overall depressive effects on innovation stemming from an emphasis on

conformity, this has created a modern economic efflorescence that is largely based on developing ideas originated elsewhere -- as a percentage of its gross domestic product, Japan's creative economy, that portion of a nation's productivity composed of intellectual property and patents, is among the smallest of the world's economic giants (Howkins, 2002). In the postindustrial era, ideas are often more valuable than labor or materials; it therefore remains to be seen whether, in the absence of substantial cultural changes, the Japanese economic miracle of rapid growth can be maintained. While it is unlikely that, in the U.S., shame will ever again achieve the cultural prominence that it held in the past, cases such as this should give both pundits and jurists reason to pause before seeking to enhance the propensity to experience shame and the frequency with which it is intentionally induced in others as a means of regulating behavior.

As exemplified by Southern California, American culture fosters free-spirited innovation and experimentation, features that vital to the economic and political success of the U.S. In comparison to at least one small-scale community in a semi-traditional society, the cultural prominence and, arguably, the motivational significance of shame are greatly attenuated in Southern California. Likewise, both U.S. society in general, and Southern Californian society in particular, are characterized by huge metropolitan areas and substantial social and geographical mobility, features that differ markedly from the types of social groupings that predominated for most of human history. One of the most important lessons to be drawn from the systematic investigation of shame is therefore that, while this emotion likely played a central role in the evolution of human cooperation in small-scale groups, in today's world of globalized and hypercompetitive markets, there are intrinsic costs to relying on shame as a mechanism of social regulation. Caution should therefore be exercised before advocating what amounts to increased conformism in the name of civility and prosociality – the era of shame may be passing.

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