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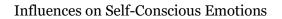
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Who's to Blame for Shame? Interpersonal Influences on Self-Conscious Emotions in Early Adolescence

by

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Abstract

Theories of self-conscious emotional experience suggest that shame and guilt arise as a result of negative self-appraisals surrounding one's conformity to social norms; however, shame focuses on whole-self appraisal while guilt focuses more specifically on the actions one has taken. As a result, shame tends to be associated with more negative aspects of behavior, mental health, and wellbeing. Thus, it is valuable to examine possible aspects of development that influence individuals' tendencies toward shame or guilt. Some evidence suggests that negative parenting styles are associated with shame, and positive parenting styles with guilt. This study aims to investigate whether the parenting dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness are associated with shame-proneness and guilt-proneness in early adolescence, and whether peer social support can function as a protective factor. It is predicted that guilt-proneness will be associated with higher responsiveness and lower demandingness, while shame-proneness will be associated with lower responsiveness and higher demandingness. It is also predicted that perceived peer support will moderate the relationships between parenting styles and shame-proneness such that these relationships will be weaker for those with high social support than those with low social support. Finally, it is predicted that there will be gender differences in shame and guilt, such that females and non-binary individuals will have higher levels of both shame and guilt-proneness than males. The results of this study will expand understanding about self-conscious emotions, the impact of parenting styles on emotional development, and possible protective factors to promote beneficial outcomes in early adolescents with adverse upbringings.

Keywords: shame, guilt, parenting styles, social support

Who's to Blame for Shame? Interpersonal Influences on Self-Conscious Emotions

in Early Adolescence

Self-Conscious Emotions

When you show a toddler a photo of a frowning face, they can label it as "sad," or they can point out the smile amidst a grid of photos when you ask them to find "happy." But if we were to try to ask them to identify "shame" or "pride," they would probably have a more challenging time. Emotions like these are far less straightforward, less easily tied to a consistent facial expression or even elicitor than the basic emotions. These emotions belong to a different category known as Self-Conscious Emotions (Lewis, 1997). Self-Conscious Emotions (SCEs) are emotional responses to ideas about oneself, arising from a cognitive process that combines understandings about self, social goals, and others' perceptions. The resulting emotion is a direct response to an internal idea rather than an external event. This added complexity is illustrated even in the first appearance of these emotions. While the basic emotions like happiness and sadness develop within the first few months of life, the SCEs develop during the second year alongside the emergence of self-reflection and do not solidify until the end of the third year (Lewis, 1997). We don't begin to make specific cognitive differentiation between our own SCEs until early adolescence (Olthof et al., 2004), and experiences of SCEs continue to change throughout different life stages alongside individuals' self-conceptions and social contexts. This study aims to investigate the experience of SCEs in early adolescence as influenced by converging relationships with parents and peers, in order to better understand detrimental and protective effects on this population's emotional wellbeing.

The specific emotions that fall under the SCE category are made up of two types. The first is the exposed self-conscious emotions – embarrassment, jealousy, and empathy – which involve only a basic recognition of oneself as being or acting differently from others (Lewis, 2016). For example, someone might feel embarrassed because they get called on to answer a question, regardless of how well they know the answer. The sense of embarrassment comes from

the distinction of self from the others around them. Meanwhile, the evaluative self-conscious emotions, shame, guilt, pride, and hubris, involve a more complex appraisal of one's conformity with social expectations and a sense of responsibility for one's actions. For example, someone might feel proud that they got a good grade on a test. They feel this pride because *they* were the one who did it and because *getting a good grade* is a social expectation up to which they have lived (Lewis, 2016).

This process relies on a fundamental human capability: theory of mind. Theory of mind refers to the ability to attribute mental states to oneself and to others, which allows us to make inferences about others' intentions, understandings, thoughts, preferences, and more (Premack & Woodruff, 1978). The self-conscious emotional process requires an understanding of others' ideas and expectations, which involves theory of mind cognition. In fact, brain regions involved in theory of mind have also been found to be involved in SCEs (Robins & Schriber, 2009). Some empirical evidence has found that early adolescents with higher theory of mind skills experience higher levels of shame and guilt, though more research is needed to understand this relationship (Bosacki et al., 2023). However, some awareness of others' mental states seems key to the experience of SCEs and has been incorporated into common theoretical conceptualizations of SCEs.

The most common theory about the cognitive process involved in SCE elicitation is an attributional theory. Prior to an emotional event, a person will have gradually recognized a set of standards, rules, and goals (SRGs) that are specific to the setting they are in (time period, culture, age group, social norms etc.) and internalized them as a framework within which they belong (Lewis, 2016). In response to a triggering event, they must first assess that it is not relevant to survival goals (which would instead elicit a basic emotion like joy, fear, sadness, anger, or disgust; Tracy & Robins, 2004). Next, they must evaluate themselves as responsible for an action: the action must be attributed to internal causes rather than to chance or external forces (Lewis, 2016). This causes the person to focus their attention on the self, activating self-

representations that may or may not be congruous with SRGs (Tracy & Robins, 2004). The final

evaluation of whether the individual has met the SRGs elicits an SCE (Tracy & Robins, 2004).

This process of SCE elicitation helps explains why SCEs are more complex than basic

emotions and more specific to different stages of life. In order to deepen our understanding of

SCEs in early adolescence, it is necessary to understand the complex factors which influence

early adolescents' interpretation of others' mental states, the unique set of SRGs within which

they exist, and influences on their interpretations of causality.

Shame vs. Guilt

Components of Attribution

Differentiation in the elicitation process leads to distinct SCEs. When evaluating the

contribution of different emotions to overall wellbeing, there is a particularly interesting

difference between shame and guilt. These two emotions are both formed in response to an

evaluation of failure on the part of the individual and may colloquially be referred to as "feeling

bad about what you did" or "personal regret". However, despite being seemingly

interchangeable in public understanding, they differ significantly in their activation and

consequences. As a result, the differentiation between them has received particular attention in

psychological literature. Due to the complexity of this distinction and the potential severity of

the different outcomes, we will focus exclusively on these two SCEs.

One of the most important components of the distinction between shame and guilt is the

attribution of globality. If an individual makes a global attribution, they see their action as

reflecting on their whole self – "I am bad"– while a specific attribution focuses on the badness of

the action itself (Lewis, 2016; Tracy & Robins, 2004). If one evaluates their action negatively or

as a failure, a global attribution would elicit shame and a specific attribution would elicit guilt

(Tracy & Robins, 2004). This aspect of shame and guilt was demonstrated in a set of four studies

that compared causal attributions and SCE, where guilt was found to be associated with more

specific attributions about the self, while shame was associated with more global attributions (Tracy & Robins, 2006).

Other situational analyses also contribute to this distinction, such as attributions about the stability or controllability of the situation. Shame has been associated with more stable causal attributions, such as an action being caused by a long-term or unchanging feature like one's ability, while guilt has been associated with more unstable attributions, such as an action being caused by a more temporary feature like one's effort (Tracy & Robins, 2006). These same studies found that shame was more likely to be experienced when an individual interpreted a situation as controllable, while guilt was more likely if they interpreted it as uncontrollable.

Dispositional Patterns

Attributional factors help us understand the immediate process of SCE production, but a more long-term understanding of emotional wellbeing requires an analysis of why individuals tend toward these factors. For this, we look at the traits of shame-proneness and guilt-proneness. While SCEs are experienced in response to an event in a specific context, people can have tendencies toward experiencing these emotions with more or less frequency, and thus most research analyzes these emotions as stable, dispositional constructs (Tangney, 1990). Individuals' proneness to experiencing shame or guilt across a range of situations can be considered a personality trait and can therefore more meaningfully be analyzed in terms of long-term and causal patterns.

In general, guilt-proneness has been associated with more positive and adaptive outcomes while the correlates of shame-proneness are more negatively valenced. One longitudinal analysis linked shame-proneness amongst fifth grade students with later risky behavior such as risky driving, earlier onset drug and alcohol use, and less safe sex, while guilt-proneness was linked to less risky behavior (Tangney & Dearing, 2003). In a study of 288 Canadian high schoolers, guilt-proneness was found to have a positive association with life

satisfaction, while shame-proneness had a negative association with life satisfaction (Sullivan et al., 2020).

It was also found that guilt-proneness was not associated with psychopathology, while shame-proneness had a positive association with both anxious and depressive symptoms (Sullivan et al., 2020). In fact, shame-proneness has been consistently associated with higher levels of depression and anxiety across multiple studies (Muris et al., 2018; Orth et al., 2006; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005). Orth et al. (2006) attempted to explain this connection through the mechanism of rumination. In a survey of 171 mothers and fathers coping with family breakup, the authors found that shame, when controlling for guilt, had a significant effect on depression and that rumination substantially mediated this effect. They proposed a mechanism in which shame activates negative evaluation of self by others, the self-esteem system reduces state self-esteem to warn the individual about risk to their relationships, this threat leads to rumination about the situation, and persistent negative rumination about the self increases depression (Orth et al., 2006). Theories like these may help explain how emotional tendencies lead to different outcomes between individuals.

Social and Moral Perspectives on SCEs

However, some theorists have proposed that SCEs should be understood from a less individualistic and more social perspective. Sznycer's (2019) social adaptationist theory of shame and guilt posits that these emotions developed as an evolutionary adaptation to adjust our social valuation. In his theory, we attach value to others' welfare based on their potential benefits and costs to us, and experience SCEs in proportion to this value. When we recognize that we have acted in a way that these valuable others may perceive to be contrary to the level of social value they perceive us to have, we experience SCEs in order to adjust others' perceptions of our value. In this model, shame evolved to reduce the spread of negative information about the self that could potentially cause social devaluation, subordinate one to a rival, or reveal norm violations. Meanwhile, guilt evolved to readjust one's own valuation of others in cases where one

failed to prioritize the welfare of a valuable other. This offense could mean someone fails to meet

expectations and thus could incur costs to important social relationships, and feelings of guilt

motivate them to avoid re-offense (Sznycer, 2019). Social aspects like these are especially

relevant given that SCEs tend to promote prosocial behavior and have only evolved in species

with complex social hierarchies (Tracy & Robins, 2004).

        In fact, the reinforcement of prosocial behaviors like acting in socially acceptable ways

(shame) or practicing reciprocity (guilt) have led many to call SCEs the "moral emotions" (Carnì

et al., 2013; Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010; Tangney et al., 2007a, 2007b). They promote the

interests of others and society, motivating people to do good and avoid doing bad (Tangney et

al., 2007a). This likely occurs because SCEs offer immediate punishment or reinforcement of

behavior, so people manipulate their actions in anticipation of the emotional consequence. It is

also notable that shame and guilt are typically felt in response to moral transgressions (such as

failing to help) rather than nonmoral failures (like unattractiveness; Sznycer, 2019).

        However, in line with similarly differentiated outcomes, shame and guilt are not equally

morally adaptive. Action tendencies in response to shame are denial, concealment, and escape,

while guilt tends to bring about reparative actions like confessions, apologies, and reparations

(Tangney et al., 2007a). Guilt increases other-oriented empathy, while shame disrupts it,

instead increasing self-oriented distress or anger (Tangney et al., 2007a). These tendencies align

with the social adaptationist theory of shame and guilt, giving insight into how these emotions

may have evolved as a way to encode morality in human behavior.

        Guilt's comparatively more positive and constructive morality may lead us to wonder just

what kind of thought process could orient someone toward one emotion over the other. Sheikh

and Janoff-Bulman (2010) pointed toward ties with moral reasoning styles to help explain this.

In a study of 220 undergraduate students, they found that for multiple SCE measures, shame

was tied to tendencies toward proscriptive moral regulation, while guilt was tied to prescriptive

regulation tendencies. Proscriptive regulation is based on "what we shouldn't do;" it utilizes the

avoidance system to inhibit immoral behavior and prevent negative outcomes. Shame may be

linked to this system because its overwhelming focus on the total self alerts to the possibility of

"punishment-worthy moral failure." Alternatively, prescriptive regulation is based on "what we

should do;" it utilizes the approach system to motivate moral action and promote positive

outcomes (Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010). Guilt may be linked to this system because of its

connection to reparation.

These social and moral perspectives both complicate and expand our understanding of

shame and guilt. They fit into the basic mechanism of SCEs as an emotional response to a

cognitive appraisal, in which the cognitive event is the individual's evaluation of their meeting a

certain social expectation. However, they propose new reasons for inciting shame vs. guilt:

shame tends to be associated with inhibition of behavior and avoidance of social devaluation,

while guilt is associated with activation of prosocial behavior. While different from attributional

theory, which looks at shame as being incited by global, stable attributions and guilt as specific,

unstable attributions, it may be possible to integrate these two theoretical perspectives into an

understanding of current and evolutionary emotional processes. Social devaluation is a change

in an individual's assigned value within a social network, which is a relatively stable position

that encompasses an individual as a whole. Meanwhile, prosocial behavior is a specific act;

though individuals likely act consistently, one prosocial act does not directly cause further

prosocial acts, and so it is more specific and unstable than one's social status. In this way, social

adaptationist theory and the morality of SCEs can be seen as components of the attributional

process.

Cultural Differences

However, despite their moral implications, we should avoid viewing shame and guilt as

having universal moral underpinnings. Cross-cultural research has pointed toward different

conceptualizations of these emotions in different contexts, especially when comparing

collectivistic and individualistic cultures (Wong & Tsai, 2007). The emotions may be differently

valenced; in collectivistic cultures, shame tends to be considered as less negative because it reaffirms belonging to a social group, which is more heavily valued. Cultures that emphasize self-improvement may also value shame more, as a negative self-image may inspire more change (Wong & Tsai, 2007).

These differences mean that the regulatory utility of SCEs may also vary: guilt may be more effective in individualistic cultures because it is more closely associated with a general code of ethics, as is largely understood in previous research, but shame may be more regulatorily effective in collectivistic cultures because it is more closely associated with these different ethical codes and thus is more likely to restore one's place in the social structure (Wong & Tsai, 2007). Alternatively, shame and guilt may be considered as more similar to one another in collectivistic cultures, because people do not view themselves as being so distinct from their relationships and contexts, so the separation between whole self and specific actions may be less relevant. This increased connection may also make it more likely for shame and guilt to be induced by actions that other people take (Wong & Tsai, 2007). These cultural differences have found further empirical support in meta-analytic cross-group comparisons of shame- and guilt-proneness, in which gendered patterns were only significant for samples of white or non-specified ethnicity participants (Else-Quest et al., 2012). Thus, when drawing conclusions about shame and guilt-related patterns, we should be careful not to generalize beyond the cultural context within which findings were made.

Gender Differences in Shame and Guilt

However, some patterns have been identified between SCE and gender even across cultures. In general, females have been found to be more shame-prone (Akbag & Imamoglu, 2010; Else-Quest et al., 2012; Muris et al., 2018) as well as more guilt-prone (Bosacki et al., 2023; Else-Quest et al., 2012; Muris et al., 2018). These differences could be tied to socialization, parenting, biological differences, or differences in self-perception. However, these differences are not universally present across all ages. In a meta-analysis of data related to SCE

proneness, Else-Quest et al. (2012) found that gender differences in guilt were not present in childhood and became present only in adolescence, pointing to the need to investigate the causal mechanisms behind gender differences and the unique experiences of SCEs during this period of life.

Shame and Guilt in Parenting

Parental Value Transmission

Individual variation in emotional development is largely dependent upon the context in which individuals grow up and the people who have the greatest influence in their lives. In any analysis of development, it is essential to consider the impact of parents, as they generally have some of the earliest, longest lasting, and most persuasive influence on children. For this reason, our consideration of self-conscious emotional development looks to the influence of different parenting styles to understand how emotional tendencies are developed. This involves understanding both the factors involved in parental influence and the impacts that different kinds of parenting have on SCE-proneness.

Grusec and Goodnow's (1994) model of disciplinary encounters as a context for parental value internalization illustrates how parent-child disciplinary interactions can lead to value transference. They emphasize that specific forms of discipline are not inherently superior to one another, but rather that the effectiveness (degree of value internalization in children) depends on a multi-part interaction between type of discipline, parent and child characters, and communication styles. Children will be more receptive to parental discipline if they perceive the nature of discipline (reasoning or power assertion) to match the nature of the misdeed, if they see the reasoning as having truth-value, if aspects of parental communication promote acceptance (like warmth and emphasis on importance to the parent), and if children perceive themselves as formulating the value position themselves rather than being pressured into it. Discipline may be less effective if children feel a threat to their autonomy or perceive other threatening power assertions such as disapproval, humiliation, unpredictable behavior, or

sarcasm (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). A similar interactive model was hypothesized by Darling and Steinberg (1993), in which the effect of parenting style on adolescent outcomes comes primarily from its mediation of the relationship between parenting practices and adolescent outcomes. That is, parenting practices (like high involvement in children's schooling) would be more or less effective in producing desired outcomes (high academic performance) depending on parental style (for example, warm and encouraging vs. strict and demanding). This differentiation would depend both on how well that style matched the practice and how generally influential that style was on that particular adolescent (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Overall, these models suggest that styles of parental reasoning which are adaptive to children's personal preferences and individual differences may be most effective for communicating parental values.

Associations Between SCEs and Parenting Styles

In order to understand how this model applies to SCE experience, we can look at consistent trends in the effects of parenting style on shame and guilt, in which more positive parenting styles are associated with guilt-proneness and more negative parenting styles are associated with shame-proneness. In a study of early adults between the ages of 18 and 29, guilt-proneness was positively associated with bonding, discipline, education, responsivity, sensitivity, and general welfare and protection that participants perceived in their parents, while shame was negatively associated with general welfare and protection (Mintz et al., 2017). Meanwhile, guilt was negatively associated with the perceived parental negativity measure, particularly the scale items of "comparing you to other children," "demeaning you," "embarrassing you," "pinching/spanking/hurting you," "telling you you're not important," and "withdrawing love/affection," while shame was positively associated with some of these negative behaviors such as "demeaning you," "embarrassing you," and "pinching/spanking/hurting you" (Mintz et al., 2017).

This overall guilt with positive parenting/shame with negative parenting trend is replicated across studies, even starting in early childhood, when parental authoritarianism measured at age 3 predicts girls' shame-proneness at age 5 (Mills, 2003). In adolescence and young adulthood, shame has been positively associated with perceived parental demandingness and rejection, while guilt has been positively associated with parental warmth and negatively associated with parental demandingness and rejection (Assaad, 2023; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005). If we look back at trends in the moral adaptivity of shame and guilt, we recall that guilt has been conceptualized as a more morally adaptive emotion, due to its associated prosocial action tendencies. As parental value transmission ideally aims to convey good morals, it makes sense that more positive and reason-based styles of parenting, which have been theorized to be more effective at value communication, are more likely to convey a sense of guilt than shame. Conversely, parenting styles that convey a negative attitude toward children may build a negative self-attitude, fostering a sense of shame.

Some possible mechanisms have been proposed to explain the relationship between parenting styles and SCE-proneness in children. One longitudinal study looked at the relationship between mutually responsive orientation (MRO) and the development of child conscience over a period of about four years, starting when children were nine months old (Kochanska et al., 2005). MRO is a measure that includes observer-rated maternal responsiveness to child emotions/behaviors and shared positive affect between mother and child. The study found that MRO had direct positive effects on children's positive moral behaviors and understanding of morality, and that this effect was mediated by two factors: committed compliance to maternal requests and children's enjoyment of their interactions with their mother. Committed compliance links to theories about children's need to understand and accept parental discipline as an antecedent of internalization, and the authors suggest that it may promote internalization because its voluntary nature makes children feel that they are making an autonomous decision, or that over time their obedience helps them develop a moral

self-image and this moral self-conception serves as a moral guide. The authors also suggest that

the mediator of enjoyment of interaction with mother may promote moral internalization

because the child wants to maintain their positive emotional state by continuing to behave well,

as this will elicit positive emotions from their parents, or because positive emotions foster

attachment security, which in turn increases receptiveness to parental teachings (Kochanska et

al., 2005). Indeed, attachment security is negatively related to shame (Akbag & Imamoglu,

2010; Gross & Hansen, 2000).

However, when looking at trends in parenting outcomes, it is important to remember a

key component of value internalization theory, that parenting styles must be adaptive to

individual differences amongst children. These differences are both created by and responsive to

differences in parenting style. For example, differential gendered parenting may contribute to

gender differences in shame and guilt, such as if parents more frequently discuss the impacts of

their actions on others with girls and thus have better familiarized them with the guilt-induction

process (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Cultural differences may play a role as well. For example,

values play into parenting decisions when looking at differences between Chinese and U.S.

samples, in which Chinese parents more actively incorporate shame into their parenting because

of its higher social and ethical value (Akbag & Imamoglu, 2010; Wong & Tsai, 2007). Other

demographic, cultural, and stylistic differences in parenting have potentially wide-ranging

effects on adolescent SCE experience.

This analysis of the relationship between parenting and SCEs is an important component

in understanding how self-conscious emotional tendencies develop and consequently how we

can best protect against negative outcomes. We see that more negative or forceful parenting

styles tend to be associated with shame-proneness, while more positive and responsive

parenting styles tend to be associated with guilt-proneness. We can attempt to understand these

patterns by analyzing the process of parental value internalization in which reason-based

parenting styles more effectively convey parental values while more authoritarian styles lead to

greater resistance. Additionally, we can analyze how individual variation in response to parenting may occur, through mismatch of parenting style to adolescent temperament or through cross-group differences, helping to explain SCE variation among different populations.

Peer Influences

Parents' sizable influence on the development of SCEs may leave children whose parents utilize more negative or forceful styles in a highly vulnerable position to the consequences of shame-proneness. However, parents are not the only influential figures in adolescents' lives; it is also very important to consider the effects of peers on their development. In fact, early adolescence is a salient period for examining the changing influences of parents and peers on one's psyche. It is a notable time in SCE development, as youth gain the ability to consciously recognize the difference between shame and guilt, and certain gender differences like higher guilt in girls than boys start to emerge that did not previously exist (Else-Quest et al., 2012; Olthof et al., 2004).

This is also a time in which children's relationships with their parents become more complicated: child-parent conflict increases in adolescence, and children view parental intervention as inappropriate in a wider variety of scenarios and thus are less willing to accept parental authority (Branje et al., 2012; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). In response to this relational deterioration, early adolescents often turn to peers to fulfill support functions. In a cross-sectional study comparing fourth, sixth, and eighth graders, it was found that younger students reported more trusting and communicative relationships with their parents than the older students, and older students were more likely to seek out peers to fulfill attachment functions (Nickerson & Nagle, 2005). The differences within this age range (fourth graders' mean age was 9.61, while eighth graders' was 13.58) show that the early adolescent period is a critical time of transition. This gravitation toward peers is especially strong when youth have more negative relationships with parents. In students from all the age groups in Nickerson and Nagle's (2005) study, peer attachment-seeking was stronger amongst those who viewed their parental

relationships as less secure. In a separate study of sixth and seventh graders, students who

perceived more power assertion and restrictiveness from their parents had higher peer

orientation, and those who perceived that their parents gave them less opportunity to help with

decision making engaged in higher peer orientation and peer advice seeking (Fuligni & Eccles,

1993).

As peer relationships gain relevance in comparison to parental relationships, we can

consider how they may intervene in the relationship between parenting style and SCEs. Though

this question has not been investigated in the early adolescent population, there is evidence

from other populations that peer social support can have important protective effects against

shame. The LGBTQ+ population experiences higher levels of shame than their heterosexual

counterparts, and thus research into protective effects against shame is particularly relevant in

this group (Cabral & Pinto, 2023). It has been found that higher levels of reported social support

amongst LGBTQ+ individuals are associated with lower levels of shame as well as less self-

blaming attributions in cases of discrimination (Burns et al., 2012; Cabral & Pinto, 2023).

Though these individuals' experiences of shame and social relationships differ from our early

adolescent population, the protective effects of social support against shame offer a possible

avenue through which vulnerable adolescents could be shielded from the detrimental effects of

shame on risk behavior, life satisfaction, psychopathology, and more. As early adolescents

develop more complex understandings of their self-conscious emotions and gravitate away from

their parents, their deepening relationships with peers may help them restructure their

tendencies toward shame.

The Current Study

Up to this point, our understanding of shame-proneness and guilt-proneness in early

adolescents is built upon disparate sources of information. There are several theories to explain

the arousal of self-conscious emotions: attribution theory looks at the evaluation of one's actions

in term of stability and globality and recognizes shame as coming from stable, global

attributions for failure and guilt as coming from unstable, specific attributions. Social

adaptationist theory looks at self-conscious emotions as an evolutionary adaptation to adjust

one's social valuation within an interdependent social climate, looking at shame as a way to

repair damage to one's social valuation and guilt as a way to repair underappreciation for

valuable others. These theories help explain isolated occurrences of shame and guilt, but can

also be interpreted as mechanisms that facilitate the trait-like patterns of shame-proneness and

guilt-proneness. We find that these traits have consistent consequences: guilt is associated with

more prosocial and positive outcomes, while shame is associated with negative outcomes like

increased risk behavior, lowered life satisfaction, and psychopathological symptomology. Thus,

it is beneficial to understand how these emotional traits are developed in order to avoid negative

consequences and promote wellbeing. There is some understanding of how different

relationship figures may influence their development, as shame has generally been related to

more negative parenting styles and guilt has generally been related to more positive parenting

styles, but little research has looked at the influences of peers on SCEs, which may be

particularly relevant during early adolescence due to their increasing importance.

   Thus, there is still a gap in our understanding of how relational influences contribute to

self-conscious emotions during early adolescence. More information is needed in order to

understand whether one theoretical model is more explanatory of emotional activation, or

whether these models can be integrated to more fully explain the arousal of SCEs. Additionally,

more information is needed to understand the specific parenting behaviors which influence

shame- and guilt-proneness, and it may be particularly useful to understand these emotions in

the context of the dimensions of parental demandingness and responsiveness, as these two

dimensions are used frequently in parenting research and thus may help us connect the field of

SCEs to other research on parenting. Finally, it would be useful to develop a better

understanding of interactions between parental influences and peer influences on shame and

guilt, in order to understand whether these two relational spheres have converging or diverging

effects, and whether peer relationships may function as a protective factor against the emotional

consequences of negative parenting styles.

Integrating previous knowledge and new theoretical directions, we propose a theoretical

model in which different parenting styles lead to different structures of value internalization,

such that those who experience more negative parenting are more likely to make global

attributions about themselves as a moral being in response to failure and thus experience

shame, while those with more positive parenting are more likely to make specific attributions

related to the action and thus experience guilt. Parental style in this model will be

conceptualized through the dimensions of demandingness and responsiveness, which will have

unique effects. Higher demandingness creates an all-encompassing sense of responsibility, such

that violations of this responsibility lead to globally negative attributions and shame, while

lower demandingness gives children space to come to their own conclusions about the morality

of each specific action and seek reparation to repair their negative appraisal rather than letting it

be defining, resulting in guilt. Meanwhile, higher responsiveness demonstrates to children that

they have inherent value, thus making them less likely to experience the globally negative view

of self that accompanies shame and more likely to seek guilt-associated reparation to assure

congruence between their own perceived self-worth and other's perception of them. Lower

responsiveness makes children feel less deserving of positive appraisal and thus more likely to

appraise themselves as wholly negative. We propose that during early adolescence, increased

reliance on peer relationships over parental relationships causes individuals to redefine valuable

others and redefine the SRGs most relevant to their moral community, thus giving them an

opportunity to restructure their attributional patterns according to values which more closely

align with their personal choices than those imposed on them by their parents. Consequently,

greater levels of peer social support can buffer negative effects of parenting style on shame.

In order to investigate this theory, we will utilize a quantitative, correlational survey

design. We will collect data on perceived parenting style through the dimensions of

demandingness and responsiveness, guilt-proneness, shame-proneness, and peer social support from early adolescents, aged 11-13. This data will be analyzed to identify demographic patterns and significant relationships between concepts. The study aims to analyze the effects of these parenting dimensions on early adolescent proneness to shame and guilt, and whether peer social support acts as a protective factor in the relationship between parenting styles and shame-proneness. It is hypothesized that guilt proneness will be associated with higher parental responsiveness and lower parental demandingness. It is hypothesized that shame proneness will be associated with lower parental responsiveness and higher parental demandingness, and that these relationships will be moderated by peer social support, such that the relationships will be weaker for those with high social support compared to those with low social support. It is also hypothesized that there will be gender patterns in experiences of shame and guilt such that females and non-binary individuals will have significantly higher levels of shame-proneness and guilt-proneness than males.

Method

This study will utilize a quantitative, correlational design to assess the relationship between perceived parenting style and proneness to shame and guilt in early adolescents, and the possible moderating interaction of perceived peer social support.

Participants

Approximately 200 early adolescent participants will be recruited for the study. *A priori* power analyses using a power table indicate that in order to achieve a desired power level of 0.80, at least 191 participants will be required (Friedman, 1982). This study aims to investigate the population of early adolescents in the United States, and so participants will be middle school students in 6th-8th grade, with ages ranging approximately 11-14 years old. Participants are expected to be approximately 50% male and 50% female. Participants will be recruited through their middle schools. The researcher will use a random number generator to select three schools from a list of middle schools in Los Angeles County and will reach out to school

administration with study information. If the first three schools are not willing to participate, the researcher will continue to contact random middle schools until they have required a sample of three schools. From there, they will use a random number generator to select 100 students from the school directory and send home consent forms to their parents. The final sample will be made up of all students who return consent forms and are present at school on the day of data collection. Participants will be compensated upon completion of the study with a $15 visa gift card, sent to their emails.

Materials

Participants will complete a series of iPad surveys assessing study variables.

Demographic measures

Participants will be asked their gender (male, female, non-binary, or other), ethnicity (African/African American, Middle Eastern, Caucasian/White, Asian/Asian American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hispanic/Latino, or Biracial/Multiracial), and their age (in a write-in format).

Proneness to Shame and Guilt

The Test of Self-Conscious Affect for Adolescents (TOSCA-A; Tangney et al., 1991), narrowed to only the shame and guilt subscales, will be used to measure shame-proneness and guilt-proneness in participants. This measure consists of 15 scenarios, 10 positive and 5 negative, that adolescents would be likely to encounter in daily life, each followed by questions measuring several emotional responses, including likelihood of feeling shame and guilt. Responses are reported on 5-point Likert-scales ranging from 1 (not at all likely) to 5 (very likely). An example item is: "For several days you put off talking to a teacher about a missed assignment. At the last minute you talk to the teacher about it, and all goes well." The response to this item that measures guilt is, "I would regret that I put it off," and the response measuring shame is, "I would feel like a coward." The composite score for each self-conscious emotion is

created by summing the 15 items. Reliability estimates of these subscales using Cronbach's

alpha reveal acceptable values of .77 for shame and .81 for guilt (Tangney et al., 1996).

Perceived Parenting Style

The short version of the Parental Perception Questionnaire (PPQ-20; Pasquali et al.,

2012) will be used to measure perceived parenting style on two dimensions: parental

responsiveness and parental demandingness. This measure consists of 20 items about the

mother and 20 items about the father. In this study, parental labels will be revised for gender

inclusivity to say, "mother or other primary caregiver" and "father or other primary caregiver

that was not referenced in earlier questions" and items will be revised so that gendered

pronouns (he/she, him/her) will be changed to "they" and "them." Responses are measured on a

five-point Likert scale, where participants indicate to what extent the behavior or attitude

applied to the focus parent. Response options range from 0 (not applicable) to 4 (totally

applicable). An example item from the father scale that measures demandingness is, "they

always say how I am supposed to behave" and an example item measuring responsiveness is

"they are very interested in what I learn at school." Final scores will be calculated by summing

the items for each subscale and then averaging the mother and father scores within each style

dimension, in order to create two overall scores of demandingness and responsiveness. This

scale has produced acceptable reliability for both dimensions of parenting style, with Cronbach's

alpha values of .86 for father responsiveness, .77 for father demandingness, .84 for mother

responsiveness, and .73 for mother demandingness (Pasquali et al., 2012).

Perceived Peer Social Support

Perceived peer social support will be measured using the Perceived Social Support,

Friends scale (PSS-Fr; Procidano & Heller, 1983). This scale contains 20 items which are

positive relationship-based statements to which participants responded with their agreement of

"yes," "no," or "don't know." The number of "yes" responses will be summed to create a total

score ranging from 0, no perceived social support, to 20, maximum perceived social support.

Some example items are, "my friends enjoy hearing about what I think," and "my friends are sensitive to my personal needs." This scale produced a Cronbach's alpha score of .88, indicating acceptable reliability.

Procedure

Documents detailing informed consent will be sent home to participants' parents and returned before the date of data collection. In collaboration with school administration, students will be pulled out of class, five at a time, for 20 minutes each, over the course of two consecutive days per school. In an empty classroom or other private space, students will be given an overview of the study procedure including potential risks and benefits and will give verbal informed assent before beginning study tasks. On individual iPads, they will fill out Qualtrics surveys to assess study variables: first shame and guilt-proneness, then perceived parenting style, then perceived social support, and finally demographic questions. At the end, they will be thanked and debriefed. Once data collection is complete, data will be analyzed using SPSS statistics software (*IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows*, 2019).

Ethical Considerations

This study falls within the guidelines of ethical research in psychology because there is minimal risk to participants which is outweighed by the overall benefits of the research. This study does not include deception, as participants will be informed of the general topics being investigated at the beginning of the study and then informed of exact hypotheses during debriefing. It does not include sensitive information, as early adolescents could reasonably be expected to encounter conversations about their parents, friends, and reactions to social situations throughout the course of everyday life. As the scenarios presented to measure shame- and guilt-proneness are hypothetical and do not intend to induce active shame or guilt in participants, there is no direct emotional manipulation involved beyond the emotions that may be evoked based on participants' unique associations with study topics.

However, there are ethical considerations to be made. The population we are studying, youth between the ages of 11 and 14, is considered a vulnerable population because they are not able to legally consent to their participation. However, it is important that our participants fall within this age range because the salience of early adolescence as a period for SCE development and changing relationship balances means that the study questions uniquely apply to them, and we would not be able to obtain valid information without their participation. We will ensure that their participation is as voluntary as possible by obtaining informed consent from their parents and informed assent from the participants themselves, as they are old enough to understand the basics of our study topic and what it means to be a research participant. We will also emphasize the voluntary nature of the study during the recruitment process, where there are potential effects of undue influence because information about the study will be sent home from school, which may convey a sense of authority or obligatoriness. We will try to counteract this effect by clearly stating that participation is voluntary and under the authority of the researcher and Scripps College, rather than the children's school. We will also consider the potential undue influence of compensation, as students may come from low-income families and most middle schoolers do not have income sources of their own, so they may be disproportionately attracted to financial compensation. We will try to counteract this effect by maintaining a small compensation amount of $15, which is not enough to significantly change the financial status of participants, while still offering some direct benefit to them.

Within the data collection process, the primary source of risk is that students will be pulled out of class: this could result in lost learning or social embarrassment. However, lost learning is minimized by the short period of time that the study takes, approximately twenty minutes, and this could be further minimized by pulling students out during homeroom or another non-instructional time, if school administration can help us structure this into the schedule. We expect that the social embarrassment of being called out of class will also be negligible, as being pulled out of class is a standard procedure which would not likely cause

special alarm, and students will be informed of the reason for their departure so they will have

the opportunity to explain it to their peers.

We must also consider the potential impacts of the data we have collected. There is a

small component of identifiability in the data, as it will be initially connected to a participant's

name and contact information for purposes of recruitment and scheduling. Participants will also

be identified due to their direct interfacing with the researcher during data collection. However,

each participant will be given a unique participant identification number, and a list connecting

participant name to participant number/contact information will be kept on the researcher's

password-protected laptop during the recruitment and data collection processes. As data is

collected, study measures will be stored in password-protected files in which the data is

connected only with participant identification numbers and not names. Once all data has been

collected, the original file linking participant identification numbers with identifiable

information will be permanently deleted, thus transforming all remaining information into an

anonymous data set.

Overall, the potential risks presented are counteracted in the methodology such that they

do not present above minimal risk to participants. Additionally, the minimal risk present is

outweighed by the potential benefits of the research. There are some direct benefits to

participants, as they receive compensation of a $15 visa gift card. They may also benefit from a

chance to reflect and ruminate on their relationships with loved ones, and they may benefit from

the education function of debriefing, in which we will give them information about SCEs that

could improve their emotional intelligence and help them adjust the weight they place on

beneficial or detrimental relationships with others. There will also be greater benefit to

knowledge and society. The interactive impact of peers and parents on shame and guilt in this

age group has not previously been explored, and greater understanding of these relationships

may help us better promote guilt-encouraging relationships and reduce shame-encouraging

relationships. This could be done through applications to parenting handbooks and classes,

interpersonal therapy models, and socioemotional education programs for early adolescents. By encouraging more adaptive moral emotions, we can have important impacts on the psychological, social, and general wellbeing of early adolescents during this foundational stage of life.

Anticipated Results

Data Analysis Strategy

Data will be analyzed using SPSS statistics software (*IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows*, 2019). Descriptive statistics will be run to get a sense of participant demographic distribution. Analyses of internal reliability using Cronbach's alpha will also be conducted for each measure. In order to investigate whether gendered patterns of shame and guilt-proneness are replicated in our study, a one-way ANOVA analysis will be conducted for shame-proneness and for guilt-proneness with gender as the predictor. Following this, other study hypotheses will be tested using two multiple regression analyses. In the first model, predictor variables will be parental responsiveness, parental demandingness, and peer social support, and the dependent variable will be guilt-proneness. In the second model, predictor variables will be parental responsiveness, parental demandingness, and peer social support, and the dependent variable will be shame-proneness; in order to test the interactions between parenting variables and peer support, we will also create two interaction terms, one that is the product of parental demandingness and peer support, and a second that is the product of parental responsiveness and peer support.

Anticipated Patterns

This study intends to investigate gendered patterns in shame- and guilt-proneness, the relationship between perceived parenting style and proneness to guilt and shame in early adolescents, and whether there is a protective moderating effect of peer social support in the relationship between perceived parenting style and shame-proneness.

First, it is predicted that ANOVA results will reflect gender trends in the literature on self-conscious emotions which have found that females tend to be more prone to both shame and guilt (Akbag & Imamoglu, 2010; Bosacki et al., 2023; Else-Quest et al., 2012; Muris et al., 2018). Research has also found that the LGTBQ+ population experiences higher levels of shame than non-LGBTQ+ individuals (Cabral & Pinto, 2023). Thus, it is expected that there will be an overall trend that females and non-binary individuals will be higher in both shame-proneness and guilt-proneness than males; however, the effect size is expected to be small, in line with previous studies.

In the first multiple regression model for predicting guilt-proneness, it is predicted that when controlling for other variables, guilt-proneness will be positively predicted by parental responsiveness, negatively predicted by parental demandingness, and positively predicted by peer social support. It is predicted that these relationships will have medium effect sizes. These patterns will be reflective of previous studies which have found that guilt-proneness is generally positively associated with positive aspects of parenting including bonding, discipline, education, responsivity, sensitivity, general welfare, and parental warmth and negatively associated with negative or controlling aspects of parenting including parental negativity, demandingness, and rejection (Assaad, 2023; Mills, 2003; Mintz et al., 2017; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005).

In the second multiple regression model for predicting shame-proneness, it is predicted that when controlling for other variables, shame-proneness will be negatively predicted by parental responsiveness, positively predicted by parental demandingness, and negatively predicted by peer social support, and that these relationships will have medium effect sizes. These relationships will reflect patterns in previous research, where shame has been negatively associated with positive aspects of parenting like general welfare and protection, and positively associated with negative aspects of parenting including demeaning, embarrassing, physical punishment, authoritarianism, demandingness, and rejection (Assaad, 2023; Mills, 2003; Mintz et al., 2017; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005).

It is also predicted that there will be significant interactions between parenting styles and peer support in the second model. It is predicted that the regression weight of the interaction between parental responsiveness and peer support will be positive, indicating that at low levels of peer support, parental responsiveness and shame-proneness will have the strongest negative relationship, and that as levels of peer support increase, the negative relationship between parental responsiveness and shame-proneness will become less strong. For the interaction between parental demandingness and peer support, it is predicted that the regression weight will be negative, such that at low levels of peer support, parental demandingness and shame-proneness will have the strongest positive relationship, and that as levels of peer support increase, the relationship between parental demandingness and shame-proneness will become less strong. These interaction patterns will have small effect sizes. The hypotheses about peer support as a protective factor are drawn from patterns of changing relational orientation during early adolescence, when children's relationship with their parents tends to become more conflict-ridden and children instead turn to peers for support functions (Branje et al., 2012; Fuligni & Eccles, 1993; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Nickerson & Nagle, 2005). As social support has been shown in other populations to have protective effects against shame (Burns et al., 2012; Cabral & Pinto, 2023), it is predicted that it may have a protective moderating effect by reducing the salience of negative parenting in the development of one's self-conscious self-understanding.

Scholarly Merit

This study will expand knowledge in the field of emotional development by building a more robust understanding of interpersonal influences on self-conscious emotions in early adolescence. This will contribute to the broader theoretical framework of SCEs by showing how existing theories interact. This will be demonstrated by our integrated model of shame and guilt in which different parenting styles lead to different structures of value internalization, shaping children's tendencies toward global or specific attribution. In particular, the model will provide

evidence for how demandingness shapes stability attributions, such that high demandingness creates a broad sense of responsibility and causes children to perceive their failure as a violation of their full moral responsibility, while low demandingness creates a sense of less universal sense of responsibility, such that children may perceive their failures more individually rather than as a consistent pattern. Additionally, the model will provide support for how responsiveness shapes globality attributions, such that low responsiveness creates a globally negative self-image, leading children to more quickly attribute their failures to a wholly negative sense of self, while high responsiveness creates positive self-image, such that failures are more likely to be identified as specific occurrences rather than a reflection of an individual's entire self-worth. Together, parent-influenced tendencies toward attributions of stability and globality lend to tendencies toward either shame or guilt.

Our understanding of interacting theories will be further expanded by looking at the role of peer influence as it interacts with parental influence. During early adolescence, increasing focus on peer relationships over parental relationships leads both to the redefinition of standards, rules and goals central to one's moral framework (central to attribution theory; Lewis, 2016; Tracy & Robins, 2004), as well as the redefinition of valuable others (central to social adaptationist theory; Sznycer, 2019). In this way, social support networks allow one to restructure one's attributional framework to more closely align with their own preferences and shift away from shame to guilt. This model demonstrates a way in which adaptationist and attributional theories can be integrated to get a fuller understanding of self-conscious emotions.

This study will also expand our knowledge in the field of parenting psychology. By looking at how values are internalized as a result of different parenting dimensions, we can better understand the value internalization process and the interaction between value transmission and emotional profiles. The two dimensions of parenting style utilized in this study, demandingness and responsiveness, are widely recognized measures that have been used to isolate four parental categories: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and uninvolved.

These categories have been used in many types of parenting research, especially related to child attachment style, so by identifying their connection to self-conscious emotions, we can begin to tie self-conscious emotions into a wide range of research on parenting, thus increasing our understanding of the ties between parenting and emotions. These ties may also help us identify possible causal mechanisms within the studied relationships. It has already been demonstrated that attachment security is negatively tied to shame-proneness (Akbag & Imamoglu, 2010; Gross & Hansen, 2000), and it is possible that attachment may serve as a causal link between parenting behavior and self-conscious emotional experience, amongst other possible multi-variable relationships.

In addition to expanding knowledge about parent-child relationships, this study will offer important insight into the role of peers in development, particularly in the early adolescent age range. We know that this is a time of shifting parental relationships and increasing peer importance, and it is important to understand whether the impact of peers can be protective, and toward what end. This study could show us whether peer relationships can intervene to diminish negative parental impact, highlighting the positive side of peer gravitation in early adolescence.

Broader Impacts

Beyond its relevance within the field of academic psychology, this study also has the potential to positively impact greater society. In the critical period of transitioning relationships that occurs in early adolescence, it is important to know how to support struggling individuals. By better understanding how different important figures impact emotional wellbeing, counselors and other trusted mentors can trace emotional patterns through development, including as they relate to gender effects, and adapt their guidance to help youth focus on relationships that will be most emotionally beneficial to them. This could help improve individual or interpersonal therapy models. This information could also be transmitted directly

to parents via educational publications, classes, or parenting books, to help them adapt their style in a way that promotes positive outcomes.

The findings of this study may also help early adolescents themselves to bolster their understanding of the impact that social relationships have on their wellbeing and use this knowledge to reframe their self-evaluations, thus beginning to transform shame reactions into guilt reactions. Early adolescents could receive this benefit via online publications or socioemotional education curriculums. This is important because of shame's associations with increased risk behavior, decreased life satisfaction, and increased anxious and depressive symptoms. By providing these frameworks to help early adolescents shift to more adaptive self-conscious emotions, this study will help avoid these detrimental impacts.

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