

Shame expressions reduce the recipient's insult from outgroup reparations [☆]

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Abstract

Despite a growing literature on the consequences of group-based guilt and shame, little work has examined how expressions of self-conscious emotions are received by targets of collective wrongdoing. Two experiments tested the hypothesis that when an outgroup member offers apologies accompanied by reparations, the recipients are likely to take insult unless the outgroup member expresses the self-abasing emotion of shame rather than guilt. Experiment 1 showed that when reparations were offered, participants were less insulted by shame than guilt expressed by an outgroup member, rather than an ingroup member. Experiment 2 improved Experiment 1 by manipulating the culprit's action (reparation vs. withdrawal), and this experiment replicated Experiment 1's interaction on a measure of insult, but only when reparations were offered. These interactions on insult were not explained by the emotion's perceived intensity or surprisingness. Our results indicate a possible functional aspect of expressions of shame in an intergroup context. Self-abasement, as opposed to a mere admission of culpability and regret, can reduce the insult taken from an outgroup's reparations.

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Expressions of remorse for official and collective misdeeds have increased in recent years, leading commentators to describe the present day as an “age of apology” (Brooks, 2003). Recent examples include the State of Virginia's official apology for the past enslavement of African-Americans, South African ex-minister Adriaan Vlok's public washing of Reverend Frank Chikane's feet in contrition for crimes of the apartheid era, and the apologies offered by News Corporation for its plans to publish the ill-regarded O.J. Simpson book *If I Did It*. Often these apologies are accompanied by emotional expressions of sorrow, regret, guilt or shame, as well as by offers of restitution. This

research investigates the hypothesis that shame can be a more effective expression than guilt in reducing insult taken by wronged groups when such an offer of restitution is made.

The emotions that accompany apologies have been the subject of much social psychological research. Some studies have examined how guilt and compensation emerge as individual responses to evidence of being prejudiced (Monteith, 1993; Monteith, Ashburn-Nardo, Voils, & Czopp, 2002). Collective guilt can also be felt in response to injustices carried out by one's own group in the past, and can generate support for group-level compensation (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). Additionally, dominant-group guilt (e.g., White guilt) can arise when one's own group privilege is seen as illegitimate (Branscombe, 2002). From this research, it seems that eliciting guilt in the perpetrator may have positive effects on his or her actions, such as increasing willingness to pro-

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vide reparations (but see also Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006 for infrahumanization as a defense against guilt).

Such consequences are consistent with an extensive literature at the interpersonal level, in which guilt has been investigated in tandem with shame (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Research has built on the work of Lewis (1971) to propose a distinction between the two emotions. In this tradition, guilt involves an appraisal of the action's wrongness, and leads to the approach actions of reparation and apology. Shame, in contrast, involves an appraisal that one's core self is bad, and leads to avoidant or angry behavior. Research on individuals has generally shown that proneness to guilt is associated with empathy, whereas proneness to shame involves more painful emotions and accompanies social and personal problems (Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

Studies of vicarious guilt and shame for other group members' acts, too, show that shame hinges on the group's core essence while guilt hinges on personal responsibility (Lickel, Schmader, & Barquissau, 2004), although shame may also be a better motivator toward collective action than guilt (Iyer, Schmader, & Lickel, 2007). However, research on how interpersonal apologies are received has not generally observed distinctions among specific self-conscious emotions such as shame and guilt. In one exception, Proeve and Howells (2006) manipulated expressions of "remorse" (in this context, guilt and apology) versus shame attributed to an offender, but found no difference in effects of the two emotions. From the existing literature, then, it is not clear what role shame versus guilt expressions might play in the reception of an intergroup apology.

As mentioned, shame is acknowledged to lead to withdrawal action tendencies, often a less beneficial outcome for the wronged party than guilt's approach and reparative tendencies. However, emotions have multiple functions. Not only do they orient the individual toward action, but they also serve a function of social communication (e.g., Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Parkinson, 1996). With this in mind, guilt has been interpreted as signaling desire to reestablish an existing relationship (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994), whereas shame has been seen as serving a more general appeasement function (Keltner, Young, & Buswell, 1997). Likewise, in some evolutionary views, guilt functions to regulate reciprocal relationships, whereas shame regulates position in the social hierarchy (Gilbert, 2003), a view consistent with psychological views of shame that emphasize social judgment and exposure as elicitors (Smith, Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002). Even though constant proneness to shame may not be functional for an individual, the expression of shame in communication between individuals and groups does have a plausible function. In particular, when the behavioral outcomes of emotions are held constant, the communicative content of emotions should take center stage in explaining reactions to emotional expressions.

In the context of an offer of reparations, we believe that an expression of shame will be especially likely to overcome

the wronged party's misgivings about accepting handouts from an outgroup, and to mitigate the insult taken from compensation. It is important, however, to distinguish our prediction from other theoretical perspectives that might offer more general explanations why an outgroup member's shame might be better received than guilt. For example, simple derogation of the outgroup could lead to shame's absolute self-criticism being preferred over the more limited self-criticism in guilt. Likewise, as people generally prefer dispositional explanations for outgroup negative acts, and situational explanations for ingroup negative acts (Pettigrew, 1979), a preference for the "dispositional" shame emotion over the "situational" guilt emotion could be expected.

Our predictions, however, focus on the insult taken, rather than overall satisfaction or attitude, from offers of reparations. Because an offer of assistance from an outgroup implies that the group wants to approach and is in a position to be generous, it can evoke a negative reaction among people who mistrust the group's motives, especially when its status is seen as illegitimate or unstable (see Nadler & Halabi, 2006)—conditions especially likely to apply after a misdeed by the outgroup. Thus, an outgroup perpetrator who shows no remorse, or who expresses guilty feelings that preserve core self-worth and are more appropriate to a reciprocal relationship, risks arousing insult by offering compensation. However, when the emotion of shame is added to an offer of reparations, this negative reaction should be mitigated, because the reparations are accompanied by an assurance that they are given in a spirit of appeasement and self-abasement. While the alternative theories predict a general preference for shame in outgroup expressions that would extend to other measures such as satisfaction, our hypothesis states that, specifically when reparations are offered, an outgroup member's shame apology will lead to significantly less insult than a guilt apology or no apology, rather than greater satisfaction.

Experiment 1

Experiment 1 was an initial test of this hypothesis, manipulating expressions of emotion (guilt vs. shame), orthogonally with the group (ingroup vs. outgroup) of the company responsible, within a scenario of apology and reparation for an ecological disaster. We predicted an Emotion \times Group interaction on insult, such that a guilt apology would be more insulting than a shame apology only when coming from an outgroup, but no such interaction on satisfaction.

We also included measures of surprise and suspicion to guard against the possibility that incredulity at an unfamiliar combination of group, emotion, and action could explain any interaction among these factors. Finally, we measured how emotionally affected the perpetrator seemed, to see whether any interaction of group and emotion on insult could be explained by a tendency to see shame as stronger or more sincere than guilt.

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