

The Influence of Shame Management on Violence and Aggression of Female Juveniles

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ABSTRACT

This study will address shame management among female students ages 12 to 14 who bully. Data will be collected from 500 students, teachers, and parents in New Hampshire. The Management of Shame State-Shame Acknowledgement and Shame Displacement scale (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004), a Sociometric Status Assessment (Rabiner et al., 1993), and the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Howell, 1993) will measure shame management, identify students who are likely to bully and exhibit aggressive and violent behavior. Qualitative data will be collected from bullies using open-ended questions and from their parents through informal interviews. It is expected that Chi Square and Independent t-test analysis will suggest that both female and male student bullies will have poor shame management skills resulting from negative shaming from their parents. Additionally, poor shame management skills will be associated with aggressive and violent behavior.

Literature Review

Shame is an emotion of self-contempt that leaves individuals feeling exposed as defective in the eyes of others (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004, p. 270). In the social science discipline little is known about shame and its effect on behavior. It is suggested that a build up of negative emotions can result in a response of externalized anger and aggression among males (Brownhill, Wilhelm, Barclay, & Schmied, 2005). Vulnerable feelings can easily be masked by socially accepted behaviors of hypermasculinity (Brownhill et al., 2005). Other research has gone on to say that suppressing emotions of

shame, guilt, fear, and sadness can be the driving force behind violence when these feelings are displaced and projected onto others (Turner, 2007). Shame will often erupt into anger and disrupt social relationships (Turner, 2007, p. 511). Additionally, criminological research has indicated a relationship between shame, anger, and criminal behavior (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004). Findings from previous studies indicate that shame and the way shame is managed may be of importance when investigating aggressive, violent, and antisocial behavior. Since there has been a lot of focus on males and their experiences with negative emotions and behavior in past research, it may also be of interest to consider how emotions such as shame influence the behavior of females.

What causes aggression and violent behavior among females? Are there factors that are influencing female behavior that are different from those affecting males? Due to the reported rise in female arrest rates in recent decades, the investigation of the factors contributing to female aggression and violence is justified. According to the *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report* published by the U.S. Department of Justice, the proportion of female juveniles in the criminal justice system has increased between 1980 and 2003. In 2003, 29% of all juvenile arrests were female arrests, compared to 20% in 1980 (*Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report*, pg. 128). Female juvenile arrests have especially increased for assault offenses. For instance, female arrests for aggravated assault increased from 15% in 1980 to 24% in 2003 (*Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report*). Similarly, female arrest rates for simple assault increased from 21% in 1980 to 32% of all female juvenile arrests in 2003 (*Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report*). This increasing trend of

female juvenile crime is considerably notable since the rates of male arrests have remained constant over time (Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2006 National Report).

While there has been some research done on emotions, aggression, and violence, most literature has failed to touch on gender and shame. It is suggested that males suppress negative feelings that are thought to make them appear weak and vulnerable because our society socializes males to act a certain way; expression of emotion in ways that are not masculine is socially unacceptable (Brownhill et al., 2005). Other research points to the idea that social environments put individuals at risk for exhibiting antisocial behavior. There are certain social environments that perpetuate negative and harmful individual, familial, economic, and social circumstances; individuals who experience more of these stressors and risk factors are more likely to behave deviantly (Carr & Vandiver, 2001). The culture of some inner-cities is one of violence. Some communities have a street code of conduct that promotes and sanctions hypermasculinity, violence, and deviance (Stewart, Schreck, & Simons, 2006). The inner-cities' disproportionate prevalence of poverty, violence, juvenile deviance, unemployment, and over distribution of guns can evoke negative feelings among its residents. In a study conducted on urban youths, feelings of hopelessness were associated with physical fighting and the carrying of knives among female adolescents (Bolland, McCallum, Lian, Bailey, & Rowan, 2001). Exposure to violence in inner-city communities and exposure to family and sexual violence has been shown to be related to negative emotional responses associated with symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among urban adolescents (McCart, Smith, Saunders, Kilpatrick, Resnik, & Ruggiero, 2007).

Researchers who study juveniles could go on to say that those in inner-city communities are more apt to experience negative feelings (including feelings of hopelessness) because of their social toxicity, which in turn, cause youth to behave delinquently and violently (Bolland et al., 2001). According to Niehoff (2003), toxic interactions in social settings affect impressions of the world, and disrupt stress responses and distort threat perceptions. The result is an increase in the incidence of overly aggressive or fearful reactions, and this is especially true in situations involving maternal deprivation, childhood abuse, and witnessing violence (Niehoff, 2003). Violent responses and harm done to others is an indication of alienation (Morrison, 2006). It is possible that the emotional ramifications that go along with social alienation could involve poor shame management. A review of past literature could bring up the argument that violence and aggressive behavior could be an emotional issue, rather than a social and environmental one. Although there are disproportionate amounts of violence in inner-cities, violence can and does occur in other settings. Perhaps violence is so prevalent in inner-cities due to the greater likelihood of the prevalence of risk factors and stressors that result in emotional problems such as maladaptive shame management. Of the few studies that have been done on the topic of shame, aggressive behavior, and juveniles, several have been done within the context of bullying. Ahmed and Braithwaite (2004) looked at the relationship between self-initiated bullying and shame management among juveniles as being mediated through personality, family, and school related variables. Shame management was determined by whether or not feelings of shame were acknowledged or displaced. Results of the study found that those in the sample who self-initiated bullying were more likely than non-bullies to displace feelings of shame; that is, they were more

likely to externalize blame, have unresolved shame, have feelings of anger, and to displace their anger (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004). Those who bullied other students were also more likely to have family conflict, parents whose parenting styles involved stigmatizing shame, impulsive behavior, and negative perceptions of the school's ability to prevent bullying. Individuals who displace their feelings of shame and cannot feel shame for harming others will be at a greater risk of engaging in wrongdoing in the future (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006, p. 352). Although these results point to a relationship between shame management and the likelihood of acting aggressively towards others, they are somewhat limited. Bullying was determined by a single measure that did not indicate the severity or the level of violence involved. This measure also did not specify who the bullies were bullying. Additionally, the researchers did not differentiate their results in terms of gender. Therefore, it is impossible to make a statement as to whether or not shame management affect males and females differently in regards to their propensity to act aggressively or violently towards others. The aim of this present study is to expand upon and contribute to previous literature regarding shame by acquiring statistical support for the presence of maladaptive shame management among juvenile females who exhibit aggressive and violent behavior. This research will investigate different dimensions of shame management and examine maladaptive defense mechanisms that are used to resolve negative emotions. The second goal of this study is to evaluate the influence of shame on the behavior of females in comparison to shame's influence on the behavior of their male counterparts. The variables through which shame is influenced, including family, social, and peer relations, will also be considered with respect to both genders.

It is hypothesized that (1) feelings of shame will originate from family, social, and peer relations among juvenile males and females similarly, (2) shame management will affect the behavior of both male and female juveniles, and (3) maladaptive shame management will be associated with aggressive and violent behavior among juvenile females in a similar fashion that it is associated with the behavior of juvenile males. In addition, this study proposes to examine the relationship between the influencing factor of shame management and the expression of violent and aggressive behavior among female juveniles.

Method

Participants

Five hundred New Hampshire middle school students, their teachers, and their parents will be recruited to participate in the study. It is expected that the student participants will range in age from 12 to 14 years old. It is further expected that there will be equal numbers of males and females in the initial sample of this study. From the sample of 500 students we will create our sub-sample of interest consisting only of the students who bully other students. How this sub-sample will be divided by gender as well as its estimated size is unknown. Due to New Hampshire's demographics, it is expected that the majority of the sample will be Caucasian with a smaller proportion of representation from minority groups. Attempts will be made to include children from various socioeconomic backgrounds. We will use convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, to recruit our participants. We intend to incorporate in our sample any schools that will give us permission to collect data from their students and

teachers; we also intend on accepting the schools' voluntary and informed consent to participate until we reach our desired sample size. Our study's unit of analysis is individuals.

Measures

Shame and Shame Management. Shame and shame management will be measured quantitatively using the 80- item Management of Shame State- Shame Acknowledgment and Shame Displacement (MOSS-SASD) (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004) and qualitatively using an original 10 item measure . Shame management, referred to as the extent to which the emotion of shame is acknowledged or displaced by an individual when caught in the act of bullying another student and/or experiencing a shameful situation, will be assessed in terms of acknowledgement and displacement. Shame acknowledgement, as measured by the MOSS-SASD scale (Alpha reliability coefficient range: 0.88 to 0.95, Test Re-test Reliability range: 0.75 to .97), is defined as whether or not adolescents would feel shame, feel like hiding oneself, take responsibility, face up to other's rejections, and make amends if caught bullying another students in school. Shame displacement, as measured by the MOSS-SASD scale, is defined as whether or not adolescents would externalize blame, have unresolved shame, would feel anger, have retaliatory anger, and displace anger if caught bullying another student in school. The student participants in our study will be asked to answer ten questions in response to 8 scenarios describing school bullying incidents. Sample items include scenarios such as *"Imagine that you are left in the classroom alone with a student. You think that the teacher has gone and so you start teasing the student. Then you realize that the teacher is*

still in the classroom". Questions in response to scenarios like this will be questions such as, "Would you feel ashamed of yourself?" and "Would you feel like making the situation better?" Responses to these questions will be given in a "yes"/ "no" format.

Bullying-negative experiences with peers. In order to create a sample of students who bully other students, we will use a Sociometric Status Assessment measure (Rabiner et al., 1993). Looking at a class roster list, both students and their teachers will be asked to nominate three students who are "most likely to bully other students." This measure will include one item with a response of three nominations from each the student and teacher participants.

Aggressive and Violent Behavior. In order to measure the extent to which the students exhibit aggressive and violent behavior, the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Howell, 1993) measurement instrument will be used. The reported reliability of this measure of antisocial behavior is the following: Test-Retest Value range: 0.95 to 1.00, Inter-rater reliability range: 0.93 to 0.96, and Internal Consistency range: 0.78 to 0.97. The student participants will provide self-reports of their behavior on the CBCL's 140 item questionnaire in Likert scale format. To validate the responses of the students, the parents of the students will also be asked to complete a Parent format version of the CBCL. Both versions of this measure will also collect and report data about aggressive and violent behavior within the context of bullying.

Qualitative Data

Shame, Shame Management, and Bullying. In order to incorporate qualitative research into our research, we will be including qualitative open-ended questions as part of the students' questionnaires. We will be asking our student participants to provide

detailed written responses. Because our measurement instrument quantifying shame and shame management (MOSS-SASD scale) only allows us to gain an understanding of how students would act in hypothetical bullying scenarios, we will ask participants to write about a time when they actually bullied another student, if they felt ashamed of their actions, and how they handled their emotions. If they do not admit to bullying, we propose to ask them of a time when caught exhibiting shameful behavior.

The following open-ended questions will be asked of the students in a self-report questionnaire. They will be encouraged to answer openly and honestly. They will also be encouraged not to share their responses with any of their classmates. These open-ended questions are clear and unambiguous and do not involve sophisticated terminology that would confuse students or that would affect the responses. And we also plan on conducting a pilot study for the purpose of establishing reliability (e.g., internal consistency or test-retest or split-half) and validity (e.g., construct/criterion or face or content validity) of the instrument before we used it in our study.

- a. **Can you describe a time when you were caught and got in trouble for bullying another student?** *Please provide as much detail as possible.*
 1. Did you feel ashamed of yourself? Explain why or why not.
 2. Did you wish you could just hide? Explain why or why not.
 3. Did you feel like blaming yourself for what happened? Explain why or why not.
 4. Did you think that others would reject you if they found out what you did? Explain why or why not.
 5. Did you feel like making the situation better? Explain why or why not.
 6. Did you feel like blaming others for what happened? Explain why or why not.
 7. Were you unable to decide if you were to blame? Explain why or why not.
 8. Did you feel angry at this situation? Explain why or why not.
 9. Did you feel like getting back at the student? Explain why or why not.
 10. Did you feel like throwing or kicking something? Explain why or why not.
- b. **Can you describe a time when you were caught behaving badly and got in trouble for it?** *Please provide as much detail as possible.*
 1. Did you feel ashamed of yourself? Explain why or why not.
 2. Did you wish you could just hide? Explain why or why not.
 3. Did you feel like blaming yourself for what happened? Explain why or why not.

4. Did you think that others would reject you if they found out what you did? Explain why or why not.
5. Did you feel like making the situation better? Explain why or why not.
6. Did you feel like blaming others for what happened? Explain why or why not.
7. Were you unable to decide if you were to blame? Explain why or why not.
8. Did you feel angry at this situation? Explain why or why not.
9. Did you feel like getting back at someone? Explain why or why not.
10. Did you feel like throwing or kicking something? Explain why or why not.

Negative experiences with Parents. We will also be asking the parents of the student participants to consider a time when their child behaved in a negative way and how they reacted; we are interested in what they said to their child, what their emotions were, and the extent to which the parent-child relationship was affected. To obtain this qualitative data we will ask for parents to participate in informal conversational interviews.

The broader qualitative research question that we will be trying to answer in the interviews with the parents will be “Does parental shaming have an effect on the likelihood that a student will have poor shame management skills and, therefore, an increased probability of bullying other students?” Further, from the parents, we will already have the assessments of aggressive and violent behavior of their children and from the students we will have the results from the MOSS-SASD scale and their responses to the qualitative open-ended questions from their questionnaire. The interviews with the parents will allow us to see how parents react to occurrences of shameful behavior of their children and the extent to which parents shame their children in a positive or negative way. It could be that children develop their own shame management skills from the examples set by their parents. We are hypothesizing that the students who bully will be more likely to have poor shame management skills if they have

parents who shame them in ways that do not restore and maintain a healthy and supportive parent-child relationship.

Questions that will be asked of the parents will be divided into the following categories; Instances of shameful behavior exhibited by child, Parents' reaction, Child's reaction, and Affect on relationship. Sample questions that will be used to guide these interviews with the parents of students who bully will include the following: (1) Was there a time when your son/daughter behaved in a way that upset you or angered you? If so, what was your reaction? What was the outcome? Did you punish your child? How did your child react? and (2) After you reacted to your son/daughter's behavior, how did you feel the relationship with your child was affected? Did things go back to normal?

We chose to interview the parents informally in order to get more honest and open responses. We believed that if we had them simply provide written responses, we would receive limited data and also data that would be lacking in thick and rich detail and description. Asking questions in a way that forces the respondent to do most of the talking is best-suited for our inquiry. The topic of children behaving badly is appropriate for a casual and less structured conversation between a parent and researcher. Data will be recorded using field notes using prepared standardized recording forms to make note-taking easier. Note-taking will be done unobtrusively so that the respondents will not be uncomfortable or distracted. Taking notes during the interview may be the best option. Having a video tape or audio recording might make the parent participants nervous and hesitant about their answers to our questions. Writing field notes will allow us to make note of what the parents are saying and of any visual observations.

Alternatively, we chose not to interview the students because we thought that we would be more likely to get better responses if they were written. The students may be embarrassed and inhibited in their answers when asked by an unfamiliar adult about a shameful experience, especially when the experience was a time when the student was engaging in bullying behavior.

Procedure

Consent

Letters will be sent to superintendents of several New Hampshire middle schools in which they will be informed of the nature of this study and will be asked to allow their students and teachers to participate. There will also be letters sent home with each student agreeing to participate, and will also inform parents on the study's beginning date as well as asking for their participation. If the parents do not want their students or themselves to participate they must return the letter back to the school filling out a form prior to the scheduled start date indicating so, so that their child will not be in the room when the study is being conducted.

Data Collection

Participants whose parents have given consent and who themselves agree to participate will be administered the above measures in 1 hour sessions on three consecutive days. Data will be collected from students, teachers, and parents within a two-week period and will take place in the student's homeroom classrooms during the first period of each day; the interviews with the parents of the students who bully will be conducted in an empty classroom. Four classrooms from each school will be visited each data collection day by trained research investigators.

During data collection only the students participating in the study will be present and the other students whose parents did not give consent will be in neighboring classrooms doing their regular work. Seats will be arranged in rows with space in between each desk so the students are spaced out while filling out our questionnaires. At the beginning of each study, standard statements will be read to the participating classrooms, to inform the students of the study's intended directions, and to remind the students that their confidentiality will be kept. It will be clearly indicated that there are no right or wrong answers and to answer the questions as honestly as possible, and that the researchers are just interested on their perceptions about certain things. Data collection from the students will last only one week and for three days until all the students answered their corresponding questionnaires.

During the time the students are participating in data collection, their teachers will also be given a Sociometric Status Assessment questionnaire to fill out. Parents who consent to participation in this study will come to their child's middle school during the second week of data collection and will participate in the study in informal conversational interviews. These interviews, as mentioned in the *Measures* section of this paper, will provide us with more in-depth qualitative data. Due to the fact that most parents are working while their children are at school, their participation will start early in the morning before some parents need to leave for work.

Qualitative data will also be collected by having the children nominated by the Sociometric Status responses as students who are most likely to bully other students respond to the open-ended questions presented in the *Measures* section of this paper. The administration of these questions will take place after the quantitative questionnaire-data

has been collected from the initial sample of students. Informed consent will have to be given by both the students and their parents to further participate in this study's research. These qualitative questionnaires will be administered in quiet locations after school (e.g. a teacher's office or empty class rooms) by the researcher. There are no predictions on the division of gender within the subsample of students who bully.

During the first data collection session, students will be administered the Sociometric Status Assessment (Rabiner, et al 1993). During the second session, they will be administered the Management of Shame State-Shame Acknowledgement and Shame Displacement scale (Ahmed, et el 2004). During the third session, they will be given the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1993). During the first data collection period for the parents, they will be given the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1993) and qualitative interviews. For the first data collection day for the teachers they will be given the Sociometric Status Assessment (Rabiner, et al 1993). Qualitative interviews with the student bullies will take place during the second week of data collection.

External validity

Because we are using convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, our sample may not be representative of the larger population; our sample of students aged 12 to 14 who bully, may not be fully representative of the entire population of students that age who are bullies. Specifically, our sample of interest will be entirely of students who bully other students and we know that not all students aged 12 to 14 are bullies; therefore, our sample is not representative of all students in this age group. This technique was chosen because we do not know how many student bullies there actually are; we don't have advanced knowledge of the population. To make the sample more

representative, we could generate a large and more diverse sample in terms of demographics.

We may not be entirely confident in the ability to generalize our findings to other situations. We are looking at the likelihood of aggressive and violent behavior as a result of shame management skills within the narrow context of school bullying. While our study's sampling technique limits representativeness and generalizability, our findings could still be referred to when assessing anti-bullying programs in schools. Our findings could indicate that certain expressions of antisocial behavior in the form of bullying may be an emotional problem, a result of poor emotional management. Further, the generation of similar findings from replications of our study in different communities as well as with different age groups would enhance the external validity of the findings. While our research study is concerning cross-sectional data, future studies that involve longitudinal research may help to validate findings. Our research methods and measures will only be collecting data from our participants at one point in time. Alternatively, longitudinal data would incorporate the assessment of data collected over time and would provide a better understanding of how the variables being studied influence shame management over time and a better understanding of the associations between these variables.

Internal validity

Statistically controlling for individual temperamental/ personality characteristics in our data analysis will help to control for alternative factors that could influence our results; this would quantitatively remedy possible threats to the internal validity of our research. Alternative hypotheses could include the following; Individual temperaments and personalities could be responsible for aggressive and violent behavior and for the

probability that students engage in bullying behavior; The bullying behavior of peers could have an influence on students' violent and aggressive behavior and the probability that students will engage in bullying behavior; or Shame management skills may be a result of influences that are different for males and females, resulting in different reasons for aggressive and violent behavior and bullying. Other variables that we could not statistically control for would be mentioned in our limitations section of our research, indicating a direction for future research on our topic.

Triangulation (multiple methods), recording thick/rich detailed description in our interviews from which to draw conclusions from, and confidentiality will remedy possible threats to the validity of our research. Getting feedback from both fellow researchers and respondents will also help to validate interpretations of qualitative data in its hypothesized association with shame management and antisocial behavior. Negative case analysis could be an additional way to remedy possible threats to qualitative validity. This would involve taking into account any cases that do not fit our hypothesized association between negative parental shaming and poor shame management skills among students who bully others in school.

Expected Results

In order to test the hypothesis that male and female juveniles who have negative experiences with their parents and/ or peers will have poor shame management skills compared to adolescents who have more positive experiences with their parents and/or peers, a Chi Square for Independence test will be performed. It is expected that the students who are nominated by their peers as being bullies, who are categorized as being more likely to exhibit aggressive and violent behavior from the self-reported and parents'

reported responses on the Child Behavior Check List will be more likely to have poor shame management skills. These poor management skills will be evident in their MOSS-SASD scale responses and in their qualitative reports of bullying and/or shameful experiences expressed in their interviews.

To test the hypothesis that female and male adolescents who have poor shame management skills will be more likely to engage in bullying behavior than female and male adolescents who have better shame management skills, a Chi Square for Independence test will be performed. It is expected that the students who are more apt to displace their shame, as assessed by the MOSS-SASD scale, will be nominated by their peers and teachers as being students who are most likely to engage in bullying behavior. To test our third hypothesis that poor shame management will be associated with aggressive and violent behavior among juvenile females and males similarly, an Independent t Test will be performed. It is expected that students whose CBCL self-reports and CBCL parent reports categorize them as individuals who express aggressive and violent behavior and who bully others will be more likely to displace shame (as measured by the MOSS-SASD scale).

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