

Constructive or Destructive? A Dual-Pathway Model of Shame

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Abstract

Shame is a quintessential self-conscious emotion that exerts significant influence on individual behavior and psychological developmental outcomes. Simultaneously, shame constitutes an exceedingly important moral emotion within traditional Chinese culture, regarded as a crucial pathway for self-reflection among Chinese individuals. However, contemporary perspectives on the orientation of shame present two diametrically opposed viewpoints: Does shame lead to constructive or destructive outcomes? Theoretical models encompass: first, the destructive orientation of shame, with corresponding theoretical explanations including the social threat defense model, shame regulation model, etc.; second, the constructive orientation of shame, with corresponding theoretical explanations including the evolutionary psychology perspective and functionalist perspective, etc. Both perspectives have garnered substantial support from empirical research. To reasonably explain this divergence and systematically comprehend the action mechanisms elicited by shame, this paper proposes a dual-pathway structural model of shame, emphasizing the pivotal role of social self-threat appraisal therein. Future research necessitates the development of more objective and comprehensive measurement methods for shame, investigation of influencing factors of social self-repair based on cultural differences, understanding of the interpretation of shame across societies with different cultural backgrounds, and consequently, the proposal of more targeted intervention methods to facilitate the transformation of potentially destructive outcomes of individual shame toward constructive directions.

Full Text

Preamble

Constructive or Destructive? A Dual-Pathway Model of Shame

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Abstract: Shame is a quintessential self-conscious emotion that plays a significant role in individual behavior and psychological development outcomes. As a vital moral emotion in traditional Chinese culture, shame is considered an essential pathway for self-examination among Chinese people. However, current perspectives on the nature of shame present two diametrically opposed views: Does shame lead to constructive or destructive outcomes? Theoretical models fall into two camps. First, shame as destructive, exemplified by the social threat defense model and shame regulation model. Second, shame as constructive, represented by evolutionary psychology and functionalist perspectives. Both viewpoints are supported by substantial empirical evidence. To reconcile this divergence and systematically understand the mechanisms of shame-induced action, this paper proposes a dual-pathway structural model of shame, highlighting the critical role of social self-threat appraisal. Future research should develop more objective and comprehensive shame measurement methods, examine factors influencing social self-repair across cultural contexts, and understand how different societies interpret shame. This will enable the development of more targeted interventions to facilitate the transformation of shame's potentially destructive consequences into constructive directions.

Keywords: shame; social threats; functionality

Shame represents an indispensable moral emotion in Chinese Confucian tradition, regarded as a crucial mechanism for self-reflection (Geaney, 2004). The Analects state: “When inward examination reveals no guilt, what worry or fear can there be?” —suggesting that freedom from shame leads to tranquility. Yet this view faced vigorous criticism in late 20th-century psychology. In Hawkins' (2013) energy hierarchy theory, shame occupies the lowest level, described as akin to “suicide of consciousness.” Some researchers have called shame “one of the most powerful, painful, and potentially destructive experiences known to humans” (Gilbert, 1997). Its impact on psychological functioning spans cognition, behavior, and emotion, operating continuously at individual, interpersonal, and cultural levels (Lewis, Alessandri, & Sullivan, 1992; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Early definitions focused primarily on phenomenology. Lewis et al. (1992) defined shame as negative feelings arising when individuals evaluate situations and their overall self against internalized standards, rules, and goals. Tangney (1999) viewed shame as a sense of worthlessness following perceived damage to self-image after failure or moral transgression. Most definitions converge on self-evaluation and self-feeling.

A frequently confused concept is guilt. Although both arise from self-related negative behaviors, their evaluative targets differ: shame focuses on global self-devaluation, while guilt centers on specific actions (Tangney, Stuewig, & Martinez, 2014). To distinguish them conceptually, Tangney et al. (2014) described shame versus guilt as “I am a bad person” versus “I did a bad thing.” Thus,

shame originates from perceived devaluation of the entire self (Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

Conceptual variations aside, shame's behavioral outcomes remain unsettled. Over the past two decades, extensive empirical research has yielded contradictory findings. Studies on shame's negative consequences have even demonstrated its severe impact on Chinese psychological development (Guo & Li, 2017; Wang & Qian, 2010; Wang et al., 2019), contradicting Confucian interpretations. The opposing camp argues that shame can be constructive, fostering interpersonal harmony and self-change (Brown & Cehajic, 2008; Gausel & Brown, 2012; Lickel et al., 2014). Researchers have proposed valuable theoretical models for both perspectives, yet these frameworks rest on contradictory premises that cannot fully explain diverse phenomena. The fundamental question remains: Is shame inherently destructive or constructive? Or are there alternative pathways? This paper systematically reviews both constructive and destructive aspects of shame to develop a clearer, more explanatory, and reasonable theoretical model, while proposing directions for future research. Studying shame deepens understanding of Chinese psychological development within cultural contexts and offers insights for preventing its destructive consequences.

2 Shame as Destructive

The view of shame as destructive has gained increasing support with the rise of self-conscious emotion research. Since the 20th century, many researchers have shifted focus from basic to self-conscious emotions, with shame receiving particular attention. Studies show that shame triggers negative motivation, disrupts ongoing activities, impairs clear thinking and expression, and undermines psychological health (Lewis, 1992). Interpersonally, shame correlates with social avoidance and inhibited social interaction (Haidt, 2003), while manifesting in daily emotional behavior as blame, anger, and aggression (Tangney, 1991; Tracy & Robins, 2006). Highly shame-prone individuals also exhibit addiction and substance abuse problems (Randles & Tracy, 2013). Research with prisoners indicates that shame scores positively predict recidivism (Hosser, Windzio, & Greve, 2008), and adolescent studies find shame positively correlates with physical aggression and frequency of shame experiences over three months (Aslund et al., 2009). Rising shame during adolescence also exacerbates mental health risks (Kessler et al., 2015). As a potential emotional mechanism, shame can cause peer harm (Irwin, Li, Craig, & Hollenstein, 2019).

Shame also relates closely to psychological problems including eating disorders and PTSD (Beall & Tracy, 2017; Cunha et al., 2012; Porter, Zelkowitz, & Cole, 2018). Highly shame-prone individuals experience more anxiety and paranoid thoughts (Gilbert, 2000; Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, 1992). Tangney (1995) demonstrated clear links between shame-proneness and depression. Overall, shame not only disrupts interpersonal coordination and social adaptation but also poses significant threats to physical and mental health. The most influential explanations for shame's destructiveness are the social threat defense model

and the shame regulation model.

2.1 Social Threat Defense Model

The social threat defense model explains how shame triggers aggression through a psychological-biological chain. Shame typically involves feelings of shrinking or smallness and exposure before real or imagined audiences (Tangney, Niedenthal, Covert, & Barlow, 1998). Elison, Garofalo, and Velotti (2014) proposed this chain linking shame to aggression. First, individuals perceive social threats such as personal devaluation and status loss (De Wall, Anderson, & Bushman, 2011; Elison, 2005; Leary & Guadagno, 2011; Weisfeld & Dillon, 2012). Second, these threats challenge fundamental belongingness needs (De Wall et al., 2011). Third, when satisfied belongingness needs are deprived by shame-induced threat, intense negative emotions like inferiority emerge (De Wall et al., 2011). Fourth, shame's social threat and associated negative emotions produce not only emotional but also physical pain (Eisenberger, 2011; Elison, 2005). Fifth, both types of pain can trigger anger (Berkowitz, 2012). Finally, anger likely activates outward aggression in daily situations (Berkowitz, 2012). This chain explains why research consistently shows shame experiences eliciting violent and aggressive responses, with social threat—whether real or imagined—as the primary factor. Lynd (1961) noted that shame can arise from threats to emotional connections or from an “inner theater” where individuals view their social image from others' perspectives. Gilbert and Miles (2002) similarly proposed that shame can be an internal experience involving involuntary defensive responses to threat, or an actual experience of social rejection or devaluation where individuals feel they have lost social attractiveness and must demonstrate strength (Gibbard, 1990). Social threats include temporary or permanent loss of social attention, benefits, and status, leaving individuals without perceived social support and feeling permanently deprived of positive self-goals (Kurzban & Leary, 2001). When individuals sense their identity is tainted, they adopt defensive measures to avoid shame, including destructive behaviors like blaming others, anger, and aggression (Tracy & Robins, 2006). Experimental results show social rejection and shame reduce positive self-regulation while increasing anger and aggression (Jones & Elison, 2013). At the neurological level, social rejection triggers physical pain, which can provoke anger (Eisenberger, 2011). Berkowitz's (2012) model demonstrates close links between physical pain and anger, with defenses against both being rapid and automatic, disrupting cognitive resources necessary for behavioral regulation even without conscious response. These findings provide strong support for this psychological-biological chain.

2.2 Shame Regulation Model

The shame regulation model complements the social threat defense model by addressing how destructiveness can be self-directed. Nathanson (1992) clarified four shame coping styles and their relationships to negative outcomes, arguing that hostility toward others and psychological pain directed inward both

reflect emotion dysregulation rather than shame itself. Nathanson (1992) proposed four defensive tendencies: attacking others, attacking self, avoidance, and withdrawal. Attacking others involves demonstrating strength to resolve identity discrepancies, typically by externalizing shame into anger and verbal or physical aggression while denying shame's existence. Attacking self includes self-directed anger and self-blame, with most depression-related cognitive processes falling here, explaining high correlations between shame-proneness and depression (Kim, Thibodeau, & Jorgensen, 2011; Paulus et al., 2016). In this mode, shame information is internalized, accepted, and amplified, leading to loss of control and power. Avoidance involves denying or reducing awareness of shame-induced emotions, often manifesting as excitement or happiness, with tendencies to prevent self-awareness of shame and reject responsibility. Withdrawal means removing oneself from shame-inducing situations or minimizing contact with them, involving sadness, fear, and anxiety, with tendencies to retreat or hide to limit further shame exposure (Elison, Lennon, & Pulos, 2006a). These four coping styles have received empirical support and form the basis for shame measurement scales (Elison, Pulos, & Lennon, 2006). Withdrawal's relationship to shame is validated through its close ties to social isolation and social anxiety (Harder & Greenwald, 1999). Self-attack manifests as negative self-judgment and self-criticism (Elison et al., 2006), while attacking others is supported by studies on anger, domestic violence, and prisoner recidivism (Hosser et al., 2008; Kaplenko, Loveland, & Raghavan, 2018). Shame's connection to avoidance appears in the dissociation subscale of self-conscious emotion tests (Stromsten, Henningsson, Holm, & Sundbom, 2009).

2.3 Summary

The social threat defense model emphasizes defensive responses to social threat, outlining a linear process from shame through pain and anger to aggression, with physiological explanations for how anger triggers attack behavior. Nathanson's shame regulation model, from an emotion regulation perspective, shows four post-shame coping styles, suggesting shame's link to psychopathology and aggression reflects dysregulation rather than shame itself.

3 Shame as Constructive

Some researchers argue that shame's positive adaptive potential is often overlooked, as it can motivate prosocial behavior to restore threatened self-image (De Hooge, Zeelenberg & Breugelmans, 2011; Gausel, Leach, Vignoles, & Brown, 2012). Evolutionary theory views emotions as adaptive mechanisms coordinating physiological and psychological responses to events, with shame being no exception (Beall & Tracy, 2017). Functionalists believe shame enhances social acceptance by helping individuals gain approval and maintain social status (Tracy & Robins, 2004a). Two experiments found most shame-experiencing individuals prefer interaction over avoidance, suggesting shame primarily motivates social approach (De Hooge, Breugelmans, Wagemans, & Zeelenberg, 2018). Gib-

son (2019) argued shame can be a powerful component of social work practice, usable to effectively change others' behavior. Because individuals strongly desire to avoid shame's pain, it motivates compliance with self-prescribed norms for adaptive purposes (Muris & Meesters, 2014).

3.1 Evolutionary Psychology Perspective

Many scholars explain shame's constructive meaning through evolution. Emotions evolved to serve human survival and reproduction, which are intimately tied to group social relations (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Keltner & Gross, 1999). Emotions are coordination mechanisms whose evolutionary function is to orchestrate physiological and psychological programs to solve specific adaptive problems (Al-Shawaf & Lewis, 2017). Evolutionary theorists argue shame likely evolved through natural selection to serve adaptive functions for human survival (Fessler, 2007; Gilbert, 2007). Shame was crucial for human ancestral groups' survival, enhancing reproductive success.

Sznycer et al. (2012) identified shame as a functional mechanism that inhibits decisions potentially lowering one's value in others' eyes. Ancestors' harsh environments demanded careful partner selection and efficient resource use, creating risk of group exclusion (Fessler, 2004). Thus, while shame appears as self-blame for errors, its evolutionary root is helping humans perpetuate genes and maintain fitness. To receive help, individuals must optimize external evaluations to avoid exclusion, and shame corrects behavior to prevent becoming worthless in others' eyes (Fessler, 2007). Shame motivates avoidance of value-reducing behaviors and concealment of harmful information. When encountering self-threatening information, individuals display compliance and appeasement, increasing cooperation (Sznycer et al., 2016). Shame evolved to protect social relationships, fulfill belongingness needs, and maintain interpersonal harmony. Evolutionary research suggests shame serves within-group cultural consistency and solidarity. Shame can be triggered whenever negative evaluation by others or groups is possible. Individuals with sexual attractiveness, strength, and high status feel less shame as they receive group validation more easily, but after shame experiences, compliance and cooperation become attempts to seek recognition (Sznycer et al., 2012). In essence, shame reminds individuals about current behavior while influencing future actions. Shame genes easily activate after negative events because they help avoid social punishment (Jaffe, 2008). If shame preempts social punishment, associated costs remain minimal. Thus, in real social contexts, when individuals sense self-crisis, shame likely persists and positively influences relationships through cooperation and interaction, transforming shame experiences into more agentic activities (Sznycer et al., 2016).

3.2 Functionalist Perspective

Functionalism emphasizes positive self-views and shame's constructive role in maintaining group cohesion. Having a positive self-view is among humans' most fundamental motives (Alexander & Knight, 1971), largely derived from social

belongingness (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), aligning with evolutionary theory. Functionalists believe all emotions serve functions, revealing what matters to the self and giving life meaning. Unlike evolutionary theory, functionalism acknowledges shame's positive meaning while specifying conditions for negative behavior. Though shame arises from perceived discrepancies between current and ideal selves and is generally considered negative, like fear—which prevents dangerous behavior or enables rapid escape but causes problems when chronic—shame's outcomes require a dialectical perspective. Functionally, individuals first attempt restoration to satisfy positive self-view motives, but when repair seems too difficult or risky, they shift to more protective actions (De Hooge, Zeelenberg, & Breugelmans, 2010). Functionalism affirms shame's inherent constructiveness; destructiveness results only from situational catalysts.

Shame serves social purposes including alerting individuals to status threats (Elison, 2005; Scheff, 2000), promoting value maintenance (Braithwaite, 1989; Scheff, 1988), and reducing interpersonal distance through heightened self-awareness (Probyn, 2004). Increasing research shows shame motivates approach behaviors like prosocial and compensatory actions (De Hooge, Breugelmans, & Zeelenberg, 2008; Tangney et al., 1996). The self-threat in shame may signal the need to approach others to protect social group belonging, making shame's social function the regulation of interpersonal relationships and cultivation of group bonds to prevent exclusion (Jacquet, Hauert, Traulsen, & Milinski, 2011). Shame also motivates restoration of damaged self-views through social activities or skill development (Lickel et al., 2014). Shame emerges when individuals who typically evaluate themselves positively encounter discrepancies. Contrary to traditional views, functionalism sees shame as preventing self-inflation rather than affirming negative moral evaluation, providing an introspective framework that guides future behavior (Leeming & Boyle, 2013). According to emotional feedback theory, individuals learn from shame experiences to predict future emotional reactions and decide appropriate conduct (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). This is frequently applied in collectivist cultures, confirming Confucian views of shame as essential for self-examination. In Japan, shame expression is encouraged as key to self-improvement (Heine & Lehman, 1999). Interpersonally, shame motivates reconciliation and reparation after conflict, including apologies and compensation to affected parties (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014; Gausel et al., 2012), enhancing adaptation and bonding. Children experiencing higher shame in hypothetical scenarios show more frequent prosocial behavior, with peers and teachers rating them as more approach-oriented (Olthof, 2012).

3.3 Summary

The evolutionary perspective suggests shame helped ancestral groups survive, persisting across cultures as a protective mechanism that deters value-reducing decisions and enhances reproductive success. Functionalists oppose social threat defense theory, arguing shame is inherently constructive, promoting self-change and interpersonal coordination. Destructive outcomes only emerge from re-

peated shame experiences or when social image repair risks exceed individual capacity.

4 Dual-Pathway Structural Model of Shame

As shame research deepens, the divergence becomes clearer: one side supports a linear process from shame through social threat to psychological/physical pain, anger, and aggression, or attributes destructiveness to dysregulated coping. The other side supports shame's inherent constructiveness in promoting adaptation and self-improvement. This raises a critical question: What kind of emotion is shame? Previous models attempted to resolve conceptual contradictions but made distinguishing destructive from constructive shame more difficult. As a self-conscious emotion, shame cannot be simply defined as good or bad. Heninger and Harris (2014) argued that emotional outcomes depend on situational context rather than inherent valence. Rather than resolving conceptual disputes, integrating existing theories to identify determinants linking shame to behavior would better advance research and applications. This study conceptualizes shame as simultaneously potentially destructive and constructive, analyzing it within social contexts and proposing a behavioral orientation model with social self-image threat appraisal as the branching point [Figure 1: see original paper].

4.1 Conditions for Shame: Self-Society Interaction

Self-focus is necessary for shame's existence (Scheff, 2003). While most emotions can arise from internal processes or external environments, Cooley's (1922) "looking-glass self" implies shame's social nature, comprising three processes: (1) imagining how one appears to others, (2) judging that imagined appearance, and (3) experiencing shame. Thus, negative self-perception in others' eyes is shame's root (Goffman, 1967). Information threat theory similarly posits that shame arises from encountering or perceiving negative information about how others view the self (Sznycer et al., 2016). Shame exists within a bidirectional self-society interaction where self-awareness activates self-representation and compares actual self against ideal states. Across intensity and duration, shame shades into "embarrassment" (low intensity, brief), "shame" (intense, enduring), and "humiliation" (more intense, longer-lasting), but all stem from social relationship threats (Scheff, 2000).

Social self-image threat is shame's product from self-society interaction. The social self—one's social value and status—is perceived both before and after shame experiences. Achieving status and acceptance is crucial for survival and reproduction, making the self or identity worth protecting, with self-conscious emotions like shame serving as tools for this purpose (Scheff, 2003). Goffman (1955) noted that every social act risks public censure or face loss, with rejection as shame's external danger. Research reveals specific psychobiological patterns in shame, where serious social self-threat increases proinflammatory cytokine and cortisol activity concurrently with shame (Dickerson, Gruenewald, &

Kemeny, 2004). Threats to social self enhance feelings of low social value (Grune-wald et al., 2004). To protect social self, individuals can influence observers to achieve adaptive goals, such as limiting negative self-information spread to prevent devaluation (Sznycer, 2018). Thus, shame forces confrontation with perceived social threat, driving cognitive appraisal of threat reparability (Scheff, 2003). Social survival requires attention to bidirectional self-other evaluation, prompting analyzed action for optimal outcomes (Lewis, 1992). Shame correlates highly with social evaluation, whether real or perceived, threatening the social self. Leach and Cidam' s (2015) meta-analysis indicates that when social image is easily repaired, shame more likely motivates social approach; when reparability is low, shame correlates negatively with approach.

4.2 From Shame to Behavior: Dual-Pathway Process

Research reveals a key distinction between shame leading to avoidance versus social approach. Studies show shame relates to either approach or avoidance tendencies (Frijda, Kuipers, & Ter Schure, 1989; Scherer & Wallbott, 1994; Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996; Wicker, Payne, & Morgan, 1983), with only avoidance causing negative outcomes (Gausel & Leach, 2011; Muris & Meesters, 2014). Many studies include avoidance items in shame scales, bi-asing conclusions toward negative consequences (Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011). However, not all shame produces avoidance. Hooge et al. (2018) gave participants choices between social and nonsocial situations, finding most shame-experiencing participants chose social interaction, indicating shame motivates approach rather than avoidance. Although many researchers believe shame triggers social avoidance (Keltner & Harker, 1998; Lewis et al., 1992; Tangney, 1992), shame can also motivate interpersonal approach (De Hooge et al., 2008; Gausel & Leach, 2011; Gausel et al., 2012). Furthermore, while shame correlates with depression and eating disorders, scales excluding avoidance items show no such correlations (Allan, Gilbert, & Goss, 1994). Shame' s outcomes thus depend directly on whether individuals generate avoidance or approach tendencies, producing opposite results.

Hooge et al. (2008) proposed that restoration motivation emerges when shame is mild, attempting to repair threatened social self through prosocial or self-change behaviors like performance-oriented situations or remedial action. Strong avoidance stems from self-protection motivation: when social self-image repair seems difficult or dangerous, additional failures would further harm the self, prompting withdrawal to protect the threatened self from further damage (Hooge et al., 2011). Thus, cognitive appraisal of potential harm and reparability determines which motivation and action follow, creating shame' s two opposing pathways.

5 Conclusion and Research Directions

“Without a sense of shame and dislike, one is not human.” Shame' s importance in Chinese culture connects to Confucian social morality, forming the foundation of moral development and conscience (Geaney, 2004). When contradictory

results emerge, comprehensive understanding is needed. Previous research focused on shame's definition and its distinction from guilt, which cannot explain current contradictory findings since shame links to both externalizing and internalizing aggression, yet also promotes prosocial behavior and self-change (Lickel et al., 2014; Stuewig et al., 2015; Tracy & Robins, 2006; Weingarden & Renshaw, 2015). Reconciling this contradiction requires shifting focus to mediating processes between shame and behavioral outcomes and considering effective interventions. This paper integrates both perspectives, conceptualizing shame as simultaneously potentially destructive and constructive. As a self-conscious emotion, shame is inseparable from self and others, with social self-threat perceived before and after shame experiences. Appraisal of potentially illusory threats motivates repair or self-protection, triggering divergent behaviors. The branching point is social self-reparability. Future research should empirically investigate factors affecting social self-reparability across cultures and develop interventions, rather than remaining mired in conceptual debates.

5.1 Model and Measurement Improvements

Although Nathanson (1992) proposed shame regulation forms, they focus on negative regulation, contradicting current findings. Some researchers have explored expanding this model's positive aspects (Wang & Sang, 2019), but 完善ing it requires extensive exploration. Positive regulation of shame is crucial for understanding internal and external factors in social self-threat repair. Future research should construct positive aspects of shame regulation based on this model for deeper, comprehensive understanding, helping individuals recognize constructive possibilities beyond shame's destructiveness, enhancing self-efficacy for social self-threat repair, and promoting social approach.

Shame measurement also lacks comprehensive investigation. Scales ignoring social approach tendencies have created research 分歧, such as the Guilt and Shame Proneness scale (GASP), which dichotomizes guilt-repair versus shame-withdrawal, implicitly denying shame's potential for social self-repair (Cohen et al., 2011). Some experimental studies place participants directly in social situations without offering choice between avoidance and approach, focusing only on final outcomes (De Hooze, 2014). Future measurement must incorporate both subjective and social factors comprehensively and define shame within indigenous cultural contexts. Shame's behavioral mechanisms are complex, requiring multifaceted considerations for effective measurement.

5.2 Social Self-Image Repair

Beyond understanding shame's 内涵 and developing better measures, systematically investigating factors affecting social self-reparability is crucial. Early research identified whether shame content is publicly acknowledged as influential. Lewis (1995) found that unrecognized shame-anger cycles create lasting hostility and interpersonal distance, while acknowledged shame maintains relationships. Lynd (1961) similarly noted that admitting shame strengthens relationships,

whereas denial causes alienation. Unacknowledged shame becomes suppressed, creating a “shame-anger” cycle with negative outcomes. Conversely, socially validated shame content facilitates adaptation and coordination.

Personality factors like self-esteem and self-compassion also influence reparability appraisals (Cândeia & Szentágotai-Táatar, 2018; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Individuals with high self-evaluation who perceive social self-threat may respond with hostility (Heatherton & Vohs, 2000), reducing perceived reparability. Social status also affects judgments about threat reparability (Gruenewald, Kemeny, & Aziz, 2006). Current research emphasizes shame’s consequences but lacks investigation of these mediating variables. Multifaceted empirical evidence is needed to inform interventions that transform shame’s destructive consequences into constructive outcomes.

5.3 Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Cultural differences are crucial in self-conscious emotion research. Whether shame is acknowledged relates closely to culture, and the shame-guilt dichotomy is culturally moderated rather than absolute (Sheikh, 2014). Western individualistic cultures emphasize guilt, viewing shame as private and concealed, rarely expressed (Sheikh, 2014). Collectivist cultures—including China, India, and Japan—emphasize social relationships and group solidarity, making shame acknowledgment a favorable path to repairing social self-image and promoting acceptance (Yakeley, 2018). In these societies, shame is seen as a prosocial means to enhance group cohesion and prevent social fragmentation. Cross-cultural shame phenomenology also reveals differences: in collectivist cultures, shame extends to close significant others (Fung & Chen, 2001; Swartz, 1988), affecting or arising from family members’ actions. Different cultural evaluation criteria affect shame experience and reparability appraisals. Future research must recognize that cognitive and behavioral patterns following shame may be culturally influenced and provide empirical evidence across cultures.

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