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Engendering Violence: Investigating the Impact of Gender and Masculinities on the Shame-Anger Dynamic.

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Traditionally, the emotion shame was thought to play an important role in mediating the social consequences of anger. Shame is commonly understood as an emotion that inhibits socially maladaptive behaviours, including aggressive responses (Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall and Gramzow, 1996). However, there is now converging theoretical, clinical, and empirical evidence that suggests that shame may *also* be involved in destructive conflict and motivating anger and interpersonal hostility and aggression (Lewis, 1971; Averill, 1982; and Tangney, Wagner, Barlow, Marschall & Gramzow, 1996).

For example, in her clinical case studies Lewis (1971) traced sequences of emotion back from the moment anger first appeared and found that shame, caused by either real or perceived injury or injustice, always preceded anger. Furthermore, Averill provided empirical evidence for a direct link between shame and anger, commenting that a common cause of anger among his participants was a loss of personal pride or self-esteem - very likely shame-related experiences (Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher and Gramzow, 1992). Shame has also been linked to anger arousal and associated with maladaptive and unconstructive responses to anger in numerous studies (Scheff, 1987; Tangney et al, 1992; Tangney et al, 1996; and Ferguson, Eyre and Ashbaker, 2000).

However, despite the alarming prevalence of violent male behaviour and the fact that quick resort to violence appears a matter of consequence, if not a cultural expectation, for lower socio-economic class men, the impact of gender and class-based masculinities on the shame-anger sequence is yet to be explicitly investigated. Providing an interdisciplinary framework which linked social psychology with feminism, sociology and politics, the research I conducted was designed to explore the role of shame in the origins of violence, focusing on the links between affective and cognitive factors as potential influences on aggression. In addition to this, the impact of gender and class-based masculinities on the cognitive, motivational, and behavioural elements of the shame-anger dynamic was explored.

The results yielded mix support for the hypotheses. Although, even though it was a small study and issues regarding the representativeness of each group constrain the generalisability of the results, three significant findings emerged. Firstly, the results broadly support the conceptualisation of shame and guilt as distinct affective processes with contrasting implications for anger-related behaviour. Secondly, in contrast to previous findings but informed by the theoretical rationale of the current study, the results provide sufficient evidence to caution against aggregating groups across lines of gender and socio-economic status in future research into the shame-anger dynamic. Thirdly, an Incident Analysis, which evaluated a situational episode of anger, provides further support for the causal role of shame in motivating anger.

This research, while exploratory and not without shortcomings, will provide the impetus for an exploratory discussion on the role of shame in destructive conflict and violence, and the differential impact that gender and masculinities may have on this relationship between shame and anger.