

# The Effects of Shame on Goal Orientation

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## Abstract

In 2010, researchers at Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce published projected workforce education needs in order to remain globally competitive. Finding ways to help students stay in college is needed. They argue that by 2018, the majority of all jobs will require a post-secondary degree, with most jobs requiring a bachelor's degree (4-year degree) or higher (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Yet, in 2011, more than a third of students dropped out during their first year of college. Only 53 percent of college students finished a four-year degree in less than six years, down from about 55 percent in 2006. If this trend continues, not only will there be a shortage of people with the education or training levels required for the types of jobs available in the marketplace, but also a shortage of lower-skilled work. In other words, there will be a mismatch between the required education levels of the jobs available and the potential workers.

Some emotions have been shown to predict academic motivation and goal-setting (Pekrun, Elliot, & Maier, 2009); however, affective states such as shame and guilt have received less attention. Students who perceive they are not performing up to standards may experience shame, which in turn could lead to school refusal and self-handicapping behaviours (Chen et al., 2009, Thompson, 1994). Yet, because shame is an internal, identity forming emotion, the experience of shame may be different as children age and develop a sense of identity (Wilson, 2001). This study aims to further elucidate the directionality of the link between shame and goal orientations through mixed methods research, while controlling for any differences in demographics such as age, gender, school year, and ethnicity. This link between shame and failure could be used to help explain why capable students stop trying or participating in school.

This two part study involved 113 British secondary school students, and investigated their reactions to a shaming experience. Participants were sampled from the year 7 (11-12) and the year 9 (13-14) classes. For the first part, all of the participants were given a series of vignettes in which they were asked to imagine a failure. Their responses to these vignettes were then surveyed. The participants were asked to rank the likelihood of emotion reactions, as well as what their future actions would be towards a task similar to the imagined failed task. A multinomial logistic regression was run on the survey data, using SPSS 16. Shame was found to be a significant positive predictor of avoidance, while approach was found to be a negative predictor of avoidance ( $r^2 = 0.365$ ,  $F = 30.80$ ,  $p < .000$ ,  $f^2 = 0.57$ ), controlling for gender, ethnicity and age (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
*Summary of logistic regression variables.*

Variables modelled in the equation: high avoidance			
Variable	Beta	p-value	Exp( $\beta$ )
Shame	1.16	.003	3.20
Approach	-2.04	.000	0.13
Variables not in the equation: high avoidance			
White	-1.44	0.12	0.24
Other	-1.47	0.21	0.23
Ethnicity			
Year	-0.50	0.46	0.61
Age	-0.19	0.48	0.83
Gender	-0.17	0.79	0.85

In the second study, issues with high intercorrelations between performance-approach and performance-avoidance were noted. In response, a new 3x2 goal orientation framework has been posited. This study examines this new framework using a multi-trait, multi-method (MTMM) confirmatory factor analysis ( $N = 201$ ) as a way to examine the differential effects of the two orthogonal scales. Instead of using two reporters, as in a traditional MTMM model, each item from the survey was loaded onto its two factors. The two parts of the goal orientation framework were then forced to be orthogonal, in order to look at the individual factors of each. Claims surrounding the effect of perceived competence on goal orientation are also examined. Perceived competence appears to have an effect on the levels of the different scale factors, but does not change the intercorrelations between approach and avoidance. Researchers should take care to measure or control for both scales simultaneously, in order to avoid confounding.

In sum, with both the survey and the interview data, a change in goal orientation following failure was noted. The survey data suggest that shame may elicit performance avoidance. However, the factor analysis suggests a new way of investigating goal orientation. The finding that shame predicted a threefold increase in future performance avoidance strategy, even after controlling for approach responses, gender, age and ethnicity, supports the hypothesis that there is a re-evaluation of goal orientations after a shameful failure.