The Bond Threat Sequence: Discourse Evidence for the Systematic Interdependence of Shame and Social Relationships

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During the last decade there has been increasing attention to “social affect” as a category of emotion strongly associated with the assessment, formulation, and management of social relationships. Social interaction is a continual achievement of social association. Consequently, there is a continual relevance during interaction for individuals to evaluate the quality of that association. A system of emotions devoted to the quality of “being social” may therefore be most visible when individuals encounter problems involving social relationships. Methods for examining the dynamics of social affect should also capture in detail their integration with the discourse in which they arise. Such methods, however, constitute an almost invisible fraction of the widening literature on social affect. By examining emotions and relationships as they occur, direct analysis of discourse allows exploration of social affect outside the confines of predetermined variables, scenarios, and participants’ self-reports on scales.

This chapter presents evidence of a systematic link between social affect and the quality of social relationships. Specifically, it tests and expands Retzinger and Scheff’s theory that shame represents a category social emotion dedicated to maintaining social relationships and sociality among individuals and groups. Methods for analyzing the integration of conversation with affect and relationships are presented and illustrated in detail, and applied to an interview setting in which participants explain their answers to a standard self-evaluation scale. Analysis of discourse found that participants often display in speech and gesture varieties of shame. This negative social affect is triggered when participants describe problems with social relationships and, often simultaneously, when presenting a negative impression of themselves to the interviewer. Participants manage shame by immediately reformulating their references to the relationship such that it appears less problematic. I refer to the regular association between relationship threat, shame affect, and its management as a bond threat sequence. The bond threat sequence is illustrated in detailed analysis of interview excerpts. Also presented is a test of the sequential relationship by context-sensitive content analysis and Markov chain modeling of transitional probabilities.
SHAME AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS.

The category of “negative social emotions” is potentially quite wide, judging from the proliferation of terms both clinical (such as “social anxiety”) and vernacular (such as guilt, embarrassment, remorse, or “awkwardness”). Retzinger and Scheff (Retzinger, 1991a, 1995; Scheff, 1990, 2000; Scheff & Retzinger, 1991) suggest that most if not all of these common terms for social affect are variations of a single category of emotion, which they refer to as shame or the “shame family.” The terms may be grouped by a mutual function. Scheff and Retzinger propose that shame and its complementary positive emotion, pride, serve to regulate social interaction in the interest of maintaining secure social relationships. Although guilt and embarrassment may be distinguished by common situations that evoke them and intensity of feelings (Tangney & Dearing, 2002), these classifications share relationship trouble as a common denominator. The claim that shame adequately designates a single system of affect is debatable; however, it serves as a starting point for exploring a systematic link between social affect and relationships.

Empirical studies conducted originally by H.B. Lewis (1971)—and developed by Retzinger (1987, 1991a, 1991b, 1995), and Scheff (1990, 1997)—suggest that emotion systems underlying the "shame family" of affect are constantly engaged in assessing, in some form, the quality of one's immediate or imagined relationships. Pride arises when one’s social relationships are secure; however, affect may go unnoticed if relationships are unproblematic. Troubles involving social association generally become a focus of one's attention, particularly when accompanied by overt feelings such as embarrassment, guilt, or remorse.

Several early researchers of social psychology noted, often only in passing, the association of shame and pride with an individual’s ubiquitous monitoring of self in relation to others (Darwin, 1872/1965; MacDougall, 1908; Lynd, 1958). Cooley (1902:184), in his concept of “looking-glass self,” suggested that shame and pride arise from seeing oneself from the viewpoint of others. Goffman (1959, 1967), made explicit the behavioral links between the “shame family” of affect and social relationships. Impression management, or maintaining “face,” depends upon sensitivity to deference, including subtle signs from the other of social status and mutual evaluation, such as the
duration of eye contact or pauses in speech. Indications of disrespect evoke feelings of embar-

ishment, a form of shame, and may mobilize negative attributions about the other. Goffman also demonstrated people’s efforts to hide signs of embarrassment and the wider social stigma associated with showing the painful effects of negative social evaluation.

This constant concern for the quality of relationships is a central premise of attach-

ment theory (Bowlby, 1988; Ainsworth, 1978; Main et al., 1985), which considers a minimal degree sociability and security in relationships to be as essential for adults as the primary attachments of infants to their caretakers. In the last two decades, numerous studies have shown the integral role of social attachment and related emotions in many aspects of life (Lewis, et al., 2000; Bradley & Cafferty, 2001; Thompson, 2000). Similarly, many approaches in psychotherapy stress the importance of the “differentiation” of self from others for emotional well-being, especially one’s family (c.f., Bowen, 1978).

THE SOCIAL BOND.

Retzinger and Scheff employ the term "social bond" to refer to the complex social-emotional systems surrounding the expression and experience of social relationships. They propose that the regulation of social distance is an active component of face-to-face social interaction, during which participants implicitly assess the quality of their mutual understanding, attributions of each other’s feelings, intentions, and signs of deference and status. Such assessments can also occur during private thought.

This emphasis on social association and evaluation as expressed during a course of action distinguishes the term social bond from “social relationship” or “social role,” which can apply to broader categories of association that persist across time and situations. For example, a person can describe to a therapist in general terms the relationship with his or her mother. The relevance of the social bond is evoked by the act of describing the relationship to the therapist. I refer to individuals “orienting to the social bond” to capture two forms of social association in this example. A social relationship as an object of reference serves as a direction for cognitive and emotional resources, evaluation, and a potential trigger for emotional response. Second, during
interaction one orient all topical references to other listeners. This ongoing relevance of managing the social bond with co-present others, that Goffman (1959) calls “presentation of self,” can occur simultaneously with the frequent references to self and other during everyday conversation. The empirical distinctions between both aspects of bond orientation are discussed below.

Orienting to either the social bond with the other or a bond as object of reference can be a source of trouble. Maintaining bond security requires balancing closeness and separateness among people. Movement during interaction approaching either extreme evokes strong affect and threatens the existence of that relationship. Individuals may perceive a threat to their social bonds when valued or desired relationships with other individuals or groups are too distant, or isolated. An individual, for example, may be rejected by a social group. More commonly, one encounters judgments, insults, disrespectful remarks, and other more subtle negative evaluations and attributions that may heighten one's immediate sense of “separateness” from others. Alternately, one may purposely distance oneself from others, for example, by blaming individuals or groups and becoming angry. Bonds that are too close may also be insecure. These “engulfed” bonds appear outwardly as intense attachment. People in engulfed relationships tend to conform to the “engulfing other” rather than emphasize their own needs, because their sense of self is dependent upon acceptance by the other. Those prone to engulfing others demand conformity as a sign of acceptance, and maintain a sense of emotional security by controlling others.

Close analysis of interaction in the study heretofore and elsewhere (Lewis, 1971; Retzinger, 1991a, 1995; Scheff, 1997; Fearon, 2001) finds that individuals tend to mobilize attention and action to even minor signs of bond trouble as though in anticipation of potentially greater threat. Threats generally evoke emotional response. Social bond threat predominantly triggers affect from the shame family, although other emotions (such as anger, fear, and grief) may also be associated with bond trouble. Shame can potentially be experienced as intensely negative or “painful.” More often, feelings of embarrassment or guilt are mild and transitory, yet may still be consequential to one’s perceptions and course of action.
Affect from the shame family involves both direct feelings and visible displays that communicate this family of emotions to others during social interaction. Many of the common terms included in the family of shame (such as embarrassment, guilt, and disgrace) vary in intensity and context, but share common nonverbal indicators. From her analysis of psychotherapy sessions, Lewis (1971) identified two ways patients expressed shame: overt and bypassed. Overt displays of shame include blushing, laughter—particularly giggling or “nervous” laughter, touching or covering the face, lowering the eyes, and quiet or rapid speech. Retzinger (1987, 1991a, 1995) describes these as "hiding" behaviors, by which one, in effect, withdraws from the other's direct scrutiny, and by implication, deflects attention from the threatening aspect of what is being said or done. Conversely, people may bypass shame by activities such as "tense" laughter, biting the lip, and rapid or stammered speech that distract from internal negative feelings by controlling overt signs of affect. Controlling outward displays of embarrassment or guilt also assists impression management.

Another feature of a threat is the mobilization of efforts to alleviate the threatening conditions, in this case, the problematic aspects of the current social bond. The findings reported herein suggest that individuals manage threats to the bond by shifting the way they refer to self and others, changing attributions about their isolation from, or closeness to, others. For example, one may acknowledge a mistake but then blame that error on others, or mitigate a negative self-evaluation with a more positive statement about oneself. This process of mitigating, repairing, or otherwise altering the conditions that produced bond threat I term reorienting the social bond.

Resolving the bond threat shifts conditions that evoke shame and may assuage negative feelings. This suggests that shame functions both in signaling social bond trouble and motivating its repair. Participants monitor, often unwittingly, each other’s emotional displays and gestures, as well as the content and implications of the discourse. When noticing signs of shame, embarrassment, or other discomfort in another, a participant may reorient the bond trouble by showing a perceived insult to be unintentional, mitigating a prior evaluation, or changing the topic. Thus, repairing bond trouble can be mutually beneficial. Ignoring the other’s display of shame may lead to
conflicts or other interpersonal trouble and may evoke other emotions, such as anger (Retzinger, 1991a, 1991b; Scheff & Retzinger, 1991). The remainder of this chapter presents a study in which social bond trouble and shame were found to occur in a characteristic pattern I refer to as the bond threat sequence, consisting of three components typically occurring in the following order: (1) a participant orients action or attention to a threatened social bond, (2) shame occurs with or immediately following this orientation, and (3) the participant attempts to reorient the bond and conditions of threat. Social bonds and shame are related systematically because problems in social bonds trigger shame, which participants manage by adjusting the bond.

The study was conducted in two phases: qualitative and quantitative. Each phase will be presented separately, the first describing in detail the methods for analyzing social bonds and shame, and applying the analysis to interview excerpts illustrating the bond threat sequence. The second section presents methods and the results of content analysis testing the sequential relationship of bond threat, shame, and reorientation.

PHASE 1: TESTING THE BOND THREAT SEQUENCE IN INTERVIEW SETTINGS — SOCIAL BOND ANALYSIS

Methods

Data and Procedures

The data discussed herein was originally collected in an exploratory case study examining the relationship of emotions and self-evaluation in discourse (Fearon, 1994). Two first-year university students were interviewed and videotaped, a male given the pseudonym “Darryl” and a female, “Jessie.” Each participant completed the Texas Social Behavior Inventory (TSBI) scale (Helmreich & Stapp, 1974) in which participants rate the degree to which responses to a variety of social situations are “characteristic” of them. In a structured interview based on seven of the TSBI questions, subjects were first asked to explain their choice for the written response to a scale question. They were then asked in prepared questions to recall and describe specific instances of problems with social situations like those in the inventory item.
The use of spontaneous assessments and life-history examples provide frameworks for participants’ self-evaluation and for describing potentially problematic social bonds. Although these two cases are not necessarily representative of a larger population, the observed phenomena are unlikely to be unique. The findings are consistent with Lewis’ (1971) studies of more than 100 psychoanalysis sessions, which share with the current study aspects of self-presentation and self-evaluation in an interview setting.

Conversation Analysis and Social Bond Analysis

The interviews were examined using two methods for analyzing recorded discourse in the moment-to-moment details of its production. Conversation analysis (Heritage, 1994: 233-292) was combined with methods for examining the integration of affect with interaction and participants’ ongoing management of interpersonal relationships that I call social bond analysis. This approach is based upon methods developed by Harrington (1990), Retzinger (1991a, 1995), and Scheff (1990, 1997). Both methods examine the details of recorded interaction to describe how participants bring forth organized courses of action and context oriented to each other. Conversation analysis focuses on procedures for making one’s relevant interests recognizable to others, projecting next actions, assessing quality of shared orientation, and adjusting to troubles. Of particular interest are sequentially ordered actions, such as questions and answers, in which a first action provides a context of relevance and accountability for next actions.

Social bond analysis proposes that, in addition to building utterances and a course of interaction with others, individuals continually identify, manage, and share orientation to relationships by direct and indirect references to self, others present, specific nonpresent others, and “generalized others” (e.g., groups and institutions, such as “the government”). Managing social bonds is concurrent with, and often accomplished through, other conversational procedures, such as asking questions. Because individuals must convey their orientation to others through their talk, prosody, and gestures, much of the process is available to empirical description. Individuals may also show orientation and adjustment to aspects of the bond of which they are unaware or do not anticipate.

Illustration of Social Bond Analysis
Methods for locating social bond dimensions of the interview discourse are illustrated in Table 3.1, in which the interviewer reads one of the items of the self-evaluation scale and the participant’s written response, and the participant answers by reframing the item as a personal trait. Transcript conventions of conversation analysis (Jefferson, 1984) are listed in the Appendix. The participant’s gestures are listed above the text where they occur.

Table 3.1. Excerpt 1. Jessie: “Master Situations”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Interviewer:</strong> Okay. Let’s go to number eight. U::m (1.0) I would descri:be myself as one who attempts to ma:ster situ:ations. (0.5) A:h You put number &gt;two not very.&lt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shakes head EL smile EC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jessie: N::o I don’t (0.2) &gt;°attempt° to&lt; {ma:(h)ster si(hh)tu:ations}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“I mean” (1.5) I&gt; (1.0) don’t thi:nk.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis begins by locating the social bonds to which participants orient within the given utterance. This is not a process of simply labeling “social roles,” such as “interviewer” and “subject.” Of interest, rather, is how participants both orient to and embody certain social associations through their actions, their contextual relation to surrounding talk, and especially any emotional responses these references apparently evoke.

Jessie, in her response, shows an orientation to two social bonds. First, she expresses a particular association with the interviewer through the act of responding. In the prior turn, the interviewer read one of the TSBI items and Jessie’s written response. The interviewer relies in part on Jessie’s recognition of how to be an interview participant when he uses the otherwise obscure reference “you put number two, not very.” By rephrasing the item as a statement about herself, Jessie is in effect “being” a participant in the interview by confirming the interviewer’s expectations. In the course of responding, Jessie orients to another social bond by making a self-evaluative statement from the abstract standpoint of “generalized others” who master situations.

A second task in analyzing social bonds is to locate indicators of the quality of association the participants express. An individual may make overt assessments of relationships in an utterance. More often, the quality of the bond is indirect and implicit
as actors orient to potentially assessable aspects of utterances and actions. The orientation of a given bond in an utterance can often be assigned a “direction” along a spectrum of negative or positive, threatened or secure, isolated or engulfed. There is no objective scale for assessing the quality bond orientation, and the researcher’s assignments are occasionally impressionistic. Evidence to support claims can, and should, be found in participants’ words, context, and gestures that indicate how participants overtly intend a reference to be understood by the interviewer, and any unintentional responses to bond orientation.

Jessie confirms the interviewer’s report of her written response, which maintains a positive face-to-face bond as interview participant. In agreeing, however, Jessie transforms “not very” into a characteristic of herself, stating overtly that she does not attempt to master situations. There are several indications that Jessie treats this self-evaluation as negative. From the contextual relevance, Jessie could likely guess that she has not given the preferred response to the TSBI question. The initial stretched “N::o” is a typical method of prefacing acknowledgment or admission of a fault. Jessie’s behaviors and prosody suggest a negative emotional response, specifically embarrassment, which is a form of shame, as detailed herein.

**Identifying Shame**

In addition to assessing relationship dynamics, social bond analysis focuses explicitly upon the relation of emotions and indicators of affect, and shame in particular, to talk and social bonds. Retzinger (1991a; 1995) compiled from her own and others’ research (Edelman et al., 1989; Ekman & Friesen, 1972, 1982; Gottschalk et al., 1969, Harrington, 1990, Izard, 1977; Lewis, 1971; Labov & Fanshel, 1977) a list of the verbal, paralinguistic, and gesture indicators of shame, presented in Table 3.2. Retzinger, following Lewis (1971), classifies most of the characteristic shame behaviors by function as either hiding, which is associated with overt expressions of shame, or self-control indicating bypassed shame. Verbal indicators include phrases and statements that imply underlying shame. Paralanguage includes such aspects of nonverbal manner as tone of voice, rhythm and regularity of speech. Gestures include facial expressions, gaze, and body posture.
This list of shame indicators is neither definitive nor necessarily complete. Some of the indicators may occur with other affect, or could occur for reasons other than underlying shame. Stammered and fragmented speech, for example, can occur when one searches for a word. While claims of a participant’s experience of emotions are necessarily speculative, admissible operative descriptions of emotions can be built from recorded, publicly observable indicators, provided the researcher can show their relevance to surrounding talk.

Table 3.2. *Verbal, Paralanguage, and Gesture Indicators of Shame*


1) **Blushing**
2) **Hiding Behavior**: covering all or part of face with hand (Edelman et. al 1989), averting gaze, lowering eyes or head
3) **Self Control**: biting or licking lips, pressing lips together, wrinkling forehead, fidgeting hands, feet, or whole body, masking behaviors such as false smiling (Ekman & Friesen 1982)


1) **Hiding Behavior** (with transcript markings)
   a) **Quiet voice**: (“word”) volume drops to almost inaudible level, articulation becomes lax or breathy.
   b) **Hesitation**: delay or drawn-out prefacing of sensitive or delicate topic
   c) **Self-interruption**: (word> ) abrupt halt of an utterance preceding a change or censoring of a topic
   d) **Pause**: (1.5) Silences of more than a second are generally marked when preceding a threat-relevant or sensitive topic
   e) **Rapid speech**: (>words<) making all or part of an utterance less intelligible by rushing or running together words.
   f) **Laughed words**: ( {words} ) spontaneous laughter or giggling surrounding words may indicate embarrassment, and tense laughter may mask shame or anger.

2) Control and disorganization of thought
   a) **Filled pauses**: frequent filling of pauses and lapses in speech with sounds such as “uh”
   b) **Irregular rhythm**: frequent halt and pauses giving a choppy quality to speech cadence
   c) **Stammer**: repeated words, syllables, consonants, and quick hesitations surrounding threat-relevant topics, sometimes making utterance incomprehensible
   d) **Incoherent speech**: rapid topic changes, incomplete topics, or other fragmentations of a topic, description, or narrative.


1) **Projection**: substituting reference to self with generic reference to person “you” or group such as “people,” disclaiming the experience as one’s own by shifting it to the generalized “other” (e.g.,”It just makes you feel kind of low.”) (Harrington 1992)
2) **Abstraction**: suppressing or mitigating direct reference to specific people and events by substituting generic references such as “they” or “it”, especially where use of pronouns is not conversationally relevant (i.e., when the recipient could not recognize the pronoun’s referent).

3) **Verbal withdrawal**: Shifting speech from full sentences and narrative description to short clauses, single words, minimal responses and long pauses.

4) **Fillers**: frequently interjecting utterances with phrases such as “you know” or “kinda like”, especially when use occurs with or increases during discussion of threat-oriented or sensitive topics.

5) **Code words**: references to feeling inadequate, awkward, ridiculed, socially isolated or vulnerable, “dazed”, empty or indifferent, c.f., Gotschalk et al.’s (1969) Shame-Anxiety scale.

In line 3 of the interview excerpt, indicators of shame surround Jessie’s reference to not mastering situations. There is a slight hesitation before “I don’t attempt”, lowered eyes, more rapid and quiet delivery of “attempt to”, and a slight laugh with the words “master situations.” These “hiding behaviors” are likely an overt expression of mild shame or embarrassment. It is not fully distinguishable whether Jessie responds to evaluating herself as not mastering situations or to making a negative impression with the interviewer for saying so. Both factors can contribute to the affect, however, the laughter in particular may be oriented to the interviewer by presenting an affiliative acknowledgement that her statement can have a negative interpretation.

**Identifying Reorientation of Social Bonds**

In line 4 of the excerpt, Jessie follows the reference “master situations” immediately with “I mean,” which prefaces a qualification of her prior statement. This is followed by a long pause of 1.5 seconds, after which “I don’t think” qualifies and mitigates the impression that she was presenting a definitive assertion that she does not attempt to master situations. Thus, Jessie’s words specifically address the problematic conditions in the social bond as she may perceive it, namely, presenting a negative self-evaluation to the interviewer.

Jessie’s mitigation efforts are examples of reorienting the social bond. Actions that may qualify as reorientation are those that specify in a markedly different way a social bond indicated earlier, generally within immediately prior clauses, sentences, or turns of conversation. Although one’s orientation can shift from positive to negative or neutral, this study focuses on shifts from negative to more positive or neutral orientations. Reorienting actions include:
1. Mitigation: words or phrases that qualify or downgrade an event or bond orientation to appear less severe or important.

2. Redirecting the bond: shifting responsibility for bond trouble from oneself to others, or from one “offending” party to another, through behaviors such as blaming, and justifications accounting for trouble. Accounts may include circumstances not involving social relationships.

3. Denials or defensiveness: denying relevance of a bond trouble or feelings, or showing indifference (e.g. “It didn’t really matter”).

Social bond analysis was applied to video recordings and transcripts to identify instances in which participants oriented to social bond threat, indicated by: (1) orienting to a social bond with signs of negative evaluation or problems in impression management, (2) indicators of shame, and (3) efforts to reorient the threat by shifting the reference to the bond, or presenting to the interviewer a more positive impression.

Findings: Two Examples of Bond Threat Sequences
Analysis of two bond threat sequences further illustrates both the phenomena and the methods of conversation analysis and social bond analysis that describe the phenomena. In interview excerpts with “Darryl” and “Jessie,” each participant encounters a bond threat and manages shame by reorienting the bond. Their bond threat sequences differ, however, in the source of threat, and the methods by which they manage shame. Darryl orients toward an isolated bond by describing being negatively evaluated by friends, and shows efforts to bypass feelings of shame. Jessie expresses shame overtly when orienting toward an engulfed relationship with a male friend.

Darryl: Isolation Bond Threat, Bypassed Shame
In a probe question for an item on the TSBI scale, Darryl is asked to describe a specific instance of making a decision with a group of friends. He responds with a narrative in which he is repeatedly left to decide for his friends where to eat. Table 3.3 provides the discourse, beginning about forty seconds into his response, after Darryl has explained that “after awhile everyone’s kinda like ‘What do you want to do Darryl?’ Like — like I was always just imposing my opinion on them when they wouldn’t make the decision.”
ORIENTING TO ISOLATION BOND THREAT. In lines 1 and 2, Darryl orients to an isolated social bond as he describes how his friends blame him for making a decision. He refers to the bond twice, with “I—telling—them” and [I]—“getting my way”—[with them]. Emphases on the words “telling” and “getting” connote the impression that he is making an improper imposition, presented as an attribution of the friends’ perspectives. The words “always” and “pretty-much” also extend the friend’s attributed blame from the specific to general case, as though these were common judgments. Again, the empirical focus is not on the past relationship, but the present act of description that Darryl constructs for the interviewer, and likely intends to be interpreted by the interviewer as negative. This incident of social rejection is fairly mild, and Darryl may have chosen it assuming it was the sort of story the interviewer was looking for. Darryl’s subsequent emotional response to telling the story, and his effort to reorient the bond distinguishes his presentation of the incident as a bond threat.

TABLE 3.3. Excerpt 2 Darryl. Interviewer’s Question: Describe a Time When You Made a Decision for a Group of Friends.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 | Bond threat and so: () >because of that< they thought I was like al:ways (1.1) pretty-
|   | lowers head, false smile verbal disruption |
| 2 | much telling them “let’s do this” and an (0.3) >getting my< wa:y.
|   | EC,(interviewer nods,”huh” . lowers head, false smile verbal disruption |
| 3 | Reorients w/ bypassed shame bu:t () it wasn’t like that at all () >Theyjs wr<() >they weren’t< () eno:ugh> |
|   | rapid voice inbreath |
| 4 | >they didn’t have enough to<() (>hhh) make their ow:n dec:jsio:n |

REORIENTATION. In lines 3 and 4, Darryl reorients the bond in two steps. First, he verbally denies that his friends’ attributed evaluation of the situation was true, which he emphasizes and extends by the words “at all.” Notice his use of indirect references “it” and “that,” which mitigate another direct indication of his offending action. Darryl then blames the situation on his friends being unable to “make their own decisions.” The blame statement is itself somewhat mitigated; he does not directly state what his friends “didn’t have enough” of. Darryl reorients the implication of social rejection by shifting focus from Darryl’s attributed faults to those of his friends.
SHAME. Darryl’s act of orienting to bond trouble evokes an emotional response. Indicators of shame occur throughout the excerpt; however, the expression of affect shifts with Darryl’s bond orientation. Overt indicators of shame occur as he describes his friends’ negative judgments, in line 1, as he lowers his head and says rapidly, ‘because of that’. He makes eye contact then lowers his head again in line 2 as he indicates his own actions, “telling them.” He smiles slightly, which might be considered a “false smile” (Ekman & Friesen, 1982) performed with the mouth alone and operating to mask and control negative feelings. As he completes the references to the negative judgment, he stammers and pauses slightly, indicators of verbal disruption and a shift toward efforts to control and bypass feelings.

Darryl also shows efforts to control and bypass expression of shame during his reorientation of the blame. As Darryl begins to formulate the blame statement in line 3, he looks away, then hesitates, stammers, speaks rapidly, and draws a breath before arriving at “make their own decision.” He seems to spit out the blame statement, anticipating its emotional tenor before he has cognitively formulated its linguistic content. He also hides direct reference to what his friends do not “have enough” of, in effect mitigating a more emotionally charged blame statement. Rapid speech and thought distract from feelings arising with the orientation to being rejected, or with the formulation of blame.

Darryl’s shifts in gaze correspond to both shame affect and efforts to reorient the feelings. He maintains eye contact, in a sidelong glance, during his defense in line 3, “it wasn’t like that at all.” The eye contact may help solicit the interviewer’s nod and verbal acknowledgment, “huh.” Darryl lowers his eyes after “at all” keeping them lowered while he blames his friends. Lowering eyes is an overt shame indicator, hiding oneself from face-to-face attention; however, the gaze shift is followed immediately by the verbal disruption, indicating efforts to control feelings. He returns eye contact during the following reorientation, in which the interviewer’s ratification is again relevant. Controlling shame is effective for both impression management and alleviating affect triggered by describing the situation. A display of shame, such as blushing or turning the head, would hamper his ability to present a legitimate case to the interviewer for laying
blame on his friends. Also, overt feelings of shame could lead to guilt about blaming his friends.

The bond threat sequence in Table 3.3 shows Darryl’s strategy for managing the isolation threat posed by orienting to a negative judgment by friends, and evoked by presenting its description to the interviewer. In the next excerpt, Jessie shows trouble when orienting to an engulfed social bond, and reorients the bond while expressing more overt indicators of shame.

**Jessie: Engulfed Bond Threat, Overt Shame**

As a follow-up to the question Jessie answered the excerpt above, the interviewer had asked Jessie to describe a situation that she has not mastered. She describes a troubled relationship with “this guy.” She explained prior to this excerpt that “from all outsiders’ point of view… most people would think we were like boyfriend and girlfriend? But and totally like we’re not at all? Like we don’t feel that way at all.” She continued: “It’s kinda like real borderline. Like, we are in a way like, the way we act around each other? But then there’s like no commitment or what> whatsoever.” Numerous shame indicators, primarily overt, marked Jessie’s description thus far, including pauses, lowered eyes, laughed words and “filler” terms “like” and “you know.” The following excerpt begins directly after this reference to their lack of commitment.

**TABLE 3.4. Excerpt 3a: Jessie. Interviewer’s Question: Describe a Situation You Have Not Mastered**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eyes averted</th>
<th>EC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Bond threat</td>
<td>An () and I guess if I (1.2) wanted to master the situation I could bring it up and say wohl what’s going on here you know why (1.3) ‘yaknow n’(0.6) should we be: (0.6) &gt;committed to each other&lt; or whatever</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ORIENTING TO ENGULFMENT BOND THREAT.** Jessie’s complaint about a lack of commitment seems on the surface to be another orientation to an isolated social bond evoking embarrassment about feeling rejected. The way she reorients the bond, however, suggests that she is threatened by commitment as a source of engulfment. Again, engulfed bonds are “too close for comfort” in one’s feelings of dependence,
conformity, or differentiation of self from others in which rejection is treated as the only alternative to commitment. Jessie describes a hypothetical situation in which if she “wanted to master the situation” she would confront the issue of their commitment. To “bring it up” with the friend and question the status of their relationship would create an opportunity to move the relationship toward either greater closeness, commitment, or to “whatever.” “Whatever” could cover a reference to the alternative, “uncommitted”, implying dissolution of the relationship, or it may refer to “whatever” nebulous state they are in now. Since confronting their relationship is a hypothetical case only if she wanted to “master the situation,” she implies a preference for keeping their relationship status quo. Movement in the relationship risks either becoming more engulfed in the bond, or possibly being rejected. This interpretive analysis of the possible state of relationship Jessie describes is not fully verifiable. Her actions, however, show evidence that the act of describing the situation for the interviewer triggers a threat sequence. Her solution is to move away from engulfment, as she indicates in her next utterance, displayed in Table 3.5.

TABLE 3.5. Excerpt 3b Jessie: Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>eyes averted</th>
<th>quieter</th>
<th>EC</th>
<th>laughed</th>
<th>words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reorients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>w/ overt</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>shame</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>but () “I don’t really” (1.9) “An l() don’t” () I’m not {sure that} l wdn’t&gt;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tense smile, laugh EL, bites lip</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I don’t think I {want} that {any}ways so (2.5)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tense smile, laugh</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>“I guess I haven’t really wanted {to mm (hh)mm}”</td>
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</table>

REORIENTATION. Jessie reorients the bond as presented to the interviewer by declaring, rather tentatively, that she doesn’t want “that.” She never directly specifies what “that” is. She may not want more commitment, or she may not want to confront the state of their relationship and risk rejection. If she desires to avoid greater commitment to her friend, then she reorients an engulfed relationship by asserting her needs as a conscious choice – “I don’t…want,” “I haven’t really wanted to….” Her reorientation, however, implies that another solution to engulfment is to not confront the bond, not to risk any movement in closeness or distance, but rather to maintain a status quo. If she
avoids questioning their bond, however, Jessie indirectly maintains a state of engulment. In an engulfed bond, particularly within families, independent movement toward more separation risks attributions of abandonment by the other and dissolution of the bond (Bowen, 1978). People in engulfed relationships may resist negotiating the terms of a relationship because it evokes strong emotions. The more attachment, the greater the risk of dissolution of the bond and negative emotional consequences. Maintaining the status quo is a solution to the emotional risks of confronting an engulfed relationship. Thus, Jessie reorients expression of what she might identify as the bond threat, a lack of commitment, by asserting that she does not want more commitment.

SHAME. Shame may be evoked, however, by orienting to an underlying threat posed by confronting an engulfed bond. A cluster of shame indicators, italicized in the transcript, follows Jessie’s talk about confronting their commitment. Laughed words, verbal mitigation, and hesitation surround her description of what she wants in the relationship. Softer speech hides the initial formulation of the reorientation, which is disrupted by pauses, hesitation, and verbal disorganization. She prefaces each statement of what she wants with verbal mitigation, “I don’t really,” “not sure that,” “I don’t think…anyways,” “I guess,” and “I haven’t really.” Following these qualifiers, she then laughs the words that make the self-assertions, “I’m not {sure that},” “I don’t think I {want} that {any}ways,” and “I haven’t really wanted {to mm(h)mm}.” Verbal mitigation and laughter cover a direct statement of what she wants, such as “I don’t want commitment” or “I don’t want to ask him.”

The verbal mitigation and disruption, laughter, gestures, and paralinguistic hiding behaviors are primarily indicators of overt shame. The affect is more visible and less controlled than bypassed shame, as though her feelings “leaked” out. Jessie shows efforts to control the display at the (2.5) pause, pressing her lips together and perhaps biting them, and then speaking more quietly. The overt display suggests that Jessie has more direct experience of feelings than Darryl, whose rapidly produced reorientations could “crowd out” his attention to feelings.

As discussed, the interview participants can orient concurrently to social bonds described and the face-to-face bond with the interviewer. Both activities of description and impression management can trigger overt shame, and the analysis does not clearly
distinguish which, if either, is a primary source of affect. Both Darryl and Jessie’s efforts to control shame, however, appear directed primarily toward impression management, especially while reorienting the bond. For Darryl, bypassing expression of shame helps mitigate a display to the interviewer of any guilt about blaming his friends, which would undermine his reorientation. Jessie displays feelings more directly, however, the laughed words and verbal mitigation act as “hiding” behaviors, manage her impression by marking the commitment problem as not serious, and conveying conviction to the interviewer that she does not wish to confront an unusual relationship. The subtle details of their emotion management and reorientation methods are likely not a result of conscious deliberation. The efforts to manage both presentation of self and the personal experience of social bonds suggest a systematic functional integration of social affect with the pragmatics of talk; in this case, creating descriptive narratives in response to interview questions.

PHASE 2: QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE BOND THREAT SEQUENCE AND SHAME

Direct analysis of the interview discourse suggested that the bond threat sequence was predominant throughout the interviews, and that when indicators of shame occurred they were most often associated sequentially or concurrent with orientation to negative bonds, and efforts to reorient the bond. These quantitative observations are not systematically addressed by conversation analysis and social bond analysis. These methods, however, allow precise coding of content, which in turn can address the following questions: (1) are there individual differences in sources of bond threats, whether isolated or engulfed, and in the type of shame participants display—overt or bypassed? (2) Do shame, orientation to bond trouble, and reorientation occur together more often than by chance and in what order? Addressing the second question tests the hypothesis that shame and social bond orientation are sequentially related, and that shame has a direct role in the detection, display, and management of social bond trouble. The results presented here are exploratory for this small participant pool, but suggest directions for larger studies.
Methods

Demarcating Interview Data into Units of Analysis

In preparation for content analysis, both interviews were transcribed using conventions of conversation analysis (Jefferson, 1984). Because each component of the bond threat sequence is either a contextual part of an utterance or, for gestures and paralanguage, is systematically related to that context, coding the interviews required full and detailed application of conversation analysis and social bond analysis described previously to support each coding decision. For content analysis, coding of shame indicators in relation to verbal actions of bond orientation requires a nonarbitrary unit of analysis that properly distinguishes one action from another. Transcripts, therefore, were demarcated by “turn construction units” (TCUs) (Sacks et al., 1974). Extensive research in conversation analysis finds that speakers and recipients naturally construct and monitor utterances with attention to where the next speaker might begin his/her next turn at talk, even when sh/e does not actually begin a new turn. TCUs are also distinguishable in the multiturn narratives of the interview participants. For example, the following utterance, “No I don’t attempt to master situations | I mean (1.5) I> (1.0) don’t think” contains two TCUs separated between “situations” and “I mean.” Thompson and Ford (1996) have concluded that TCUs are closely aligned with “intonation units” in which stretches of speech are distinguishable by rising and falling contours of intonation. Linguistics research has suggested that intonation units, and hence TCUs, may represent the “rhythm” and sequential building blocks of symbolic thought and semantic content. The TCU therefore provides a means of demarcating interview transcripts that reflect the participants’ own orientation to the discourse. As a working hypothesis, I treat emotions as also organized within TCUs, because affect indicators usually can be found to correspond to their immediate verbal context.

Coding criteria and measures

For content analysis, each TCU was coded for the discourse and affect events occurring with it. Indicators of overt shame and bypassed shame were coded using the verbal, gesture, and paralanguage indicators listed in Table 3.2. Also distinguished were shame indicators with and without a clear relevance to the context. Using social bond analysis, each TCU was coded for the participant’s orientation to a social bond, if any, and
whether the bond orientation was positive, negative, or neutral. Also coded, when possible, was orientation to isolated or engulfed bonds. Bond reorientation was marked for TCUs containing mitigation, redirection, denials, defensiveness, or other shifts from negative to positive orientation.

A FileMaker database was constructed to assist in coding and statistical analysis. Coding allowed calculation of individual differences and overall ratio of shame and bond threat sequences to interview responses. Calculation of transitional probabilities, and Markov chain sequential modeling (cf., Bakeman & Gottman, 1986), was used to test the probability that an association between orientation to a negative bond, indicators of shame, and reorientation occur together more often than by chance, and in that particular order.

Findings: content analysis of interview

Individual Differences in Shame and Bond Threat Sequences

Participants’ bond threat sequences ranged from one to seven TCUs in duration. During interview responses, TCUs occurred as part of bond threat sequences in 64% of the male’s TCUs, and in 84% of the female’s TCUs (Table 3.6). Shame indicators occurred in 33% of the 571 TCUs for Darryl and 45% of Jesse’s 444 TCUs. These results indicate the effectiveness of the interview method for eliciting shame and bond threat orientation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TCUs</th>
<th>Darryl (571 TCUs)</th>
<th>Jesse (444 TCUs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Within Bond Threat Sequences</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With shame indicators</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: TCU, turn construction unit.

In the excerpts presented previously, Darryl and Jessie differed in the sources of bond threat and types of shame they displayed. Content analysis suggested a pattern of difference throughout the interviews. Lewis (1971), in her analysis of psychotherapy sessions, found that an individual tends toward either overt or bypassed expression of shame in a variety of social situations, suggesting a possible personality trait. Jessie and Darryl displayed both overt shame and efforts to bypass shame, often intermingled within an utterance. Jessie, however, in addition to displaying more shame overall,
expressed overt in 85% of the TCUs with shame indicators (Table 3.7). Darryl showed slightly more bypassed (54%) than overt (46%) shame indicators.

**TABLE 3.7. Comparing Types of Shame Expression and Direction of Bond Orientation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of TCUs with:</th>
<th>Shame</th>
<th>Bond Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overt</td>
<td>Bypassed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darryl (male)</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesse (female)</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: TCU, turn construction unit.*

Darryl and Jessie also differed in the type of bond orientation that typically provoked shame during their interviews. Darryl tended to orient his discussion and life-history examples toward problems with isolated social bonds that involved social separation, negative judgments or blame from others, or perceptions of lack of control. Of Darryl’s TCUs with bond orientation, 61% involved isolated bonds and 7% engulfed bonds (Table 3.7). Jessie, however, expressed shame most often when orienting discussion toward engulfed bonds, such as conforming to her peer group and parents or shyness in group situations. Of Jessie’s TCUs with bond orientation, 45% were toward engulfed bonds and 30% toward isolated bond trouble. Participants’ bond orientation expressed during the interview may reflect general tendencies in the type of bonds and situations they find problematic. Because participants choose their particular examples and control the length of their responses, overall proportions of bond orientations are arbitrary to a degree and not fully comparable. The individual differences in bond orientation and shame display in these two cases, however, correspond to individual and gender differences found by Lewis (1971, 1976) and other shame research (Scheff, 1997; Tangney, 1990; Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

**Transitional Probabilities**

Sequential analysis of transitional probabilities among indicators of bond orientation and shame within and between TCUs provided preliminary support for the hypothesis that bond threats, shame, and reorientation are related sequentially. Markov analysis is more valid with a larger number of observations (TCUs) than were available for the two participants. Also, an Anderson-Goodman test of homogeneity (Gottman & Roy, 1990: 67-76) found that the data for both participants could not be reliably pooled. Results for
this exploratory analysis cannot be considered fully reliable; however, they are suggestive of what a larger study may show.

A series of individual tests for each participant were run to find significant probabilities of transition of bond states and shame within a single TCU, between adjacent TCUs, and across one or more TCUs. The number of TCU data points was not sufficient for a direct test of the sequential probability of negative bond orientation, shame, and reorientation occurring together. Although numerical results of each test could not be combined, significant results confirmed the three components of the hypothesis: (1) negative bond orientation occurs with or transitions to shame more often than by chance; (2) shame transitions to, or co-occurs with, reorientation/mitigation; and (3) negative bond orientation transitions to reorientation. These associations among the two-step transitions confirm qualitative observations that these three components usually occur in the sequential order.

DISCUSSION

The central, although preliminary, finding of this exploratory study is the significant sequential relationship between negative bond orientation, shame, and reorientation. The bond threat sequence suggests a central role of shame in the detection of troubles in one’s current and imagined social associations, the signaling of trouble to self and others, and motivation for adjustment to the social bond. Unlike other emotions, those of the shame family appear almost exclusively social in their domain of operation, and are intimately tied to language, social self, and human group life. Social affect for human beings may have co-developed with language and specialized in their evolution from similar affect in other species, to alert oneself and others to changes in the quality of social relationships.

The operation of a bond threat sequence also suggests new methods for analyzing shame in both controlled and natural settings. If social bond trouble reliably indicates shame, the characteristic gestures and paralinguistic markers that occur with an utterance are evidence of underlying feelings. The integration of close analysis of conversation and of participants’ orientation to social association accomplished through
talk gives a more reliable context for both identifying shame and its operation in ways that self-reports, affect inventories, and self-evaluation cannot capture.

This exploratory study could be replicated with a larger sample, with the TSBI or other standard measures of self-esteem, social behaviors, or social affect, such as the Test of Self-conscious Affect (TOSCA) (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). In addition to providing a more valid basis for quantitative analysis, a wider sample would allow comparison of individual differences, including gender, age, culture, ethnicity and language.

Research on the phenomena of the bond threat sequence could also be extended to studies of discourse in everyday situations, or specialized settings such as organizations. The sequence of bond orientation, shame, and reorientation is likely to be more complex and varied during face-to-face interaction. Either member in a conversation might trigger a threat, and reorienting the bond is often a process of negotiation, rather than “self-repair” alone as in the interview settings. Interesting patterns, however, become apparent when analyzing recorded interaction from everyday settings, including the involvement of other emotions. Retzinger (1987; 1991a, 1991b) documents in detail the patterns in marital quarrels in which conflicts escalate through “shame-rage spirals,” and Scheff (1997) has explored interaction of shame and anger at a macro scale, specifically its contribution to the start of World War I. Scheff (1997) also found that abusive parents may have particular difficulty handling shame. In an exploratory study (Fearon, 2001), I found that a caretaker’s unacknowledged shame precedes anger and physical punishment. Shame and social bond dynamics are also readily apparent in group interaction in settings such as business meetings, and are a largely unexplored dimension in understanding group dynamics.

APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

- » < Hurried speech within brackets.
- > “Cut off” of the prior word or sound.
- ° ° Words bracketed by degree signs are softer than surrounding talk.
- ___ Underscoring indicates some form of stress.
- :: Colons indicate prolongation of the immediately prior
sound.

; Underscoring of a colon and following letter indicates a rising intonation, “e.g. Does he work hard?” and underscoring of letters prior to a colon indicate falling intonation, e.g. “I don’t work hard.”

,. ? Punctuation markers indicate intonation rather than grammatical symbols.

(1:3) Indicates measured time in one second, and tenth of a second.

() Indicates tiny gap, generally less than one second.

{word} Laughed words.

(hh) Parenthesized h’s indicate explosiveness, associated with laughter, sighs, and outbreaths.

*italics* Shame markers.

EC, EL, EA, Eup Eye contact, eyes lowered, eyes averted, eyes up


REFERENCES


