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# **SHAME MANAGEMENT AND BULLYING**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of  
The Australian National University.

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## CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Eliza Ahmed, hereby declare that, except where acknowledged, this work is my own and has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other university or institution.

Eliza Ahmed

Eliza Ahmed

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## ABSTRACT

This research addresses the impact of shame management skills on bullying behavior in children. The theoretical impetus for this research comes mainly from reintegrative shaming theory (J. Braithwaite, 1989) which suggests that both shaming and the emotion of shame are of considerable importance in controlling deviant behavior. A social-developmental model of bullying is formulated that brings a range of predictive variables together in a coherent theoretical framework. Variables include the family (stigmatized shaming, non-stigmatized shaming and family disharmony), the school (perceived control of bullying, liking for school and daily hassles), individual differences (guilt-proneness, shame-proneness, pride-proneness, impulsivity, empathy, self-esteem and internal locus of control) and shame management (shame acknowledgment and shame transformation).

The central theme of this thesis is that shame management, or rather failure to manage shame effectively, plays an important role in bullying behavior. Shame serves both an adaptive and maladaptive function. It is adaptive when it activates an internal sanctioning mechanism and involves sanctioning agents who can affirm the worth of the individual; shame is maladaptive when an internal sanctioning mechanism is bypassed and/or feelings of rejection from social sanctioning agents are evoked. A measure of the adaptive as well as the maladaptive aspects of shame is developed: the Measure Of Shame State – Shame Acknowledgment and Shame Transformation (MOSS-SAST).

Parents and their children (4th to 7th grade) completed self-report questionnaires anonymously. Controlling for the child's age and sex, bullying behavior was linked to family, school, individual differences and shame management variables. Parents of children who bullied others reported using stigmatized shaming more often as a child-rearing practice. In addition, children who bullied others experienced a disharmonious family environment characterized by conflict among the members. A child's daily hassles and impulsivity were associated with greater amounts of bullying. Liking for school, perceived control of bullying, guilt-proneness, pride-proneness, empathy, self-esteem and internal locus of control were associated with less bullying. Multiple regression analyses indicated

that bullying was significantly predicted by shame acknowledgment and shame transformation, over and above the effects of other variables. In the mediational analysis, support was found for a partial mediational model showing that family, school and individual difference variables not only directly predicted bullying, but also operated through shame management variables.

Finally, evidence is provided to show that bullying/victimization in children can be characterized in terms of how effectively the child manages the emotion of shame. Self-reported non-bully / non-victims acknowledged shame with little transformation of it. Self-reported bullies were less likely to acknowledge shame, and more likely to transform shame into anger. Self-reported victims acknowledged shame without transformation, but were more likely to internalize others' rejection of them. Bully/victims were less likely to acknowledge shame, were more likely to have self-critical thoughts and to transform their felt shame into anger.

The present thesis suggests that attention to the role of shame in bullying is warranted. Intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning is related to individual shame management skills. This finding gives rise interventions that can be offered to professionals, school personnel, parents, bullies and victims.

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