

Condoned or Condemned:

The Situational Affordance of Anger and Shame in the US and Japan

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Abstract

Two studies tested the idea that the situations that people encounter frequently and the situations that they associate most strongly with an emotion differ across cultures in ways that can be understood from what a culture condones or condemns. In a questionnaire study, N=163 students from the US and Japan perceived situations as more frequent to the extent that they elicited condoned emotions (anger in the US, shame in Japan), and they perceived situations as less frequent to the extent that they elicited condemned emotions (shame in the US, anger in Japan). In a second study, N=160 students from the US and Japan free-sorted the same situations. For each emotion, the situations could be organized along two cross-culturally common dimensions. Those situations that touched upon central cultural concerns were perceived to elicit stronger emotions. The largest cultural differences were found for shame; smaller, yet meaningful, differences were found for anger. (150 words)

Keywords: Emotion, culture, situation, anger, shame

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Condoned or Condemned:

The Situational Affordance of Anger and Shame in the US and Japan

Emotions are always about something: We experience anger at a friend's insulting remark, pride in an important achievement, and sadness about the loss of a close friend. While most emotion theories have acknowledged this "aboutness" of emotions (e.g., Arnold, 1960; Barrett, Mesquita, Ochsner, & Gross, 2007; Frijda, 2007), there is very little research on how situations afford emotional experiences. In the present studies, we tested the idea that people's emotions are afforded by the situations that they encounter in their cultural context. We predicted that the emotional situations that people encounter frequently and the kinds of situations that they associate most strongly with an emotion differ across cultures in ways that can be understood from what a culture condones or condemns.

Consider the following example that was sampled from an online forum for expatriates and Japanese in Japan (www.jref.com). The first post is an observation about shame by a male American teacher in Japan: "My school has students enter the staff room through a separate, hard to reach door [...] and on the door is a sign reminding them to say 'shitsurei shimasu' when they enter and 'shitsurei shimashita' when they leave. Now they force the kids to say 'I'm being rude' when they enter a room they have to enter, and 'I was rude' when they leave, but if they're forced to say it against their will, who honestly believes there's any truth behind those words? They just become an empty phrase and when they actually have something to apologize for, there's not going to be any remorse, just words." (JimmySeal, 2006).

A response was posted by a Japanese female: "[...] Japanese consider 'causing someone trouble' or 'getting help from others' as shame. In my opinion, that's one of the reasons why you

use ‘sorry’ and ‘excuse me’ phrases a lot in Japanese conversation where you'd say ‘thank you’ [in English] instead.” (Cue, 2006).

The example illustrates that, although the expatriate and Japanese discussant shared some understanding of shame, their understanding of what shame is *about* may be quite different. The expatriate teacher from the US did not see how entering a teachers’ lounge could be shameful. Consequently, he assumed that the students must have been “forced” to express an emotion that they could not possibly have felt in such a mundane situation; he clearly did not expect students to act shamefully, unless they have “actually something to apologize for.” Moreover, his puzzlement about the Japanese make-up of this situation (hard to reach door, signs reminding people to apologize) is a sign that such situations are not as commonly encountered in the US. On the other hand, the Japanese discussant had a very different view of the situation: Shame is felt upon bothering people or causing them trouble. In her view, signs on doors are not there to impose an emotion. Rather, they highlight the existing emotions by reminding the students to express the shameful humility that they naturally feel. Reminders of this type are very common in Japan (Kitayama, Markus, & Matsumoto, 1995).

In the current research, we started from the idea that these kinds of cultural differences in the situations that people encounter afford different emotional experiences in their daily lives. We expected that, across cultures, emotional situations are promoted—and thus experienced frequently—to the extent that they elicit desirable or condoned emotions; on the other hand, situations should be suppressed—and are thus experienced rarely—to the extent that they elicit undesirable or condemned emotions. Moreover, we predicted that the kinds of situations that are particularly powerful elicitors of emotions differ across cultures: Those situations that reflect central cultural concerns, or touch upon them, make people particularly angry or ashamed.

Condoned or Condemned: Anger and Shame in the US and Japan

In this research we compared anger and shame, because they appear to have markedly different meanings in the US and Japan: Anger is a condoned emotion in the US and condemned in Japan; shame is condoned in Japan, and condemned in the US. Which emotions are condoned and which are condemned, can be understood from the prevalent cultural meanings and practices, which we will refer to as cultural models (e.g., Holland & Quinn, 1987; Shore, 1996).

Cultural Models in the US and Japan

The dominant cultural models of the US and Japan vary in a number of ways that reflect on the respective meanings of anger and shame. The US cultural model emphasizes an independent self that is bounded, unique and autonomous. Feeling good about one-self and maintaining dignity are central objectives for an independent self. This may be effectively achieved through the assertion of personal desires and the continuous pursuit of one's goals. On the other hand, the Japanese cultural model emphasizes an interdependent self that is embedded in relationships, connected with others, and focused on harmony and face-saving. Assertion of individual desires is discouraged in favor of social harmony; instead, the norm is to adjust to the demands of the situation at hand and not to bother or burden others. Adjustment is achieved, among others, by closely monitoring one's own shortcomings and trying to overcome them (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Kim, Cohen, & Au, 2010; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2002).

The Cultural Significance of Anger in the US and Japan

Anger signals the belief that another person is blocking one's goals, that one is entitled to more than one is getting, and that there is a chance that one will get one's way if action is taken

(Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Kuppens, Van Mechelen, Smits, & De Boeck, 2003). From the perspective of the US independent model, anger is an appropriate experience that is experienced relatively frequently (Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006). Anger is a hallmark of autonomy and independence and, as such, it is socialized from an early age on (Rothbaum, Pott, Azuma, Miyake, & Weisz, 2000). Appropriately experiencing and expressing anger is understood as a desirable sign of healthy and mature self-expression, whereas not expressing one's anger is perceived as harmful in the long run (Shweder, Haidt, Horton, & Joseph, 2008). Consistently, discussing one's anger in a constructive way is conducive to healthy relationship development in couples (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995).

According to the Japanese interdependent model anger is best avoided; in fact, anger is experienced to a lesser extent than in the US (Kitayama et al., 2006). Anger poses a serious threat to the central Japanese goal of relational harmony and embeddedness. Consequently, socialization practices in Japan steer clear of angry interactions: When interests clash, Japanese mothers and children make mutual adjustments to each other to avoid escalation of conflict (Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003). By adolescence, Japanese have mastered the art of conflict avoidance (Rothbaum et al., 2000) and even in adult life, the avoidance of anger remains a cultural goal: Elaborate politeness rules help to avoid confrontations in everyday life. Those who nonetheless assert their desires are perceived as immature and childish (Azuma, 1984).

The Cultural Significance of Shame in the US and Japan

Shame involves a negative evaluation of the self (Tangney, 1991; Tracy & Robins, 2004) and signals outcomes that are identity-goal incongruent (Mascolo & Fischer, 1995)¹; which specific kinds of negative evaluations or identity goals are salient may differ between cultures (Mesquita & Karasawa, 2004). Shame is a highly undesirable emotion in the American context,

because it undermines positive self-regard; it is also experienced to a lesser extent in the US than in Japan (Kitayama et al., 2006). Children are protected from feeling shame by elaborate rituals of praise both at school and at home (Miller, Wang, Sandel, & Cho, 2002; Nisbett, 2003). Shame has all but disappeared from American literature (e.g., in dictionaries or bible translations) and social and political discourse (Cohen, 2003). American self-help manuals (e.g., Allyn, 2004) promise those who still grapple with the painful experience of shame that they can, once and for all, “defeat self-consciousness and interrupt the spiral of shame so that [they] can live true to [themselves]” (p. xii).

Although shame is perceived as an unpleasant emotion in Japan, its negative valence is less pronounced than in the US (Romney, Moore, & Rusch, 1997)—possibly because it is considered conducive to self-improvement and perspective-taking (cf. Heine et al., 1999). Shame is encouraged in children: For instance, schools foster shame by the practice of *hansei* (critical self-reflection), a scheduled time to think about areas of self-improvement at the end of the school day (Lewis, 1995). Being aware of one’s shortcomings, and actively correcting them, affirms interdependence and helps individuals re-align with social norms and expectations.

In sum

Anger and shame take on very different meanings according to American and Japanese cultural models. While anger is a condoned emotion in the US, it is discouraged in Japan. Shame, on the other hand, is condemned in the US, but seen as instrumental to interpersonal relations in Japan. There is some first, mostly anecdotal evidence that cultural practices in the US and Japan promote situations that evoke condoned emotions (e.g., debate in the US, *hansei* in Japan), while situations that produce condemned emotions are avoided (e.g., through boosting self-esteem in the US, politeness rules in Japan). Study 1 will test the prediction that situations will occur more

frequently to the extent that they evoke culturally condoned emotions, whereas they will occur less frequently to the extent that they evoke culturally condemned emotions (the “situation promotion hypothesis”).

The Antecedents of Anger and Shame in the US and Japan

Not only the frequency, but also the content of anger and shame antecedents may differ across cultures. This means that the actual situations that are most angering or most shameful may vary between the US and Japan. The discussion on the internet forum about shame upon entering the teachers’ room is a case in point. In the Japanese context, it is particularly important to be sensitive to others’ needs. The concern is so powerful that even situations that are mildly inconveniencing another person, such as entering the teachers’ room, may elicit shame. In contrast, entering a teachers’ room would hardly be a reason for shame in an American context. In general, we expect situations that highlight central cultural concerns to be more powerful in eliciting emotions. Cross-cultural evidence for this assumption is very limited, but the literature suggests a few dimensions of difference.

Anger. Compared to Japanese, Americans report more anger in intimate relationships (Scherer, Wallbott, Matsumoto, & Kudoh, 1988). This may be explained from the value placed on autonomy and self-assertion in close relationships, which can be contrasted to the Japanese emphasis on embeddedness and relational harmony in close relationships (Rothbaum et al., 2000). The flip side is that Japanese experience most of their anger with out-group members (Scherer et al., 1988); harmony is less of a concern in this latter type of relationship (cf. Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988).

There is some indication of another dimension of distinction in anger antecedents, reflecting the type of violation involved. The American emphasis seems to be on a violation of

individual rights. For example, in the multi-national study by Scherer and colleagues (1988), more anger antecedents in the US sample than in Japan involved injustice—referring to situations in which respondents failed to get the reward they felt they deserved. This emphasis on the violation of personal rights is consistent with an American model of independence. In comparison, the Japanese emphasis is on the violation of norms, rather than personal rights. For instance, a study by Ohbuchi and colleagues (2004) found that Japanese, as compared to Americans, perceived interpersonal norm-violations as more serious, and in some cases this was associated with higher levels of anger. In this study, norm violations referred to others neglecting relationship obligations or being inconsiderate—concerns that fit with the Japanese model of interdependence.

Shame. Shame equally appears to be about different situations in the US and Japan. Shameful events in US contexts are those that reveal character flaws (Crystal, Parrott, Okazaki, & Watanabe, 2001); these situations are particularly relevant to the central cultural goal of maintaining self-esteem and positive independence. On the other hand, shameful events in Japanese contexts compromise the public face, as when one is openly being ridiculed or rejected, or fantasizes to oneself that this could be the case (Crystal et al., 2001); this type of situation would be relevant to the central Japanese task of maintaining face and connectedness with other people.

In sum, there is some evidence that the situations eliciting anger and shame in the US and Japan differ on certain dimensions. These dimensions have face value because, in each culture, the most angering or shameful situations are the ones that touch upon central cultural concerns. However, these situational dimensions of difference remain to be investigated systematically. Study 2 aims to explore the dimensions of anger and shame situations across cultures, and to

establish which kinds of situations tend to evoke emotions in the US and Japan; we expect those situations that touch upon the respective cultural concerns to be particularly powerful elicitors of anger and shame (the “situation relevance hypothesis”).

The Current Studies

In two preliminary studies, we sampled antecedents of anger and shame in the US and Japan; these antecedents were used as stimuli to test our hypotheses in two main studies. We tested the situation promotion hypothesis in Study 1, using a questionnaire design. Study 2 was a sorting task that allowed us to first establish a cross-culturally comparable structure underlying the anger and shame situations. Combining the data from Studies 1 and 2, we then tested the situational relevance hypothesis.

Preliminary Studies: Sampling Anger and Shame Antecedents

In order to test our hypotheses, we needed a representative sample of anger and shame antecedents from both the US and Japan. To obtain this sample, we reanalyzed emotion situation descriptions that had been provided by US and Japanese students in two previous studies: An interview study provided salient emotion antecedents from autobiographical memory (Mesquita et al., 2006); an experience sampling study provided more common, daily antecedents of anger and shame (Mesquita & Karasawa, 2002).

Salient Emotion Antecedents

In the first study, we interviewed 20 American (10 women) and 19 Japanese students (11 women). The American students ($M = 18.9$, $SD = .66$) were on average younger than the Japanese students ($M = 20.5$, $SD = 1.2$), $t(28.3) = 5.29$, $p < .001$. All but one Japanese male participant reported detailed descriptions of an event in which they felt offended/angry (Japan: *iyana omoi*) and all participants reported one experience in which they felt humiliated/ashamed

(Japan: hazukashii omoi). The interviews were recorded, fully transcribed in the original language, and the Japanese interviews were translated to English. The study yielded 38 detailed descriptions of anger antecedents and 39 detailed descriptions of shame antecedents.

Daily Emotion Antecedents

Fifty-three American (26 women) and 50 Japanese (29 women) students participated in a week-long experience sampling study, in which they were asked four times a day to a) report the last emotion they had experienced, and b) provide a brief description of the situation that had led to it. Again, the American students ($M = 19.0$, $SD = 4.9$) were on average younger than the Japanese students ($M = 21.3$, $SD = 2.3$), $t(101) = 3.02$, $p < 0.01$.

We selected those situations that (1) were interpersonal in nature and that (2) had elicited emotions in the anger domain (e.g., annoyed and angry in the US, ikari and irairai in Japan) or emotions in the shame domain (e.g., embarrassment and shame in the US, hazukashii and terekusasa in Japan). We identified 66 anger-related experiences (31 from the US sample, 35 from the Japanese sample) and 15 shame-related experiences (9 from the US sample, 6 from the Japanese sample) and extracted the respective situation descriptions. There were no cultural differences in the number of anger and shame experiences in this preliminary study, $\chi^2(1) = 0.83$, $p = .36$.

Creating Short Situation Vignettes

The preliminary studies yielded 158 situation descriptions (104 associated with anger and 54 associated with shame). They were rewritten into short, scripted situation vignettes that were succinct yet retained relevant elements. A script format was developed that specified three relevant core elements of the emotional situation (see Forgas & Van Heck, 1992; Reis, 2008; Vansteelandt & Van Mechelen, 2006): (1) The ongoing activity of the protagonist, (2) the

relationships of the actors involved, and (3) the specific event that triggered the experience of an emotion. An example (with core elements in brackets) is:

“Lauren [*protagonist*] was trying to discuss [*ongoing activity*] in which order she and her co-workers [*relationship*] at her part-time job will take breaks. One of them interrupted her and told her to stop chatting and just take her break [*event*].” (anger situation reported by Japanese respondent)

Of the 158 situations, 27 situations were excluded because (1) essential elements of the script were lacking or could only be inferred, (2) the situation was incomprehensible without its subjective interpretation, (3) the situation was too complex to be reduced according to the script format, or (4) the reported incident occurred before the participant had started college².

Study 1: The Promotion of Anger- and Shame-Eliciting Situations

The first study tested the prediction that situations would occur more frequently to the extent that they elicited culturally condoned emotions (anger in the US, and shame in Japan), whereas situations would occur less frequently to the extent that they elicited condemned emotions (shame in the US, and anger in Japan) (the “situation promotion hypothesis”). We measured the extent to which given situations elicited an emotion in terms of the emotion-eliciting power of the situation.

Method

Participants. Participants were 86 American (40 women and 46 men) and 77 Japanese (44 women and 33 men) students. All but seven American students were born in the United States³; 72.1% of them identified as White / Caucasian-American, 9.3% as Black / African American, 8.1% as Asian / Asian American, 5.8 % as Hispanic / Latino-American, 1.2% as Native Pacific Islander, and 1.2% as Arab / Arab-American. The Japanese students were all born

in Japan and had no immigrant background. The American students ($M = 21.6$, $SD = 2.84$) were slightly older than the Japanese ($M = 19.0$, $SD = 1.1$), $t(111.85) = 7.93$, $p < .001$.

Anger and shame situation vignettes. We randomly sampled 20 situations associated with each emotion in each culture from the 133 vignettes yielded by the preliminary studies. The final set of emotion situations used in the questionnaire consisted of 40 anger vignettes (anger version) and 40 shame vignettes (shame version), half of which were sampled from the US and half from Japan. The situations were stratified by the gender of the protagonist such that approximately half of the situations were initially reported by women ($n=42$), and the other half by men ($n=38$). The full list of situations can be found online at [Supplementary file].

To make the situation vignettes salient to our target student populations, we gave the protagonists names that were most popular in the birth cohort of our target sample, that is, students between 18 and 23 years (Meijiyasuda, 2009; Social Security Administration, 2009). Thus, the US sample read vignettes about protagonists with American names and the Japanese sample read vignettes with Japanese names, even though for both samples half of the vignettes were originally generated by respondents from the other culture. In naming the protagonist we respected the gender of the respondent who had originally reported the situation.

Questionnaire. Two questionnaire versions were created, an anger and a shame version, each consisting of 40 situations. For each situation, participants indicated the *likelihood of occurrence* and the *power* of the situation to elicit anger (in the anger version) or shame (in the shame version), using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all likely) to 6 (extremely likely). We opted for a referent-shift format in which students report on the experience of typical students (likelihood: “How likely do most students you know experience a situation like this?”; power: “How likely is it that a situation like this – if it were to happen – would lead most

students you know to being angry/ashamed?”), because this format is less susceptible to self-presentational biases (cf. Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Shteynberg, & Wan, 2010; Kitayama et al., 1997). Anger and shame were defined in an introductory paragraph to the questionnaire in ways that included less intense experiences of the same emotion: “In this study we are interested in how and when people experience anger (this includes being angry, mad or annoyed with someone)” or “In this study we are interested in how and when people experience shame (this includes feeling humbled, feeling inadequate, or feeling embarrassed)”. We additionally emphasized to the US participants that shame included these low-intensity synonyms by repeating it in the later question on the emotion-eliciting *power* of the situation. This was deemed necessary because US participants in a pilot study had trouble understanding the word “shame”.

Procedure. Half of the participants completed the anger version of the questionnaire, the other half the shame version. In each version, participants indicated for each situation, the likelihood of its occurrence and the power to elicit either anger or shame. All materials were created in English, and translated by a professional translator who spent her childhood partly in Japan and partly in the US. One of the authors, who is a native Japanese and fluent in English, checked all translations. Comprehensibility of the situations across cultures was pilot-tested.

Analytic strategy. We used multilevel regression models (with situations nested within respondents) to test the situation promotion hypothesis. All analyses were conducted using the program MLwiN 2.10 (Rasbash, Charlton, Browne, Healy, & Cameron, 2009). At level 1, we regressed the frequency of the situations on the emotion-eliciting power of the situations, allowing for random (co-)variance at level 1 and 2³. We first conducted the analyses for each cultural group separately and then analyzed the full dataset, entering culture of the participant as a level 2 predictor.

Results

Situation Promotion Hypothesis. In line with our predictions, we found that the perceived frequency of an emotional situation depended on the extent to which the situation was thought to elicit culturally condoned or condemned emotions (see Figure 1). Situations were perceived as more likely to occur to the extent that they elicited culturally condoned emotions (anger in the US, shame in Japan). In contrast, situations were perceived as less likely to occur to the extent that they elicited culturally condemned emotions (shame in the US, anger in Japan). More specifically, Americans perceived situations to be more likely to occur the more angering they were ($b = .22, Z = 6.08, p < .001$), whereas Japanese perceived situations to be less likely to occur the more angering they were ($b = -.09, Z = 3.1, p < .001$). The opposite pattern emerged for shame: Americans perceived situations to be less likely the more shameful they were ($b = -.05, Z = 1.53, p = .06$, one-tailed), whereas Japanese perceived situations to be more likely the more shameful they were ($b = .04, Z = 1.38, p = .08$, one-tailed). For both anger and shame, the strength of the association between likelihood of occurrence and emotion-eliciting power was significantly different between the two cultural groups, as indicated by significant situation power (group mean centered) $\times$ participant culture (effect coded: -1 = Japan, 1 = US) interactions for both anger ($b = .17, Z = 6.92, p < .001$) and shame ($b = -.04, Z = 1.95.15, p = .03$).

If the experience of condoned and condemned emotions is dependent on the situations that are frequently encountered in a culture, one may expect that the cultural origin of the situations matters. Situations that are in line with cultural ideals may have been selected over time (Kitayama et al., 1997); therefore, we assumed that situation promotion would occur especially for same-culture situations. Post-hoc tests indicated that this was indeed the case for all associations between situation power and likelihood of occurrence. We used Wald chi-square

tests to test for significant differences in the strength of prediction between same-culture and other-culture situations (see Goldstein, 2003, chap. 2). In the US group, the positive association between power and likelihood of occurrence was stronger for US ($b = .25$, $Z = 5.53$, $p < .001$) than Japanese ($b = .17$, $Z = 4.17$, $p < .001$) anger situations, $\chi^2(1) = 3.94$, $p = .047$; and the negative association between power and likelihood of occurrence was stronger for US ($b = -.09$, $Z = 2.72$, $p < .01$) than Japanese ($b = .04$, $Z = 1.0$, $p = .31$) shame situations, $\chi^2(1) = 11.16$, $p < .001$. In the Japanese group, the negative association between power and likelihood of occurrence was stronger for Japanese ($b = -.14$, $Z = 3.97$, $p < .001$) than for American ($b = .01$, $Z = 0.36$, $p = .71$) anger situations, $\chi^2(1) = 11.62$, $p < .001$; and the positive association between power and likelihood of occurrence was stronger for Japanese ($b = .07$, $Z = 2.00$, $p = .04$) than for American ($b = -.02$, $Z = 0.71$, $p = .47$) shame situations, $\chi^2(1) = 4.16$, $p = .04$.

Discussion

Our findings suggest that the cultural organization of everyday life plays a role in affording the emotions that people experience. Situations were perceived as *more frequent* to the extent that they elicit stronger feelings of anger in the US and of shame in Japan, while situations were perceived as *less frequent* to the extent that they elicit stronger feelings of shame in the US and of anger in Japan. Moreover, this situation promotion was stronger for same-culture situations than for other-culture situations. The findings point to a regulatory process at the level of cultures (Mesquita & Albert, 2007): The cultural selection of everyday situations seems to promote situations that elicit culturally condoned emotions, and suppress those situations that elicit culturally condemned emotions.

Although Study 1 has demonstrated that people appear to experience more frequently those situations that elicit culturally condoned emotions, it does not shed light on the types of

situations that are particularly angering or shameful in the respective cultures. In Study 2, we therefore compared which situations elicit stronger feelings of anger and shame in the US and Japan. Our prediction was that the higher intensity emotions would be associated with situations reflecting central concerns in each culture. In order to make a cross-cultural comparison of emotion-elicitors possible, we set out first to establish the dimensions underlying these situations.

Study 2: Dimensions of Anger and Shame Situations in the US and Japan

The main hypothesis for this study was that situations touching on the central cultural concerns would be particularly powerful emotion elicitors (the “situation relevance hypothesis”). In order to establish the underlying content structure of our sample of anger and shame situations from Study 1, we used a card-sort task in Study 2.

To enable the formulation of specific comparative predictions, we relied on the few pointers available in the literature. Earlier research suggests that anger antecedents vary with respect to (a) the closeness of the antagonist and (b) the violation of personal rights as opposed to interpersonal norms. Furthermore, previous findings suggest that shame antecedents vary with respect to the type of self-violations involved, ranging from personal flaws to loss of public face. We predicted cultural differences in anger-eliciting situations, such that situations in which close others violated personal rights (an independent concern) would be more powerful anger elicitors in the US, whereas situations in which distant others violated interpersonal norms (an interdependent concern) would be more powerful elicitors of anger in Japan. In addition, we predicted cultural differences in shame-eliciting situations, such that the revelation of personal flaws (an independent concern) would be stronger elicitors of shame in the US, whereas losing face (an interdependent concern) would be a stronger elicitor of shame in Japan. In both cases,

violations of the central cultural concerns were expected to produce higher intensity emotions, as measured in Study 1.

Method

Participants. Participants for Study 2 were 81 American students (40 women) at Boston College and 79 Japanese students (40 women) at Kyoto University. The American students were all born in the United States with the exception of two participants⁴. The American participants identified as White / Caucasian American (69.1%), Asian / Asian American (12.3%), Black / African American (7.4%), Hispanic / Latino-American (7.4%), ethnically mixed (2.5%) and Native Pacific Islander (1.2%). The Japanese students were all born in Japan and had no immigrant background. American and Japanese students were both on average 19.7 years old ($SD = 1.1$). For testing the relevance hypothesis, we used data from Studies 1 and 2 jointly; the participant samples of these two studies were, in each culture, comparable with respect to gender, age, and ethnic composition.

Material. The situation vignettes used for the card sort were identical to the ones used in Study 1.

Card sort procedure. Participants came to the lab and were told that they would sort 40 situations that other students had reported to be related to anger / shame, in any way that made sense to them. They were instructed to first read all situations and to then sort them, using an internet-based card-sort tool (<http://websort.net>). Participants sorted the situations into as many categories as they saw fit, thinking about “what makes some situations similar to each other and different from others.” Half of the participants from each culture sorted anger situations, the other half sorted shame situations.

Participants created between 2 and 18 categories for anger, and between 2 and 16 for shame. There were cultural differences in the number of anger categories (US: $M = 9.45$, $SD = 3.40$; Japan: $M = 8.15$, $SD = 2.99$), $t(78) = 1.81$, $p = .07$), but not in the number of shame categories (US: $M = 8.51$, $SD = 2.38$, Japan: $M = 8.25$, $SD = 3.10$).

Analytic strategy.

Establishing the structure of the domain. For each participant, we created a 40 x 40 co-occurrence similarity matrix for all possible combinations of situations. For the American students, we aggregated the 41 anger situation matrices and the 40 shame situation matrices respectively; for the Japanese students, we aggregated the 39 anger situation matrices and the 40 shame situation matrices respectively. In order to establish the culturally common structure underlying both anger and shame situations, we subjected the aggregated matrices of the American and Japanese participants for each emotion separately to individual difference multidimensional scaling using a generalized Euclidian model (identical to GEMSCAL in the ALSCAL procedure). For each emotion, configurations were obtained in dimensions 2 to 10, with 10 being the maximum number of meaningful dimensions for a set of 40 stimuli (Kruskal & Wish, 1978). Based on inspection of the scree plots and for reasons of interpretability, we opted for a two-dimensional solution. The configurations in two dimensions were good, with normalized raw stress of .079 and .066 for anger and shame, respectively. For each emotion, the dimension weights after rotation were almost identical across samples (anger: $US_{Dim1} = .495$, $Japan_{Dim1} = .477$, $US_{Dim2} = .458$, $Japan_{Dim2} = .465$; shame: $US_{Dim1} = .512$, $Japan_{Dim1} = .517$, $US_{Dim2} = .436$, $Japan_{Dim2} = .437$), pointing to a very similar representation of the situational spaces in the US and Japan⁵.

Hypothesis testing. In order to test the situation relevance hypothesis, we combined the data from Studies 1 and 2. Using the program MLwiN 2.10 (Rasbash et al., 2009), we again conducted multilevel regression analyses (situations nested within persons). For each culture separately, we examined how the position of the situation along the two dimensions (Study 2) was associated with the power of that situation to elicit the emotion in question (Study 1). Cultural differences were established using Wald chi-square tests (see Goldstein, 2003, chap. 2).

Results

Situation Dimensions

Anger. As predicted, one dimension reflected the antagonist's *relational closeness* (vertical dimension, Figure 2). Situations at the top of the dimension involve antagonists with whom the person has an intimate relationship, whereas situations at the bottom involve antagonists who are strangers or acquaintances.

The second (horizontal) dimension bears some resemblance to the predicted dimension of violation of personal rights versus interpersonal norms. It can best be interpreted as one of degree of *intentionality* of the antagonist. Whereas the left of this dimension refers to situations in which antagonists purposefully inflict harm or, in other words, make an effort to offend, the situations on the right refer to situations in which antagonists fail to be considerate or, in other words, do not make an effort to live up to interpersonal norms.

Shame. As predicted, one dimension of the situational space represented the type of *self-violations* involved (horizontal dimension, Figure 3). At the left extreme of this dimension, people's personal flaws in character or abilities became evident (e.g., not having called home for several weeks), whereas at the right, people failed to behave appropriately and lost face in mostly public situations (e.g., talking to oneself and being overheard by a stranger).

The second (vertical) dimension represented *agency*: Situations on this dimension differ in terms of who caused the feeling of shame. Whereas shame in situations at the top was caused by others' actions (e.g., being ridiculed by friends), shame in situations at the bottom was caused by the person's own actions (e.g., getting everybody lost after having claimed to know the way).

Situation Relevance Hypothesis. Cultural differences in anger elicitors were small, but differences in shameful elicitors were considerable and in the predicted direction (for an overview of the beta weights and significance tests, see Table 1). In Figures 2 and 3, each culture is represented by a separate arrow; the arrows point in the direction of the types of situations that, for that culture, most powerfully elicited the pertinent emotion (the angle was derived from the beta weights in Table 1; for details on calculation, see Kruskal & Wish, 1978, p. 87).

Anger. Consistent with our predictions, only the Japanese and not the American students perceived situations more angering to the extent that they described others who were *inconsiderate* of interpersonal norms (as opposed to purposefully inflicting harm); the American students did however, against our prediction, not perceive situations in which their personal rights were violated as more angering, and the difference between US and Japanese participants was only tendentially significant, $\chi^2(1) = 2.51$, $p = .11$. Consistent with our prediction, US participants perceived situations with close others as more angering than situations with distant others; inconsistent with our prediction, Japanese students also perceived situations with close others as more angering, and the difference between US and Japanese participants did not reach significance, $\chi^2(1) = 2.01$, $p = .16$.

Shame. A more pronounced pattern of differences was found for the shame-eliciting situations. Consistent with our predictions, the power of a situation to elicit shame was related with kinds of self-violations, $\chi^2(1) = 5.81$, $p = .02$: Americans perceived situations in which their

personal flaws were revealed as more shameful, whereas Japanese perceived situations that implied a loss of public face as more shameful. Japanese and American students also differed substantially in terms of the source of agency eliciting shame, $\chi^2(1) = 6.26$, $p = .01$: Americans perceived situations in which others' actions caused them to feel shame as more shameful, while Japanese perceived situations in which they themselves were responsible as more shameful.

Discussion

Study 2 further illustrates how situations differentially afford anger and shame in the US and Japan. According to the situation relevance hypothesis, we expected that anger and shame elicitors would differ across cultures, such that situations touching on central cultural concerns would elicit higher intensity emotions in the respective cultural contexts. We started from the same systematically sampled pool of situations as in Study 1. A cross-culturally common representation of both the dimensional space of anger antecedents and of shame antecedents allowed us to compare what is particularly angering and shameful across cultures.

We identified two dimensions underlying our sample of *anger* situations—the dimensions of relational closeness with the antagonist (intimates versus distant others), and the level of intentionality of the antagonist's act (intentional harm versus failure to be considerate). Based on past cross-cultural research, we had predicted that US and Japanese anger elicitors would differ with respect to the closeness of the antagonist and the type of violation (individual rights violations versus social norm violations). However, the second dimension was better described as the antagonist's level of intentionality—ranging from highly intentional to merely inconsiderate or oblivious acts. There are several reasons to have faith in this dimension: (a) it was based on careful empirical research that started from frequent and salient emotion elicitors and that used participants' own categorization of the situations to establish meaning dimensions;

(b) it resonates with earlier research in US and Western European cultural contexts that finds blame to be an important appraisal component of anger (Kuppens et al., 2003).

We did not find evidence for the predicted cultural differences in the closeness of the antagonist: American and Japanese participants, alike, perceived situations with close others to be more angering. However, whereas intentionality was no systematic predictor of anger in the US sample, the Japanese students perceived situations in which others were inconsiderate as more angering. Although this cultural difference was not statistically significant, the finding is in line with the Japanese cultural model that emphasizes politeness rules and the consideration of others. Because Japan is a “tight” culture (Gelfand et al., 2011), compliance with the norm may be generally expected, not negotiable, and therefore angering.

The domain of *shame* situations was defined by two dimensions as well: One dimension reflected the type of self-violation (personal flaws versus face loss) and the other dimension referred to the source of agency (self versus other). The first dimension of shame was consistent with our predication that self-violations would range from the revelation of personal and internal flaws to loss of public face as a possible dimension underlying shame situations. The distinction is however somewhat more nuanced than we initially predicted: Those situations that involve a revelation of personal flaws are about deficits in persistent, fixed and stable traits or abilities (e.g., being a bad son, being a bad sibling, being a bad team mate) – in other words *feeling bad about who you are*. In comparison, situations involving a loss of public face reflect deficits in fleeting, local and malleable behaviors and public impressions – or in other words *looking bad in public*. The second dimension of other versus self agency had not been predicted, yet it further organizes shame situations in a meaningful way.

Our study yielded strong cultural differences in the kinds of situations that American and Japanese participants found shameful. While the American participants perceived situations shameful in which others point out personal flaws, Japanese students perceived those situations as shameful in which people themselves realize that they lost face in public. Again, these differences can be understood from the respective cultural models. An independent model emphasizes self-actualization and maintenance of high self-esteem, particularly where it concerns the realm of the private self (e.g., abilities, traits). Moreover, the value placed on dignity in middle class US cultural contexts (such as our samples at Boston college) implies a strong focus on preserving autonomy in the face of others (Kim et al., 2010). It is not surprising, therefore, that American participants perceive it to be most shameful when others point out personal and internal flaws. Not only have the protagonists in these situations failed at exactly those aspects of the self that matter most, this failure has also been made evident by others, further undermining their interpretive autonomy. An interdependent model, on the other hand, emphasizes the need to preserve face in public; continuous effort at scrutinizing one's behavior (rather than one's stable abilities or traits, which may not be subject to adjustment) is key to successful social performance and harmonious interactions with others (Kim et al., 2010). Realizing that one has failed at monitoring one's behavior and consequently may have bothered others, implies a loss of face and is understandably perceived as particularly shameful in the Japanese cultural context.

These findings allow for a specification of our working definition of shame. In order to not preclude cultural variation, we had initially defined shame in general terms as an emotion "involving a negative evaluation of the self". We had eschewed from making more specific definitions of shame a priori—e.g., as an externally oriented negative evaluation of one's global,

stable self (Tangney, 1991; Tracy & Robins, 2004)—as these may be culturally biased (see Footnote 1). Our findings support this decision: Defining shame as an externally oriented negative evaluation of one's global self may be appropriate for the US, but not the Japanese context. In the US, the situations that were considered most shameful (others pointing out personal flaws) were in line with this definition. In Japan, however, these situations were perceived as less relevant for feeling shame; instead, shame was about situations in which one realizes that one had lost face in public. Shame thus appears to take on specific meanings across cultures that differ in line with the dominant cultural models of independence and interdependence (see also Mesquita & Karasawa, 2004).

General Discussion

Two cross-cultural studies provided evidence that emotional experiences hinge on the different situations that people encounter and find relevant across cultures. A questionnaire study demonstrated that (perceived) likelihood to encounter a situation depended on the situation eliciting culturally condoned or condemned emotions. Situations are encountered more frequently to the extent that they elicit culturally condoned emotions (anger in the US, and shame in Japan); they are encountered less frequently to the extent that they elicit condemned emotions (shame in the US, and anger in Japan).

A card sort study provided cross-culturally common dimensional solutions for anger and shame situations respectively, and made it possible to compare which kinds of situations were perceived to elicit these emotions across cultures. We had predicted that situations touching on central cultural concerns are particularly strong emotion-elicitors. The anger antecedents provided modest evidence for this prediction. In both cultures, situations that made people particularly angry involved interactions with close others. Consistent with our prediction, only in

Japan were situations in which others were not making an effort to act considerately particularly anger-eliciting. The differences in what was considered shameful across cultures were stronger. Situations that elicited strong feelings of shame were, for Americans, situations in which others pointed out their personal flaws, while Japanese perceived more shame in situations in which the protagonists themselves realized that they had failed at maintaining face in public. These differences relate strongly to the respective cultural concerns of an independent, autonomous self that aims at maintaining dignity, and an interdependent, relational self, that aims at maintaining face.

When taking the findings from both studies together, a cohesive picture emerges of how situations afford emotional experience across cultures. In the US, situations that elicit strong feelings of, for example, anger (are perceived to) occur rather frequently; these strong experiences of anger are primarily elicited by situations with close others. Thus, angering situations in the US are culturally promoted in line with the necessary concerns and tasks of an independent self that needs to continuously negotiate personal autonomy within close relationships. While situations with close others are also strong elicitors of anger in Japan, highly angering situations are generally perceived as rather uncommon. In Japan, the focus is on steering clear of angry interactions in order to maintain harmony with close others: Even though situations with close others would theoretically be perceived as angering, they may be of less relevance in daily life as their frequency is low.

Our findings shed new light on previously observed differences in the intensity and rates at which certain emotions are experienced across cultures (Kitayama et al., 2006; Mesquita & Karasawa, 2002). Anger may be more intense and frequent in the US, and shame more intense and frequent in Japan, because of *cultural regulation* at the level of the antecedents: The

frequency with which certain situations are experienced, especially those relevant to central cultural concerns, may underlie these cultural differences in emotional experience. Antecedent-focused regulation may occur in a number of different ways. Certain common cultural practices may bring about certain kinds of situations and make them occur more frequently (e.g., practice of *hansei* or critical self-reflection leading to more shame-inducing situations). Social life may be structured in ways that affect the prevalence of certain situations (e.g., politeness rituals and highly structured social interactions reducing friction and keep social transactions smooth). Finally, institutionalized values may afford the experience of certain kinds of situations (e.g., a strongly endorsed right for free speech increasing situations of dissent).

This is one of the first psychological studies to make theoretical predictions on the types of situations that elicit emotions. In two preliminary studies, we have systematically sampled culturally relevant situations from both the US and Japan and scripted vignettes that retained central features of the situation. In a questionnaire and a card sort study, we then established their (perceived) frequency and intensity and, using a bottom-up approach, identified the underlying, cross-culturally common dimensions or features of these situations. This allowed us to determine the kinds of situations that are particularly powerful elicitors of anger and shame in each culture. In doing so, we followed the recent calls for a (social) psychology that takes the role of social situations in *affording* individual psychological processes seriously (e.g., Kitayama, 2002; Reis, 2008). While a large range of situations can in principle elicit anger or shame, our studies suggest that in their daily lives, people are more likely to encounter situations that elicit those emotions that are more desirable or functional in their cultural context.

Limitations and Future Research

The sample of situations that we used in both studies was derived from cross-cultural interviews and experience sampling in order to capture a broad range of highly salient and daily antecedents of anger and shame in both cultures. However, we cannot rule out that other kinds of situations would be relevant in non-student populations and other cultures besides the US and Japan⁶. Future emotion research would benefit from using larger samples of emotion eliciting situations that had been generated by more diverse samples of participants.

Moreover, the current findings are based on participants' perceptions of culturally shared ideas about the frequency and emotion-eliciting power of situation. We chose this referent-shift approach in order to avoid self-presentational biases, which may occur especially when asking participants about culturally undesirable emotions. These findings should however be replicated by experience sampling methods that allow for a real-life assessment of situation frequency and power.

Finally, mechanisms other than a cultural up- or down regulation of situations may be involved in making the experience of condoned emotions more and of condemned emotions less likely. Individuals may, for example, also actively seek out certain situations or (re-)appraise them in culturally desirable ways (see also De Leersnyder, Boiger, & Mesquita, in press). The current studies make a strong claim for situation promotion as a culture-level process:

Participants reported on their shared cultural perception of a randomly sampled set of situations from both cultures, thus precluding individual tendencies at seeking out situations and limiting the influence of individual appraisal tendencies. Future research may want to explore how structural affordances and individual tendencies play together in bringing emotional experience in line with what is culturally condoned or condemned.

Conclusion

Across cultures, people's emotional lives hinge on the situations that are frequent and relevant antecedents of their emotional experiences. By considering the situational affordance of emotional experience, the object of study shifts from the fixed characteristics of an emotional state to the conditional likelihood of emotional experiences under given circumstances.

Consequently, the question of cultural differences in emotions becomes how culture affects this likelihood. In this view, culture is not an independent variable that elicits psychological phenomena such as emotions. Instead, culture manifests itself at the intersection of daily realities and psychological phenomena; it is, among others, the patterning of emotional life itself.

Footnotes

¹More specific definitions of shame have been proposed in the past—mainly in order to distinguish shame from guilt. For example, shame has been defined in terms of an *externally oriented* negative evaluation of one's *global, stable* self—while guilt would involve an internally oriented evaluation of one's specific, temporary behavior (Tangney, 1991; Tracy & Robins, 2004). However, in many East Asian cultures external and internal orientation overlap and the self is primarily defined in terms of situation-specific roles and behavior; consequently, linguistic distinctions between shame and guilt are less evident in the respective languages (Wong & Tsai, 2007). We have therefore chosen a general working definition of shame that applies equally well to both the US and Japanese context.

²Of the original 54 shame situations, we had to remove 11 that did not meet the inclusion criteria. We supplemented the pool by adding two shame situations that had been reported in the interview study by respondents from a community sample. These additional situations were general in content and applied to a student population.

³There are theoretical and methodological reasons for testing our situation promotion hypothesis by comparing associations between frequency and power of situations rather than mean frequencies across cultures. First, by comparing associations, we take into account the emotion-eliciting power of the situation—situations should be promoted or avoided *to the extent that they elicit stronger experiences* of condoned or condemned emotions. Second, participants differ in the way they use rating scales across cultures. East Asian participants tend to be more moderate in their judgments (e.g., Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995), thus biasing mean comparisons. Comparing associations circumvents this problem inherent to cross-cultural research.

⁴The patterns of significant results remained the same if the non-US born participants were excluded from the analyses; we therefore decided to retain them.

⁵Visual inspection of separate MDS solutions for American and Japanese students for each emotion indicated very similar solutions for American and Japanese students.

⁶However, a recent replication of the study with Dutch-speaking Belgian students that included 20 additional Belgian situations yielded a largely identical solution (Boiger, Uchida, Mesquita, & Barrett, 2011).

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Table 1

Position of Situation in the Two-Dimensional Space Predicting its Emotion-Eliciting Power

	Anger				Shame			
	Inconsiderateness		Relational		Face loss (vs.		Other agency (vs.	
	(vs.		closeness (vs.		personal flaws)		self agency)	
	purposefulness)		distance)					
	<i>b</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Z</i>
US	0.04	1.03	0.26	7.51***	-0.12	2.64**	0.13	3.00**
Japan	0.12	2.80**	0.19	4.51***	0.39	5.40***	-0.44	6.38***

Note. Multi-level regressions (situations nested in participants). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1. Frequency of anger and shame situations as predicted by US and Japanese students' perception of the situations' emotion-eliciting power

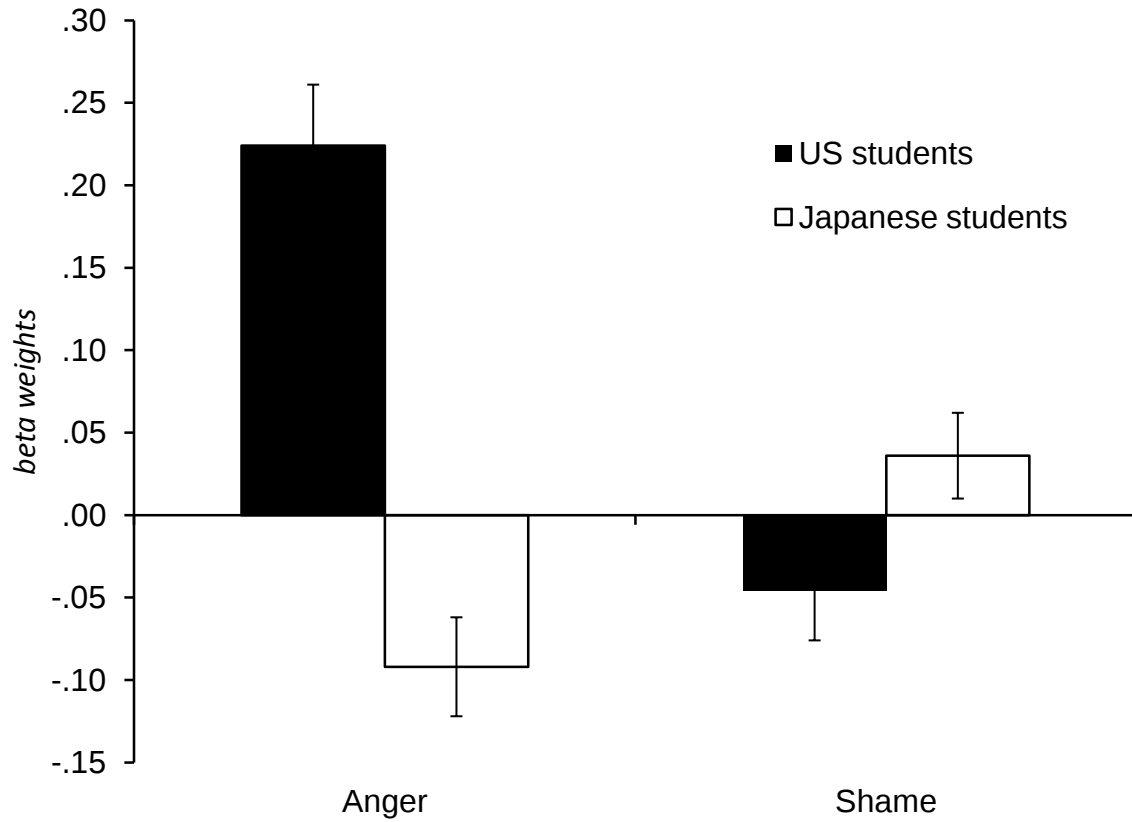
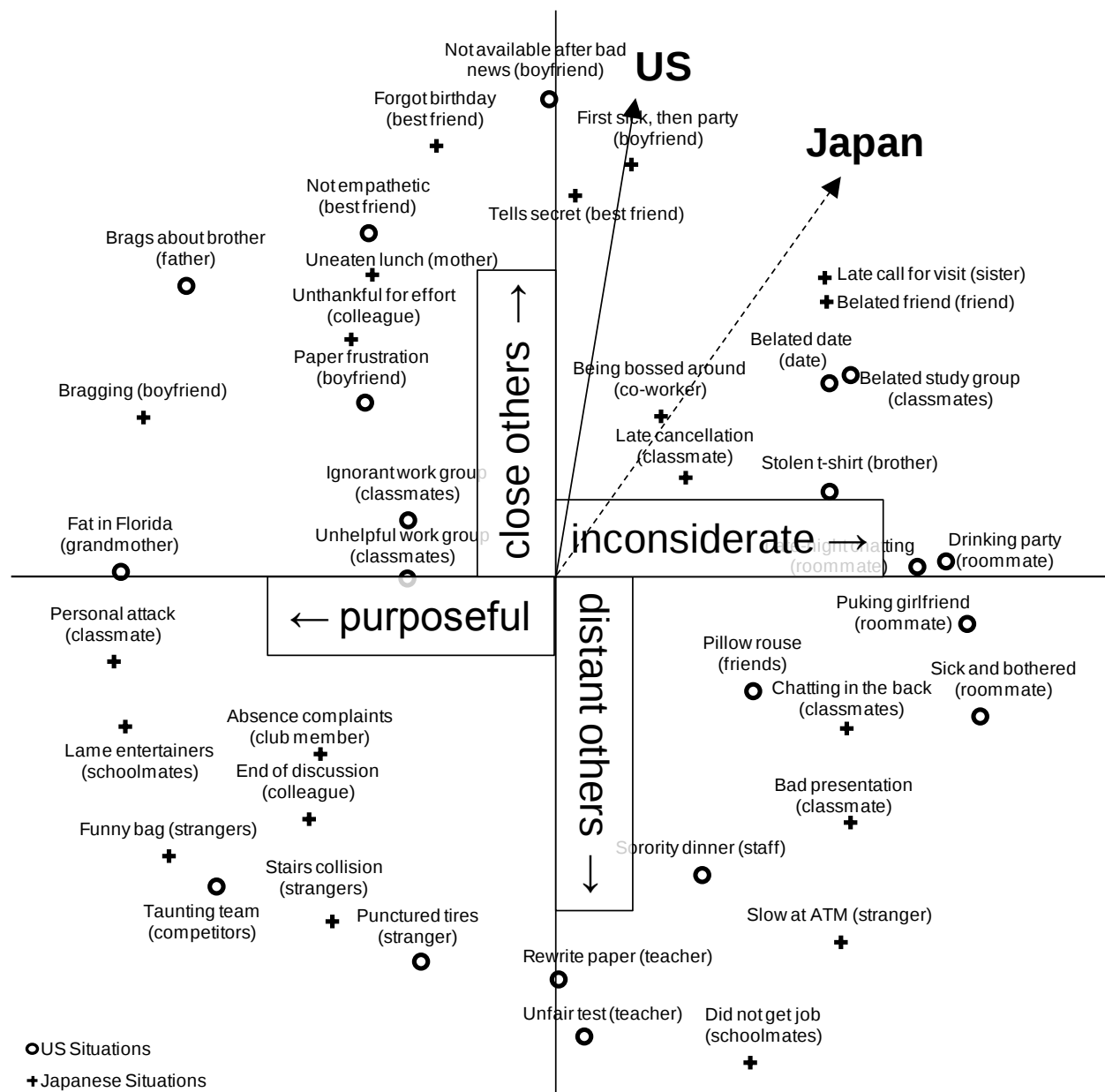
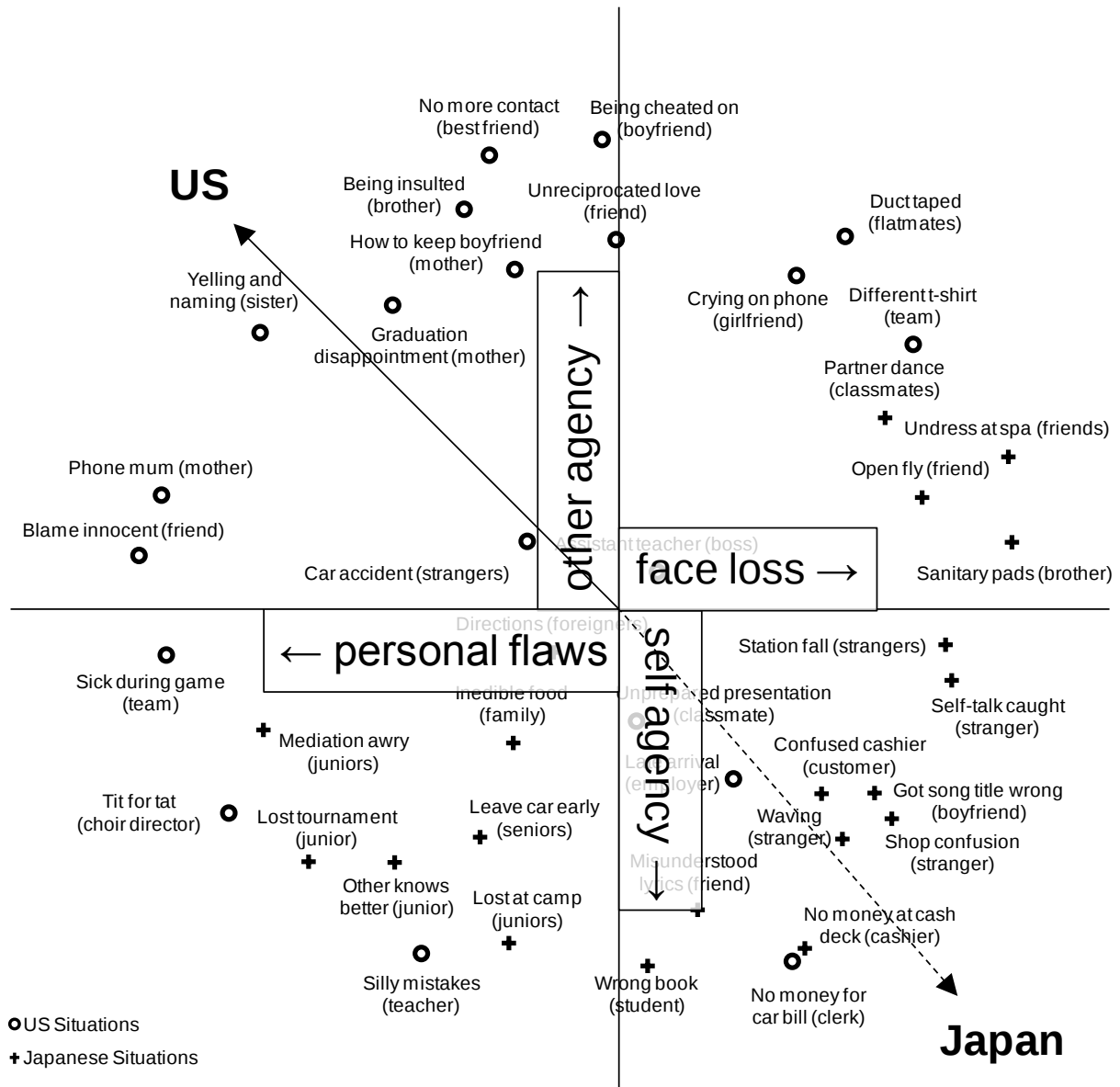


Figure 2. Cross-culturally common two-dimensional scaling solution for anger situations with the kinds of situations that elicit stronger anger in each culture indicated by separate arrows



Note. Non-metric individual difference scaling (weighted, rotated). Normalized raw stress = .079. Full situations descriptions are available online at [Supplementary file].

Figure 3. Cross-culturally common two-dimensional scaling solution for shame situations with the kinds of situations that elicit stronger shame in each culture indicated by separate arrows



Note. Non-metric individual difference scaling (weighted, rotated). Normalized raw stress = .066. Full situations descriptions are available online at [Supplementary file]