

Self-esteem and feelings of guilt and shame in undergraduate college students

Chelsea Puetz

Academic Advisor: Dr. Raquel A Lopez

Department of Psychology, St. Norbert College

Introduction

- Self-esteem is an evaluative construct that is vital to one's self-concept and plays an important role in an individual's positive progress (Metalsky et al., 1993).
- Both guilt and shame are feelings evoked by distressing personal transgressions, oftentimes used interchangeably, as they both relate to one's self-concept, aiding in self-regulation in service of social expectations (Gray-Little et al., 1997)
 - Guilt is internal, negative feelings about one's behavior following private transgressions.
 - Shame is expressed in response to public exposure of one's failures.
- Low self-esteem has been linked to shame proneness, and negative self evaluations (NSEs) (e.g. feeling bad about oneself) following public transgressions.
 - Such NSEs are typically associated with feelings of shame, and are strongly correlated with low self-esteem (Tangney & Dearing, 2002).
- Shame-prone individuals have shown similar characteristics to those who have low self-esteem, engaging in behaviors that seem problematic or maladaptive (Thomas & Warren-Findlow, 2020).

Hypotheses

H1: There will be a significant (positive or negative) relationship between self-esteem and shame.

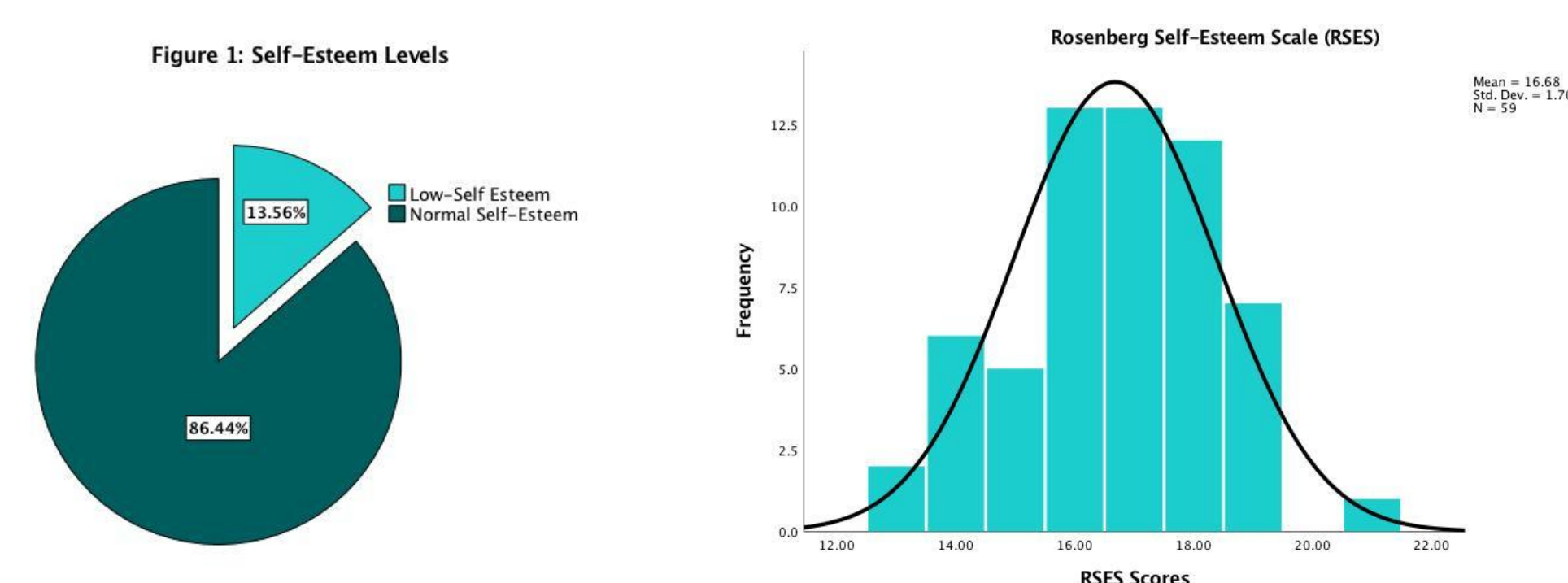
H2: Individuals with lower self-esteem will experience higher levels of both guilt and shame-proneness.

H3: There will be a stronger positive correlation between low self-esteem and shame-proneness than between low self-esteem and guilt proneness

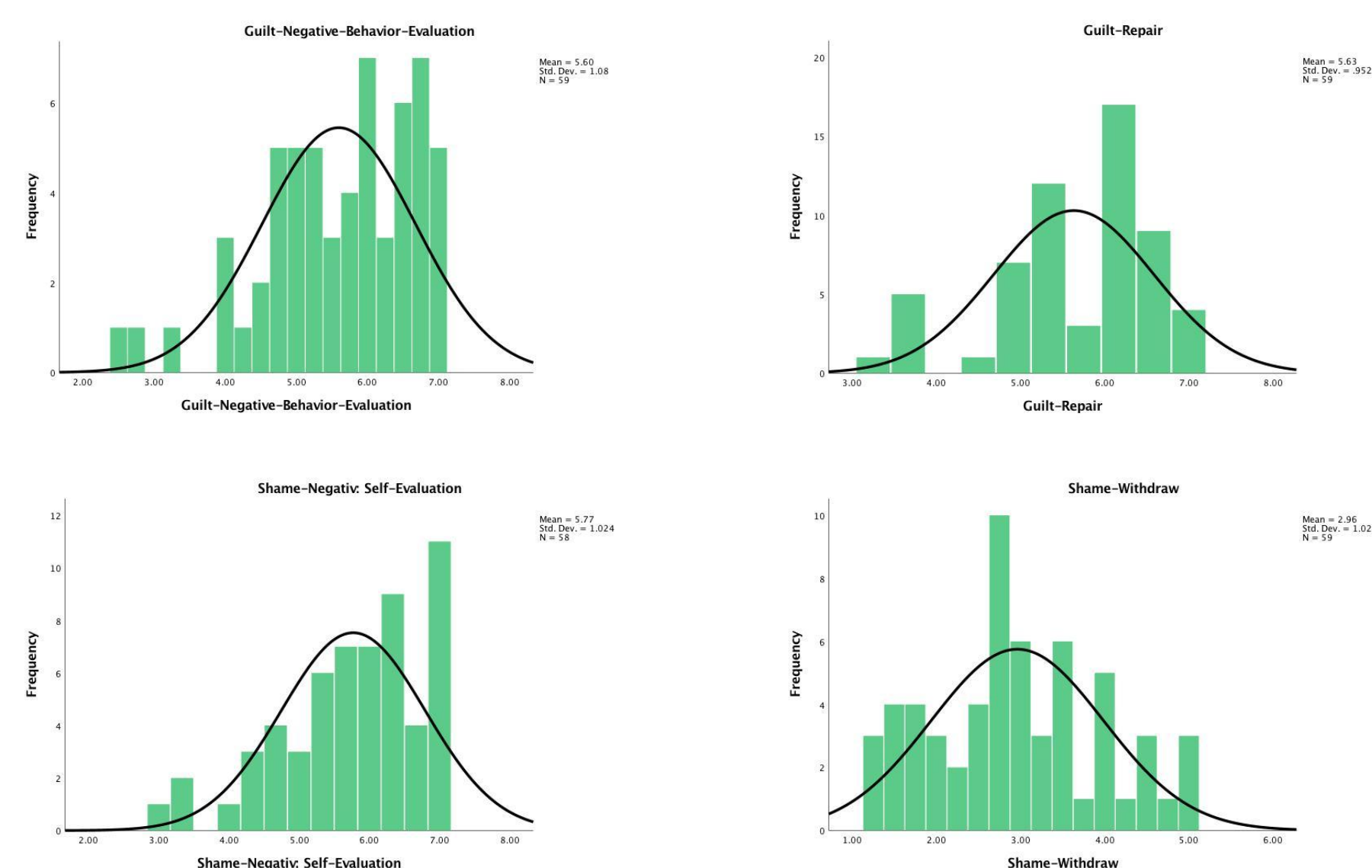
Method

- Participants**
 - 58 undergraduate students (N =58) were recruited
 - Participants attended a small liberal arts college in the Midwest
 - Participants were between the ages of 18-22 years old (mean age = 19.76 years old)

- Measures**
 - Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)*
 - 10-item scale
 - 4-point Likert with sum of scores



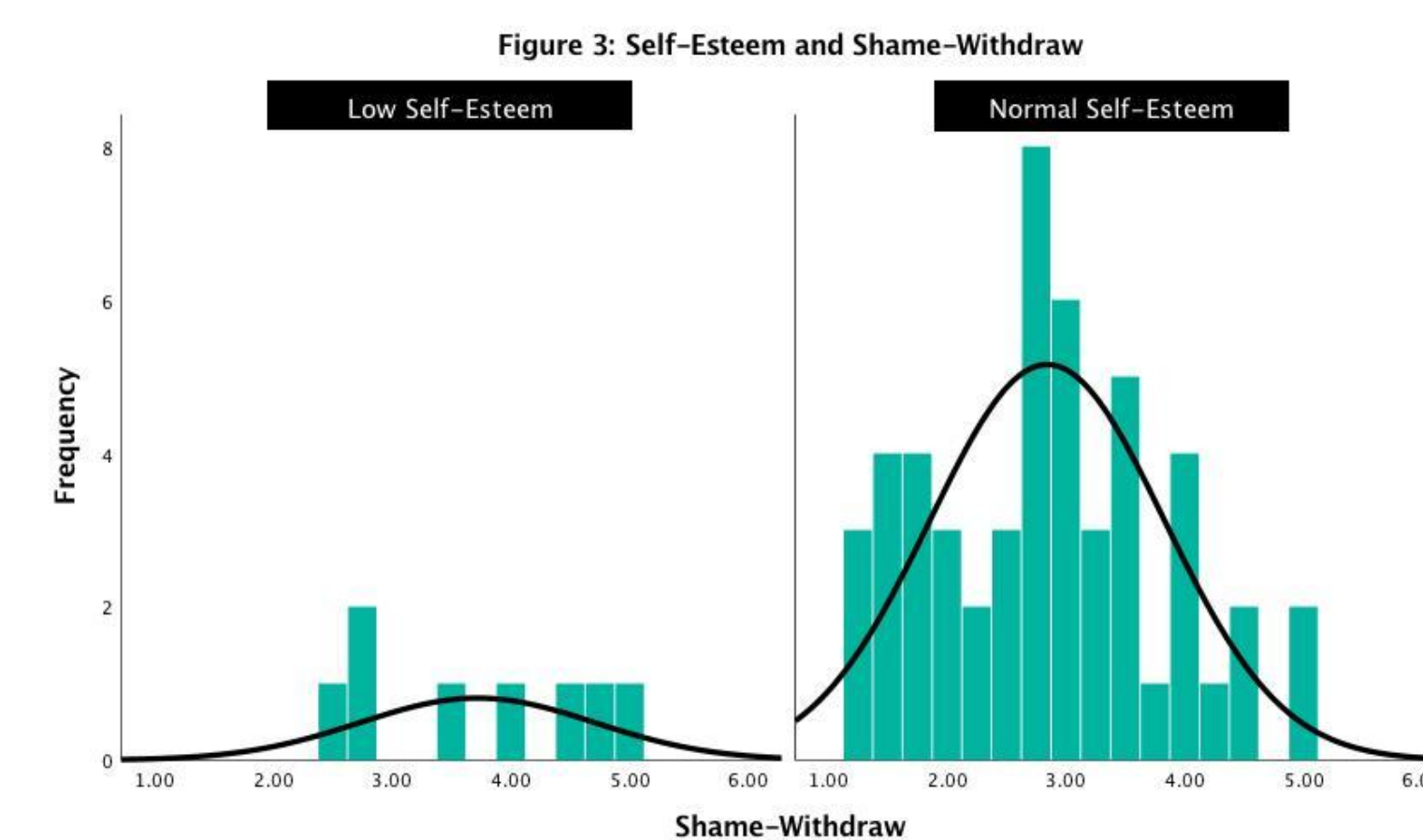
- Guilt-and-Shame-Proneness Scale (GASP)*
 - 15-item scale
 - 4 subsets: Guilt-Negative-Behavior-Evaluation (NBE), Guilt-Repair, Shame-Negative Self-Evaluation (NSE), and Shame-Withdraw



- Procedure**
 - After receiving informed consent, participants completed an online survey comprised of various questionnaires
 - Questionnaires examined in this study included those of the RSES and GASP

Results

- H1:** Self-Esteem will have a significant reaction with shame.
 - The Shame-Withdraw subscale (GASP) produced significant results when ran in an initial one-way ANOVA with self-esteem (RSES)
 - There was a significant amount of Shame-Withdraw for self-esteem at the $p < 0.05$ level.
 - $F(1,55) = 5.45, p < 0.023$
 - The Shame-NSE subscale (GASP) produced almost significant results
 - $F(1,55) = 2.89, p < 0.094$
 - A paired samples t-test was later performed, finding a stat sig difference for self-esteem and Shame-Withdraw ($p < 0.043$) with equal variances not assumed.



- Both **H2** and **H3** have been rejected due to the fact that the sample size for individuals with low self-esteem (N= 8) was too low to produce any significant results.
 - No significant results between self-esteem and both guilt subscales.
- A correlation analysis was run to test each of the GASP subscales in correlation with each other.
 - Both guilt subscales were significantly correlated at the 0.05 level with Shame NSEs ($p < 0.015$)
 - Guilt-Repair and Guilt NBEs were significantly related at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.017$)
 - Shame withdraw and Shame NSEs were also significantly correlated at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.032$)

Discussion

- No significant interactions found between low self-esteem (specifically), guilt, and shame
 - Promise in finding significant results in the future
 - Shame-Withdraw describes individuals who are likely to actively hide or withdraw from public
 - Results indicate that these tendencies do have an interaction with self-esteem in general for undergraduate college students
 - This suggests that college student's self-esteem levels will determine whether or not they will withdraw from social situations
- Strong, positive correlations between GASP subscales indicates that guilt and shame are significantly related. The following suggestions can be made:
 - Individuals who experience guilt about how they act (NBE) will also who engage in action tendencies to compensate (Guilt-Repair)
 - Additionally they will experience shame NSEs (e.g. feeling bad about oneself)
 - Individuals who withdraw from social situations (Shame-Withdraw) will also experience shame NSEs
- Future Research/Limitations**
 - Wider range of participants beyond just undergraduate students
 - More diverse demographic
 - Use of a variety of scales to examine self-esteem
 - Only 14% of participants classified as "low self-esteem"

References

References available upon request.

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