

Running head: GUILT OR SHAME

Reconciliation Responses, Blame and Expressions of Guilt or Shame

Caroline Kamau,

Southampton Solent University, UK

&

Roger Giner-Sorolla,

University of Kent, UK

&

Sven Zebel

University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Main text and footnote: 3159 words

Final pre-publication version

Correspondence to: Caroline Kamau, School of Human Sciences, Southampton Solent

University, East Park Terrace, SO14 0YN, United Kingdom. E-mail:

caroline.kamau@solent.ac.uk Telephone: +442380319053

Abstract

Recipients of intergroup apologies have been found to prefer expressions of shame over guilt. However, there is little research comparing the responses of a wronged group with those of a blamed group. Kenyans/Britons evaluated guilt/shame statements about colonialism, with blame measured as the assignment of collective guilt to Britain. Amongst Britons, there was a significant interaction, with high ingroup blamers expecting more reconciliation from shame than from guilt, and vice versa for low ingroup blamers. Amongst Kenyans, there was no main effect of blame, but more reconciliation was expected from shame than from guilt. Wronged groups thus appear to prefer shame over guilt, whereas preference for guilt/shame amongst members of a blamed group depends on the level of ingroup blame.

Keywords: guilt; shame; blame; colonialism; reconciliation

Reconciliation Responses, Blame and Expressions of Guilt or Shame

The historical legacy of Britain's colonization of Kenya has recently become a matter of controversy. Fueling a re-examination of British colonialism in Kenya, historian Caroline Elkins' (2005) Pulitzer-Prize-winning book compared Britain's practices to those in gulags in Stalinist Russia, while a BBC documentary (2002) showed Kenyan interviewees recounting gruesome experiences such as genital mutilation, gouging of eyes, rape, and murder. These sources alleged that the practices were officially sanctioned by "the Colonial Administration and the British Government" (BBC, 2002b). Against this backdrop, human rights lawyers and the Kenya Human Rights Commission have recently filed a law suit against the British government on the basis of this research (KHRC, 2009). Nonetheless, there has been no official British apology to Kenya for colonial atrocities.

This ongoing process highlights the differences between Kenyans and Britons in blaming Britain for colonialism. British public responses to the recent wave of media attention have also involved differing amounts of collective in-group blame. For instance, in the documentary, one British former colonial official in Kenya defended the brutality that took place during colonialism, while another said: "What went on in the Kenya camps and villages was brutal, savage torture... I feel ashamed to have come from a Britain that did what it did here" (in BBC 2002b). Apparently, blaming of Britain for colonialism can determine beliefs about the appropriate emotional response.

Another consequence of these differences in blame might be a difference between how citizens of the two countries evaluate the emotional content of a collective apology from Britain to Kenya. Based on previous research, we predicted that a British person who accepts less collective blame than a Kenyan would assign to Britain would view a British apology

expressed with guilt, rather than shame, to be more effective in leading to reconciliation. On the other hand, a Kenyan or a British person who accepts collective blame for the atrocities would be more optimistic about an apology expressed with shame.

Blame, Guilt, and Shame

When one group wrongs another, people in a wronged group blame the perpetrators to different degrees (Giner-Sorolla, Kamau & Castano, in press; Pennekamp, Doosje, Zebel & Fischer, 2007). People in a perpetrating group also blame their own group to different degrees (Brown et al. 2008; Zebel, Doosje, & Spears, 2009). Blaming one's own group involves accepting collective responsibility and considering that members of the group should feel bad.

The negative emotions of shame and guilt have been studied as appropriate responses to intergroup wrongdoing (Giner-Sorolla et al., 2008; Giner-Sorolla et al., in press; see also Brown et al., 2008; Lickel et al., 2005). Shame has been defined as an emotion corresponding to a global negative evaluation of the self, or to concerns about one's moral image, while guilt corresponds to a negative evaluation of one's actions (e.g. Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tracy & Robins, 2006; Smith et al., 2002). Research on the reception of shame and guilt in a collective apology has found that shame leads to more positive reactions overall than guilt; also, shame reduces the insult taken when an offer of compensation accompanies the apology (Giner-Sorolla et al., 2008). Further research has shown that when people differ in their blame of the apologizing party, the ability of shame to reduce insult taken from compensation is strongest for those who blame the apologizing party most strongly (Giner-Sorolla et al., 2010). These results argue against the position that shame is always less adaptive than guilt because studies showing this (e.g. Tangney & Dearing, 2002) consider the outcomes for individuals, but not for recipients in the larger social context. In a social situation where appeasement is seen as appropriate, an expression of shame can defuse the insult taken from a

gesture of reconciliation, and be satisfying by itself. Shame can therefore be more socially adaptive than guilt, especially if the wrongdoing is at the group level and if the shame is expressed collectively.

The present research extended previous results in several ways. Most importantly, we investigated under what circumstances a person will prefer shame over guilt when the ingroup apologizes for wrongs against an outgroup. We took as our focal population British citizens presented with an apology toward ex-colonies. We thought that this sample would vary in collective blame assigned to Britain, and that those high in collective blame would prefer a shame apology over a guilt apology, as a more convincing expression of negative self-conscious feelings. As a comparison population thought to be high in blame, we looked at a Kenyan sample; this population was expected to show a clearer preference for a shame apology.

This approach suggests the use of a measure oriented toward expectations of reconciliation; while it is possible for both populations to feel satisfaction but not approach each other, it is more important for both sides to share positive expectations of reconciliation, in order for reconciliation to actually happen. Thus, our main dependent measure deals with expectations of reconciliation from an apology. Another difference from previous research is that previous research in this area has manipulated the expression of shame versus guilt with an extended description of the appraisal and action tendencies theoretically accompanying each emotion. In this research we present merely the terms “shame” and “guilt,” a move towards greater precision and face validity of the manipulation¹.

Giner-Sorolla et al. (2008) argued that shame from an outgroup member is seen as better relative to guilt, because shame suggests an abasement of the outgroup, and shows stronger feelings of self-blame. We therefore expected Kenyans to expect more reconciliation

from shame rather than guilt expressed by Britain about colonialism. Predictions for Britons, however, were more complicated; studies to date have not looked at the role of emotions in expectations about an ingroup's reaction to an apology directed at another group. However, basing our predictions upon Giner-Sorolla et al.'s (2010) findings about judgments of outgroup-to-ingroup apologies, we expected that Britons' preferences would depend on the extent to which they blamed the ingroup. High ingroup-blaming Britons may show a pattern similar to Kenyans, seeing shame expressions as more effective than guilt expressions. However, low ingroup-blammers may believe that guilt is more appropriate than shame, implying a less negative account of wrongdoing for the ingroup. Guilt restricts the scope of bad feelings; rather than blaming the whole ingroup, guilt focuses on the wrongness of a single act. Low ingroup-blammers would thus be more likely to believe that a guilt-based apology will be appropriate and effective. If, as we expect, Kenyans as a group show more blame toward the British than most British do, then this can also explain why Kenyans, like British high ingroup-blammers, would prefer shame over guilt.

Hypotheses

We predicted an interaction between group blame and guilt/shame in predicting anticipated intergroup reconciliation. For Kenyans, we expected higher anticipated reconciliation from shame than from guilt overall, due to this group's high amount of blame. For Britons, we expected higher anticipated reconciliation from guilt than from shame, especially amongst Britons reporting low ingroup blame levels.

Method

Participants and Design

Kenyans (N=82) aged 18-46 years (M=25.47) were recruited in the capital Nairobi and randomly assigned to either a guilt condition (N=41) or a shame condition (N=41). They

were recruited from a university cafeteria and a number of leisure areas such as park grounds and a social club. Of those who indicated their sex 35 were male and 42 were female.

British participants were 68 psychology students recruited in England, aged 18-47 years ($M=20.04$). Participants were randomly assigned to either a guilt condition ($N=36$) or a shame condition ($N=32$). Of those who indicated their sex, there were 6 males and 60 females.

Procedure and materials

All participants read an introduction describing the extent of colonialism, which was similar for both groups, but focused on Kenya for Kenyan participants, and focused on all former British colonies for British participants. They were then asked to imagine an apologetic statement for colonialism offered by Britain on behalf of all British people.

Kenyans were asked: “Imagine if Britain makes the following statement on behalf of all British people who took part in colonialism” and Britons were asked: “Imagine if Britain makes the following statement on behalf of all British people who took part in colonialism, directing the statement at countries that Britain colonized”. Following that was the statement of the emotion.¹ Emotion was varied only by inserting either the term “guilt” or “ashamed” into the sentence “We British people feel ___”.

Each sample then filled out a measure of expected reconciliation, for which we adapted Aron, Aron and Smollan’s (1992) pictorial Inclusion-of-Other-in-Self (IOS) scale to measure expected closeness between Britain and the target of the apology. Britons were asked “How close would Britons and Britain’s ex-colonies be as a result of the statement? Choose one diagram” and Kenyans were asked “How close would Kenyans and Britons be as a result of the statement? Choose one diagram.” In Aron et al.’s original scale, the scale has 7 pairs of circles that vary in closeness. We presented 7 pairs of circles identical to Aron et al.’s original

measure, only that the relations we measured were intergroup rather than interpersonal. In our adaptation the circle on the left-hand of each pair was labelled with the participant's national group (rather than 'self' as in Aron et al.) and the circle on the right-hand of each pair was labelled with the participant's national outgroup (rather than 'other'). Therefore Kenyans were presented with the left-hand circle in each pair labelled 'Kenyans' and the right-hand circle in each pair labelled 'Britons'. Britons were presented with the left-hand circle in each pair labelled 'Britons' and the right-hand circle in each pair labelled 'ex-colonies'. The first pair of circles (not inter-linked) indicated no closeness, the second pair of circles indicated (slightly inter-linked) indicated some closeness, and so on until the seventh pair of circles (closely inter-linked) indicating maximum closeness between one's respective ingroup and the outgroup.

After this, participants completed 10 items adapted from the Branscombe et al. (2004) Collective Guilt Scale (the 2 subscales used concerned the assignment of collective guilt/responsibility). They were adapted so that they measured assignment of blame to Britain whether from the point of view of the British or other people. Sample items are: "All British people should feel guilty because of colonialism in Kenya," "British people as a group should not be held responsible for the actions of British colonialists," (reverse-coded) "I hold all British people responsible for colonialism in Kenya." Responses were based on a 0-100% 5-point response-scale. Cronbach's α was .64 among the Kenyan sample and .69 among the British, suggesting a reasonable internal reliability level.

Results

There was no significant effect of emotion on assigned blame - for Kenyans, $F(1,77)=1.45, ns$; for Britons, $F(1,66)<1, ns$. This shows that blame was orthogonal to the emotion condition, justifying the use of the two in a crossed design. As expected, Kenyans

assigned significantly more blame to Britain ($M=52.03$, $SD=17.0$) than Britons did ($M=39.22$, $SD=14.08$), a difference that was significant, $F(1,145)=24.27$, $p=.001$. A Briton who was one standard deviation above the mean (i.e., a score of 53.30) could be said to have a level of blame similar to that of the average Kenyan (52.03).

Separate general linear models for each sample then tested the main and interaction effects of emotion (guilt, coded -1, or shame, coded 1) and blame (as a continuous variable, centred within each sample) on expected reconciliation.

In the Kenyan sample (Figure 1), there was a marginally significant main effect of emotion $F(1,74)=3.24$, $p=.08$, $\eta^2=.04$, such that shame led to more expected reconciliation ($M=3.63$, $SD=1.74$) than guilt ($M=2.87$, $SD=1.63$). There was no significant main effect of blame on reconciliation and no significant interaction effect, $F(1,74)<1$, *ns*.

In the British sample (Figure 2) there was a marginally significant main effect of ingroup blame, $F(1,64)=2.94$, $p=.091$, $\eta^2=.044$; $\beta=-.02$, $SE=.01$; no significant main effect of emotion, $F(1,64)<1$, *ns*; and a significant interaction effect, $F(1,64)=5.52$, $p=.02$, $\eta^2=.08$. Britons who assigned low blame to the ingroup expected more reconciliation from guilt than from shame, as shown by a negative β coefficient of the simple effect of emotion at 1 SD below the mean of blame: $\beta= -0.77$, $t(64)= -1.99$, $p=.05$. Conversely, those who assigned high blame to the ingroup (mean + 1SD) tended to expect more reconciliation from shame than from guilt: $\beta = 0.54$, $t(64)=1.41$, $p =.16$.

Discussion

In these findings, members of the British national group showed variation in their evaluative responses to shame versus guilt expressions in a British collective apology, depending on their level of ingroup blame. High ingroup-blaters responded similarly to members of the recipient group (Kenyans) in expecting more positive outcomes from a shame

expression than from guilt. Low ingroup-blammers, however, expected more positive outcomes from a guilt expression than from shame. The implication is that preference for shame over guilt is a question of not so much one's own group membership (Briton or Kenyan) as how much blame one ascribes to Britain as the perpetrator group. Kenyans expected more reconciliation from shame than from guilt because their blaming of Britain for colonialism was high.

We should also note that the collective guilt scale we used to measure blame included a number of measures of the assignment of guilt and guilt feelings. However, these results are not tautological; British respondents who responded with high scores on the collective guilt scale actually showed a preference for the shame over guilt expression, whereas those who responded low preferred the guilt over shame expression. This apparent paradox can be resolved by observing that the collective guilt scale does not explicitly contrast guilt feelings against feelings of shame. Indeed, because shame has been characterized as a more strongly felt and more self-condemning emotion than guilt (e.g., Tangney & Dearing, 2002), people who agree that the British should feel guilty may respond more favourably even to an expression of shame than to an expression of guilt, because shame is a stronger emotion that communicates a greater amount of compunction. This seems to be the most reasonable explanation for the apparent disconnection between the emotions our British participants think their own group should feel, and the emotions they think their own group should express.

Our results also partially support those of Giner-Sorolla et al. (2010) in showing a tendency for the victim group to expect overall more positive outcomes from shame than from guilt. However, we did not find a significant interaction between blame and emotion amongst Kenyans, as the previous research did among Black British people considering an apology for police discrimination. It may simply be the case that given the high blame of Britain in the

Kenyan sample, responsibility for the act was not in question, and shame was universally preferred over guilt. Aside from similarities in their levels of blame, future research ought to explore the reasons for the similarity observed between Kenyans and high ingroup-blaming Britons. Both groups expected shame to lead to more reconciliation than guilt. One explanation for this may be that collectivist self-construal was activated in both.

Interestingly, higher collectivism in a culture has been associated with favourable responses to shame (e.g. Stipek, 1998), probably because of shame's capacity to restore harmonious social relations. Studies of East African cultures and of Kenya in particular have shown a relatively higher level of collectivism compared to Western countries (Hofstede, 1983; Ma & Schoeneman, 1997) However, there is also evidence that collectivism and individualism are orthogonal constructs that co-exist in every society (e.g. Heine et al. 2002) and evidence also shows that either type of self-construal can be primed by situational factors. For instance, collectivism can be primed through evoking group scenarios or imagined group tasks (see a meta-analysis by Oyserman & Lee, 2008). Asking people to evaluate group statements, then, may have primed our participants' collectivist self-construal and made them consider the social (rather than individual) outcomes of the emotion expressed. Reminders of a collective context within even the British culture therefore could have been effective in promoting a preference for shame expressions over guilt, among those who accepted blame for colonialism. Further research is needed to explore whether high blaming of the ingroup/outgroup is associated with more effective priming of collectivist sentiments such as being more concerned about the impact of the emotion for group harmony.

The concept of expected reconciliation needs to be investigated further. Further details of this process are suggested by Self-Categorization Theory's meta-contrast principle (Turner et al. 1987), which tells us how people weigh the similarities and differences between

themselves and others in a situation, in order to decide whether to categorize the latter as ingroup members. Reconciliation between Britain and ex-colonies may involve an increase in the salience (that is, psychological importance) of the categories uniting them such as the Commonwealth, or a decrease in the perceived psychological distance between the two categories. The IOS measure that we used implies the latter, but there is still the possibility of a superordinate category becoming more salient as part of reconciliation. For example this would mean that, through the meta-contrasts that lead to categorization, strengthening perceptions of cultural similarities between Britons and Kenyans/ex-colonies should promote reconciliation between the two. The consequences of reconciliation for intergroup forgiveness also need to be explored. Forgiveness may depend on successful reconciliation between the groups involved, since Wohl and Branscombe (2005) had found that inclusive categorization encompassing both the perpetrator and wronged groups promoted forgiveness.

In conclusion, our findings suggest that high collective ingroup-blamers have a similar point of view to members of a wronged group, in terms of viewing shame as more beneficial than guilt for intergroup reconciliation. In other words, those who deny responsibility for wrongdoing may end up supporting apologies couched in the terms of guilt rather than shame, which to a wronged outgroup may end up appearing unsatisfactory, especially when accompanied with offers of material aid (Giner-Sorolla et al., 2008). Only by accepting collective responsibility might ingroup members end up seeing eye-to-eye with members of the wronged group, regarding the best emotional expressions with which to apologize for wrongdoing.

References

- Aron, A., Aron, E. N. & Smollan, D. (1992). Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale and the structure of interpersonal closeness. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, *63*, 596-612.
- BBC (2002). *White Terror*. Television documentary broadcast on Sunday 17th November 2002. British Broadcasting Corporation.
- BBC (2002b). Kenya: White Terror. Programmes: Correspondent. Saturday, 9th November, 2002. Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/correspondent/2416049.stm>
- Branscombe, N., Slugoski, B. & Kappen, D.M. (2004). The measurement of collective guilt. In N. Branscombe & B. Doosje (Eds), *International perspectives on the experience of collective guilt*. Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, R., Gonzalez, R., Zagefka, H., Manzi, J. & Cehajic, S. (2008). Nuestra Culpa: Collective guilt and shame as predictors of reparation for historical wrongdoing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *94*, 75–90.
- Elkins, C. (2005). *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*. London: Owl books.
- Giner-Sorolla, R., Castano, E., Espinosa, P. & Brown, R. (2008). Shame expressions reduce the recipient's insult from outgroup reparations. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *44*, 519–526.
- Giner-Sorolla, R., Kamau, C.W. & Castano, E. (2010). Guilt and shame through recipients' eyes: the moderating effect of blame. *Social Psychology*, *41*(2), 88-92.

- Heine, S.J., Lehman, D.R., Peng, K. & Greenholtz, J. (2002). What's wrong with cross-cultural comparisons of subjective Likert scales? : The reference-group effect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(6), 903–918.
- Hofstede, G. (1983). National cultures revisited. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 18(4), 285-305.
- KHRC (2009) About the MAU MAU case. Kenya Human Rights Commission. Retrieved from <http://www.khrc.or.ke/subsubsection.asp?ID=9>
- Lickel, B., Schmader, T., Curtis, M., Scarnier, M., & Ames, D. R. (2005). Vicarious shame and guilt. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 8, 145-157.
- Ma, V., & Schoeneman, T. J. (1997). Individualism versus collectivism: A comparison of Kenyan and American self-concepts. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 19(2), 261-273.
- Oyserman, D. & Lee, S.W.S (2008). Does culture influence what and how we think? Effects of priming individualism and collectivism. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134(2), 311–342
- Pennekamp, S. F., Doosje, B., Zebel, S., & Fischer, A. H. (2007). The past and the pending: The antecedents and consequences of group-based anger in historically and currently disadvantaged groups. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, 10, 41-56.
- Smith, R. H., Webster, J. M., Parrott, W. G. & Eyre, H. L. (2002). The role of public exposure in moral and nonmoral shame and guilt. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83, 138-159.
- Stipek, D. (1998). Differences between Americans and Chinese in the circumstances evoking pride, shame, and guilt. *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology*, 29, 616-629.
- Tangney, J.P. & Dearing, R.L. (2002). *Shame and guilt*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Tracy, J. L. & Robins, R. W. (2006). Appraisal antecedents of shame and guilt: Support for a theoretical model. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32, 1339-1351.

Turner, J.C., Hogg, M.A., Oakes, P.J., Reicher, S.D. & Wetherall, M.S. [Ed's] (1987).

Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory. Basil Blackwell:
Oxford.

Wohl, M. J. A. & Branscombe, N. R. (2005). Forgiveness and collective guilt assignment to historical perpetrator groups depend on level of social category inclusiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88, 288–303.

Zebel, S., Doosje, B., & Spears, R. (2009). The threat of those who “understand”: Ways in which out-groups induce guilt. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 39, 154-162.

Figure caption

Figure 1: Effects of collective blame and emotion condition in the Kenyan sample.

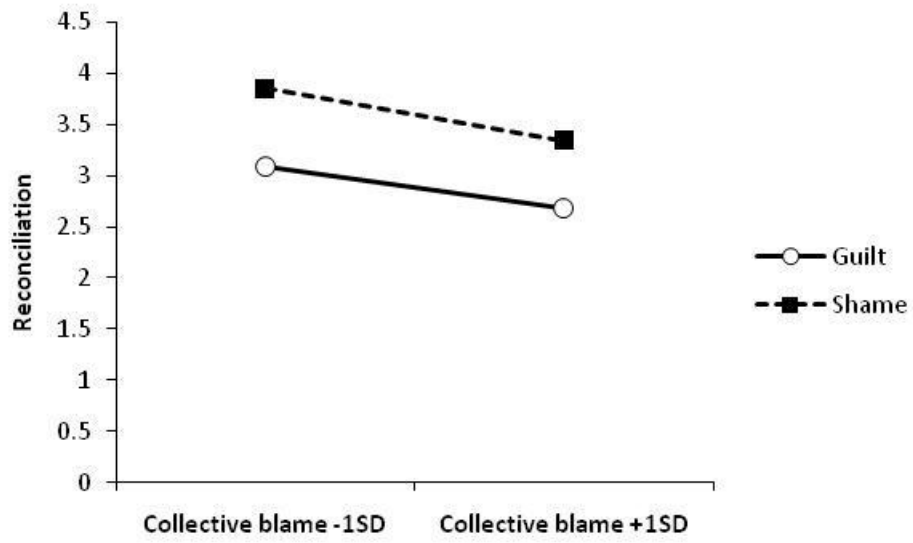
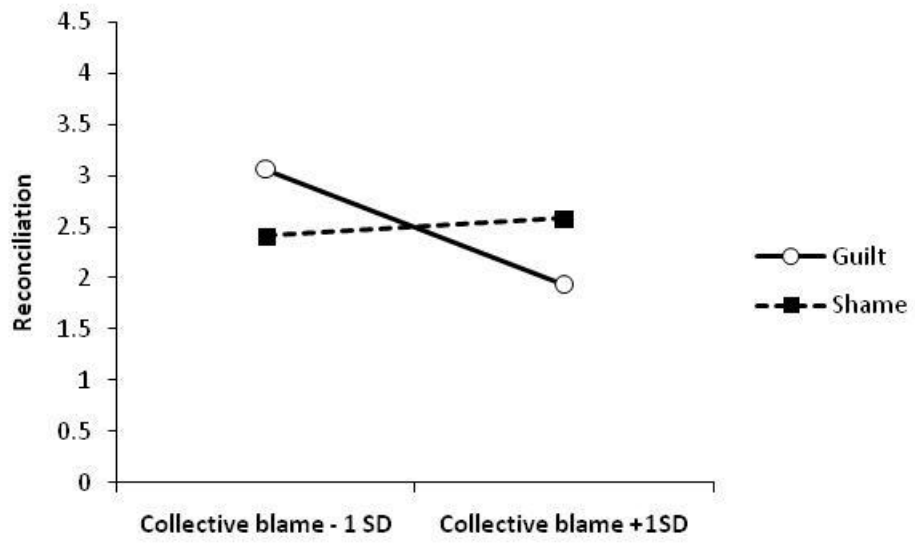


Figure caption

Figure 2: Effects of collective blame and emotion condition on reconciliation in the British sample.



Footnotes

1. We expected Kenyans to have familiarity with guilt and shame as separate emotions not just from English, but also from Kiswahili (both are Kenya's lingua franca). In Kiswahili, the word for shame is *aibu* (used to describe circumstances of disgrace, scandal and embarrassment), and is not interchangeable with the word for guilt, *hatia* (used to describe legal culpability, being guilty). Dictionary definitions of the noun *hatia* allude to legal culpability (e.g. 'crime, sin, be accused') as do English dictionary definitions of the noun guilt (e.g. 'committed offense, crime, violation of law'). However, adding 'to have' to *hatia* (*kuwa na hatia*, is synonymous with '(to feel) guilty' in English, making the Kiswahili meaning similar to the English meaning in verb form. We expected Kenyans to respond to English guilt/shame statements in the same way that they might respond to statements presented in Kiswahili. We therefore presented the same guilt/shame statements in English to both the Kenyan and British participants.
