

“Ancient” and “Modern” Stressors Classification: Evolutionary Concepts of Self-Conscious Emotions

Evangelos Katsampouris
University of Bath

Introduction

Evolutionary in origin, conceptualising stressors as ancient or modern may provide insight into the effects of stress on the experience of self-conscious emotions, and physical health/illness.

Based on the notion of a distinction between ancient and modern stressors, established methods enable people to deal with ancient stressors. However, the more modern stressors, to which people have had less time to adapt, have a greater impact on physical health.

This notion of adaptation is closely linked to the theory of allostasis and the concept of allostatic load.

Aim and Objectives

To examine the feasibility of developing a framework to identify and distinguish between ancient and modern stressors:

- To devise a coding system to delineate between stressors based on definitions of ancient and modern;
- To apply this framework to examine relationships with self-conscious emotions and physical illness;
- To investigate gender and age group differences in the appraisal of ancient and modern stressors.

Hypothesis

Modern stressors would have a greater impact on the experience of negative self-conscious emotions than ancient stressors due to greater amounts of adaptation, time, and physiological energy required.

Method

Participants: One hundred young adults, aged 18-24 years (40 males, 60 females; *Mage* = 20.3 years).

Design and measures: Mixed methods approach assessing:

- Negative life events – Life Events Inventory
- Daily hassles – Hassles & Uplifts Scale
- Stress – Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10)
- Emotions – Test Of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA-3)
- Semi-structured interviews – Thematic Analysis

Procedure: Two-phases: i) completion of questionnaires; ii) interview assessing questionnaire reported stress in-depth.

Results

- Correlations showed a moderate positive relationship between perceived stress, life events and hassles with negative self-conscious emotions ($r = .303, p = .028$)
- Perceived stress was significantly associated with shame ($B = .092, p = .009$)
- Significant gender differences were found for shame ($p = .003$) and guilt ($p = .001$) experiences (fig. 1)

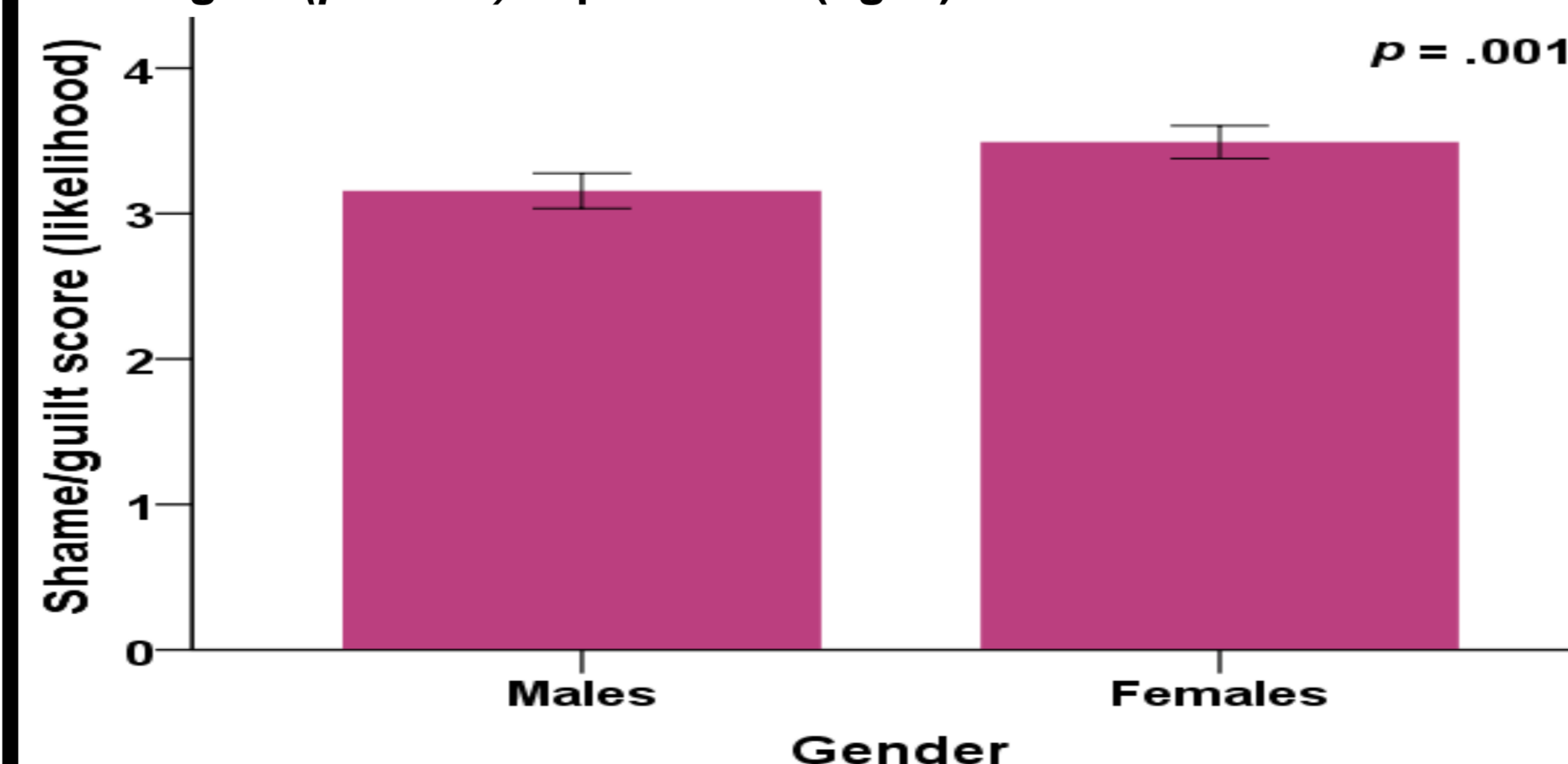
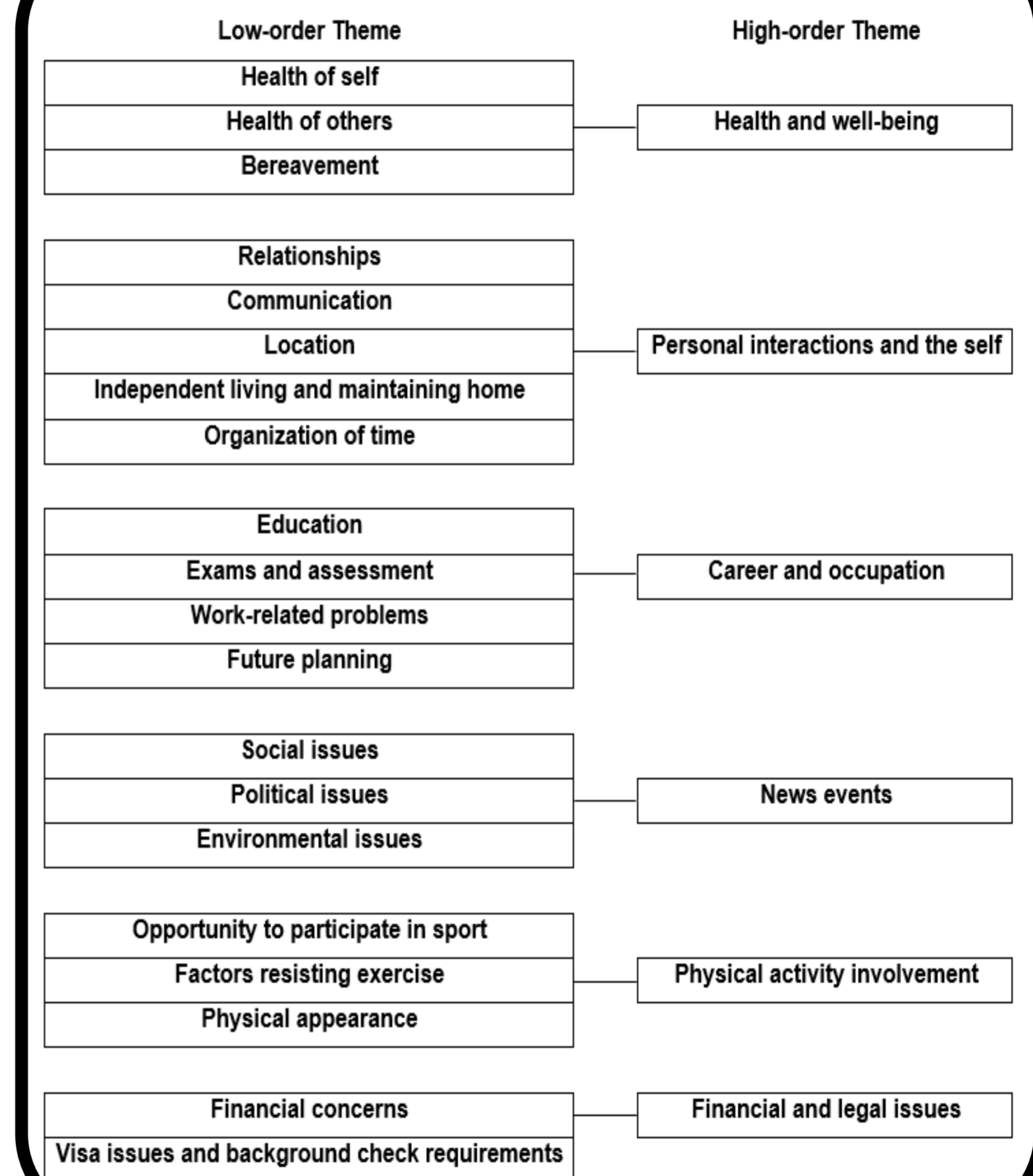


Figure 1. Gender differences between stress and shame/guilt experiences.

Ancient & modern stressors classification



Discussion

- Psychosocial stressors are positively associated with self-conscious emotions
- Ancient and modern stressors distinction adds a quantifiable evolutionary perspective on the impact of stress upon physical health
- Future research should focus on validation of the classification across different populations samples