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What is This?
Poor women and the expression of shame and anger: The price of breaking social class feeling rules

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Abstract
We investigate observers’ reactions to a poor woman who fails to express deferent emotion when asking for assistance. Participants (N = 68) viewed an ad featuring a woman actor playing the beneficiary of a charity aiding either the poor or the sick, and who expressed anger or shame. When the poor woman expressed anger, participants responded with anger. When participants were asked to choose whether the charity should use an emotional appeal or a neutral appeal in their advertising, the condition with the ashamed poor woman was the only one where there was a clear preference for the emotion ad. Implications are discussed for poor women as political actors and recipients of social services.

Keywords
classism, emotion work, political action, poverty, social class

Introduction
Hochschild defined feeling rules as norms guiding the ‘assessment of fits and misfits between feeling and situation’ (1979: 566), and argued that these rules govern the
experience of emotion, and its expression. Those who express ‘outlaw emotion’ (Shields, 2005: 8), often members of subordinate groups, implicitly challenge the standard meanings of the context in which the emotion takes place (Hochschild, 1979; Shields, 2005), and thus may risk censure from others. This may be particularly true for women given that they are viewed as the ‘emotional’ sex (Shields, 2002). We were interested in the consequences poor women face for violations of feeling rules because this group, because of its disadvantaged status with respect to gender and class, may experience social pressure to hide negative emotions, even as they are the target of such emotions from others (Erikson and Ritter, 2001). Our research addressed two central questions: When a poor white American woman expresses anger about her financial situation, do observers respond in kind with anger and an unwillingness to assist her? And, if so, do observers’ emotional responses to an angry poor woman mediate their willingness to assist her? Hochschild (1979) argues that one of the primary ways that people learn the feeling rules of their culture is by observing others’ reactions to our own and others’ emotional displays. These questions have implications for policy, and poor women’s political mobilization and mental health (Bulan et al., 1997).

**Emotions and status**

Theorists have argued that emotions are ‘communicative performances’ conveying information about social status and expected roles (Abu-Lughod and Lutz, 1990; Keltner and Haidt, 2001) and expression of emotions, particularly anger, plays an important role in social control. High-status people are free to express emotions such as anger and resentment (Ridgeway and Johnson, 1990) and people tend to believe that individuals who express anger have higher status and are more competent than individuals who express sadness (Tiedens, 2001). Additionally, Stearns and Stearns (1986) concluded in their interpretation of historical data that members of powerful groups attempt to suppress anger among those they seek to control. Conversely, those who do not have power in social interactions may try to appease powerful others (Ridgeway and Johnson, 1990) by expressing submissive emotions such as shame and gratitude (Tiedens et al., 2000). Feeling rules also influence people’s perceptions of others’ experiences of emotion. Tiedens et al. (2000) found that people believe that low-status individuals feel more sad and guilty than angry in negative situations, and more appreciation in positive situations compared to those with higher status. Thus, observers’ expectations about what kind of people should express certain emotions are linked to the target’s place in social hierarchies.

Consequently, researchers have investigated the role of emotions in stereotyping and power relations. Fiske et al. (2002) proposed that two dimensions, perceived competence and warmth, shape emotional responses toward out-groups. Because of the ideology of meritocracy in the USA, high and low status groups are stereotyped as competent and incompetent, respectively. Group competition leads people to feel that non-competitive (and thus non-threatening) groups are warm, while
those who are perceived as competitive are cold. These stereotypes are associated with emotion. People feel pity toward low-status, non-competitive groups, such as the elderly and ‘housewives’. Pity often evokes helping, which is generally viewed as positive; however, dominant groups reinforce their superior status through assuming a custodial helping role. In contrast, contempt and anger are felt toward low-status, competitive groups (Fiske et al., 2002).

These emotional performances constitute a transaction entailing norms for both dominant and subordinate group members. People who are not poor sometimes feel pity toward those who are and feel good about themselves when they help (Fiske et al., 2002). Helping the poor may thus confirm the more privileged group’s belief in their own superiority because the poor are seen as incompetent, needing the assistance of the privileged group. The poor are expected to feel ashamed for failing to provide for themselves. Shame is a common theme in narratives written by poor and working-class women (e.g., Adair, 2001; hooks, 2000; McCarriston, 1995), and in qualitative research with women on public assistance (Nicolas and JeanBaptiste, 2001).

Poor women who express shame legitimate inequality by implying that they take responsibility for their economic circumstances, while allowing members of more privileged classes to maintain the belief that they deserve their affluence and should feel proud (Fiske et al., 2002; Jackman, 1996; Roseman et al., 1996). In contrast, people feel anger when they believe that they are being treated unjustly (Roseman et al., 1996). By expressing anger, poor women convey that they do not believe they deserve their position, thus challenging meritocratic ideologies. We expected, therefore, that poor women’s anger would elicit anger from those with class privilege because it calls into question the legitimacy of their status.

**Gender, class, race and emotional work**

Hochschild (1979) argued that the management of emotions as prescribed by feeling rules constitutes a kind of work that is gendered and classed. For example, researchers have conceptualized emotion work in terms of domestic labor, which in heterosexual relationships primarily falls to women (Bartky, 1996; Stevens et al., 2001). A similar dynamic exists in workplaces with women being expected to engage in specific kinds of nurturing emotional labor (Guy and Newman, 2004).

Emotional work is also classed. Hochschild argued that middle-class parents, more than working-class parents, socialize their children for emotion management to provide the children with skills for their future employment. Middle-class jobs more often require workers to ‘sustain a definition of self, office, and organization as “up and coming,” or “on the go,” “caring,” or “reliable,” meanings most effectively sustained through acts [that have effects] upon feeling’, whereas working-class jobs more often call for specific behaviors such as assembling a car part (1979:570). However, in this conceptualization, Hochschild describes working-class jobs that are more common for men. Working-class women’s jobs are instead
disproportionally located within the service sector (Acker, 2005) and thus often require emotional labor (see, e.g. Kang, 2003).

This study investigates one aspect of women’s gendered and classed emotional labor. This focus on women is particularly relevant given that women in the USA are 40 percent more likely to live in poverty than men (Legal Momentum, 2004). Discourses of poverty are often gendered, (e.g discussions of welfare, c.f. Bullock et al., 2001; Hancock, 2004) and feminist scholars have explored the ways that gender and class intersect in women’s lives. For instance, Walkerdine (2003) argued that qualities of femininity are one of the predominant carriers of class identity, with women being impelled to conform to a classed aesthetic.

In her narrative of developing class consciousness, Linda McCarriston (1995) described her experiences with her ‘betters’, in which she was rewarded for performing shame and punished for anger. Her memoir suggests the dual-edged nature of classism, a pattern that parallels that of paternalism and ambivalent sexism (Glick and Fiske, 2001; Glick et al., 1997). Glick et. al, (1997) found that participants high in ambivalent sexism had polarized reactions to different types of women, putting traditional women (e.g., homemakers) on a figurative pedestal through enhanced favorability ratings, while denigrating non-traditional women (e.g., career women) through low ratings. We theorize that attitudes toward poor women have hostile and benevolent components such that poor women who express ‘appropriate’ emotions will be rewarded, and those who break classed feeling rules will face censure. Our study conceptualizes emotional labor of women who are expected to ‘sell’ particular emotions to receive payment in the form of charity. Further, these women not only commodify and manage their own emotions, but also cultivate particular emotions in others.

In the USA, social class is not only gendered, but is also confounded with race, such that white symbolically stands for middle-class, while black, and sometimes brown, stands for working-class or poor (Bettie, 2000; Frankenberg, 1993; Hancock, 2004). In a predominately working-class school, Bettie (2000) showed that both white and Mexican-American girls found it difficult to articulate their social class grievances, and thus resorted to talking about social class through racial descriptions of ‘acting white’ and ‘acting Mexican’. Bettie argued that the students talked about class in racial terms because of the absence of a social class discourse in the USA, and because of the over-representation of people of color among the poor/working class and of white people among the middle class. Because of the ways that race and class are confounded in the USA, we chose to use a white woman as the target in this study.

While Americans may not name class distinctions as explicitly as they do racial differences, white middle-class Americans make distinctions within their own racial group based on class, viewing poor white people in addition to people of color, as another inferior group from whom they are altogether distinct (Lott, 2002). For instance, middle-class white people linguistically distinguish themselves from the poor through terms that are coded as racially other (e.g., urban poor) or in derogatory terms that mark the white poor as different and lower (e.g., white
trash, redneck). Further, the appearance of poor white people is often viewed by middle-class white people to be an indication of their immorality and ignorance (Adair, 2001; Lawler, 2005). Thus, one way for middle-class white people to ‘help’ poor whites would be to assist them in changing their appearance to look more like middle-class white people. This approach has particular importance for women, as ‘appropriate’ middle-class femininity is often distinguished from the inappropriate femininity of poor white women (Bettie, 2000; Brown, 2003; Hardy; 2003; Skeggs, 1997).

Hypotheses

We conducted an experiment for which we created mock television advertisements for a non-profit organization providing suits to low-income women for job interviews. The woman spotlighted in the ad either displayed shame or anger. Participants were asked to provide feedback concerning their emotional responses to the ads and their opinions about the ad’s effectiveness. We expected that class privileged observers would treat a woman who expressed shame about being poor, an emotion that legitimizes the status quo, benevolently. Observers would offer assistance and express pity, a subjectively positive emotion, because she legitimated the class system by taking responsibility for her economic plight. We also hypothesized that participants would feel pride because shame suggests the poor woman’s acceptance of her lower class position, thus justifying the observers’ higher status. Conversely, a poor woman expressing anger, thus implicitly challenging the class system, would face the withholding of assistance. We also expected class privileged participants to respond with anger because her emotions would define her as competitive. Finally, we expected that the emotions that participants felt toward the target would mediate their willingness to respond benevolently in response to her appeal for help.

Method

Participants

Seventy-six university students (19 participants per condition) enrolled in an introductory psychology course participated in the study for which they received course credit. After omitting eight participants based on the results of the manipulation check (described below), the final sample included 68 students, 31 men and 37 women, ranging in age from 17 to 21 years old with a mean age of 18.72. Seventy three percent of the participants were white, 16% were Asian American, 3% African American, 3% Latino/a and 5% other or unspecified. We defined these students as having at least one aspect of class privilege, regardless of their family origin, by virtue of their attendance at this elite institution. Moreover, in response to a demographic question, 84% of the sample identified as middle class or higher.
Procedure

The study utilized an experimental design in which participants were asked to watch and give feedback on two advertisements for a fictitious non-profit organization that was market testing two different fund-raising ads. They were told that some of the items would ask about their reactions to the ads, some would ask about their beliefs in general, and because different kinds of ads appeal to different kinds of people, they would be asked some questions about themselves.

Each participant watched two ads, one featuring a woman making an emotional appeal, either angry or ashamed dependent on experimental condition, and another in which the woman made a more emotionally neutral appeal (the order was counterbalanced). We chose to have participants view and respond to both the emotion ad and the more emotionally neutral ad for several reasons. First, because of popular beliefs about the relationship between gender and emotion, we desired to compare participants’ responses to an emotion-focused ad to a more neutral, and thus ostensibly more logical appeal. Shields (2002) argued that many people believe women’s capacity for emotion risks overwhelming their reasoning ability. Moreover, research suggests that observers may view reason-focused appeals as more persuasive than negative emotion-focused appeals made by women (Perse et al., 1996). Thus, it seems likely that a spokeswoman soliciting donations would be viewed more positively when she did not use emotion, particularly negative emotion. We sought to test whether people would deviate from a preference for a ‘logical’ argument when the emotional argument fulfilled the feeling rule that women should feel and express shame about being poor. Second, this design allowed us to control for participants’ emotional responses to the neutral ad, in effect a baseline measure of their emotional responses to the organization/emotion manipulation. Finally, asking participants to make comparisons between the ads lent credibility to our market testing cover story.

Participants were also randomly assigned to watch ads for one of two different fictitious non-profit organizations. Half of the participants were shown ads for ‘Suits for Success’, which the narrator said donates professional clothes to low-income women for job interviews. The other half was shown ads for ‘Hair for Hope’, which the narrator said donates hairpieces to women undergoing breast cancer treatment. We included the organization ‘Hair for Hope’ to ensure that participants’ responses to the anger and shame ads resulted because of the spokeswoman’s class and gender, not merely because of her gender. We created ‘Hair for Hope’ for the comparison group to ‘Suits for Success’ because both non-profit organizations claimed to help women who face hardships that can have detrimental effects on appearance. However, cultural discourses of responsibility are different for these hardships, with poor women more often blamed than women with breast cancer (Weiner, 1995). To summarize, the study employed a 2 (angry vs. ashamed emotional appeals) × 2 (poor vs. sick) experimental design (See Table 1). The scripts for the two non-profits were identical, aside from whether the spokeswoman said she was getting a suit or a hairpiece.
Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions prior to arrival for the session, where each participant was tested separately. After being told that they would be market-testing ads for a non-profit organization, participants watched the first advertisement and completed a questionnaire asking them about their reactions. Then participants watched the second ad and again completed measures assessing their reactions. Next, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire comparing the two advertisements and questionnaires about their beliefs and attitudes generally.

Afterward, the participants were debriefed and asked to identify which emotion the woman in the emotion-focused ad had expressed. Eight participants were excluded from analyses because they were unable to correctly identify the emotion the woman had expressed. This resulted in 17 participants in the Suits for Success shame condition, 17 participants in the Suits for Success anger condition, 18 participants in the Hair for Hope shame condition, and 16 participants in the Hair for Hope anger condition.

### Advertisement scripts (experimental manipulation)

The ads featured two trained actors: a woman playing a beneficiary of the organization named Lisa, and a man who narrated the introduction for the ad. Both were white, wore suits and were videotaped from the waist up. The actor playing Lisa wore a wig in all conditions. Thus, Lisa appeared the same in all conditions, allowing participants to ‘read’ their own assumptions onto her body based on the emotion and organization for which she spoke. The introductory narration named the organization and stated that its work ‘improved the confidence of women’ because ‘When a woman feels good about herself generally, she is more likely to be able to’ either ‘find good employment’ or ‘mend herself physically’ (depending on experimental condition.) The narrator then introduced Lisa by saying: ‘But don’t just take my word for it; listen to the story of just one of the women who have benefited from our program.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charity</th>
<th>Charity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poverty Cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional appeal</td>
<td>Anger/neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angry appeal for poverty charity-and-Neutral appeal for poverty charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angry appeal for cancer charity-and-Neutral appeal for cancer charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame/neutral</td>
<td>Ashamed appeal for poverty charity-and-Neutral appeal for poverty charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ashamed appeal for cancer charity-and-Neutral appeal for cancer charity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We designed the four emotion-focused versions of the beneficiary’s script based on appraisal theories of emotion (Ellsworth and Scherer, 2003), which hold that particular emotions result from specific appraisals, and are associated with specific action tendencies. People feel anger when they feel that they or their ideals are being treated unjustly and the action tendency of anger is to make an offensive move (Roseman et al, 1996). On the other hand, people feel shame when they appraise their own behavior as not measuring up to an achievable standard and the action tendency of shame is to hide (Roseman et al, 1996). In the scripts, Lisa expressed an appraisal of her situation corresponding to her emotion and articulated the action tendency associated with that emotion.

In all versions of the ad, the organization’s beneficiary began by saying: ‘Hi my name is Lisa and I have not been so lucky in life.’ In the angry conditions, she continued: ‘I feel really angry about [being poor/ having breast cancer] because I don’t deserve this. I’m not going to take [poverty/cancer] lying down though, I’m going to fight back. Facing the world with my new [suit/hairpiece] allows me to stand-up and take the life that I deserve.’ In the ashamed conditions, she said: ‘I feel really ashamed about [being poor/ having breast cancer] because I feel like it’s my fault. When I feel self-conscious and want to hide, I can’t seem to take charge of my life. Facing the world with my new [suit/hairpiece] has given me the self-confidence to achieve my goals.’ In the neutral conditions, she said: ‘I [am poor/have cancer]. Fortunately for me, I was chosen by [Suits for Success/Hair for Hope] to receive a new [suit/hairpiece] that has improved my outlook on life.’ In all conditions, the actor playing Lisa was directed to express the emotion of the experimental condition through tone of voice and facial expressions.

At this point the male narrator appeared again, stating: ‘[Suits for Success/Hair for Hope] relies on donations from individuals and companies who are committed to helping women improve their lives. Please help women like Lisa by donating today.’

### Measures

After viewing the ads, participants were asked to complete the following measures.

- **Differential Emotions Scale** (DES, Izard, 1972): This measured the emotional reactions that participants felt in response to the ads. This scale provides a general structure allowing researchers to tailor the emotions to fit the goals of the research. Participants were asked to rate on a scale from 1 ‘Not at all’ to 5 ‘Extremely’ the extent to which Lisa made them feel 15 clusters of emotions. We tested hypotheses concerning the following three clusters: (1) angry, irritated, annoyed; (2) proud, confident, self-assured; and (3) pity, compassion, sympathy. The other items were included as fillers. Items in the current study have been used in other studies except for the pity cluster. At the end of the DES scale, participants were asked why they felt the emotions they had reported and
were given several blank lines in which to respond. Some of these responses are quoted in the discussion.

- **Ad Preference**: Participants were asked to choose which of the two ads (emotion-focused vs. neutral) would more likely lead them to donate money by circling one answer: Probably would give if I saw Ad #1; Maybe would give if I saw Ad #1; Maybe would give if I saw Ad #2; and Probably would give if I saw Ad #2. Participants who said they would donate money in response to the emotional ad at any level were coded as ‘0’ and those who said they would donate money in response to the neutral ad at any level were coded ‘1.’

- **Subjective Social Class**: This was measured using the average of three items pertaining to the economic situation of participants’ household in elementary school, high school and currently on a five-point scale as follows: 1 = ‘We had/have barely enough to get by’; 2 = ‘We had/have enough to get by but not more’; 3 = ‘We were/are solidly middle class’; 4 = ‘We had/have plenty of “extras”’; and 5 = ‘We had/have plenty of ‘luxuries.” The mean was 3.56 (SD = .90).

### Results

To test our hypothesis, we first examined whether the advertisement that the participants watched (i.e., the emotion expressed and the organization depicted in the ad) elicited particular emotional responses from the participants. Next, we tested whether the ad that the participants watched affected their willingness to donate to the organization represented. Last, we investigated whether the emotional response of the participant mediated the relationship between the ad watched and the participant’s willingness to donate. Participant’s subjective social class was included as a covariate in preliminary analyses, but because it had no significant effects, we simplified the analyses by omitting this variable.

**Emotional responses**

To begin, we tested whether the order that participants viewed the ads affected their emotional responses, and found no effect. Next, three 2 (angry vs. ashamed) × 2 (poor vs. sick) ANCOVAs were run on the Differential Emotions Questionnaire for Anger, Pride and Pity controlling for the Anger, Pride or Pity felt by participants when watching the neutral advertisement. Results indicated that there was a main effect for the emotion expressed by Lisa in the advertisement such that participants felt significantly more anger and less pity toward the target when she was angry than when she was ashamed; there was also a marginally significant effect for pride when the target expressed shame compared to anger (see Table 2 for means, SDs and F values for ANCOVAs). There was also a main effect for organization with participants feeling significantly more pride when they saw the ads with the poor woman compared to the ad with the sick women. There was also a marginally
significant main effect of organization for anger, such that the organization serving poor women elicited more anger.

Results indicated there was also a significant interaction between organization and target’s emotion on participants’ reported anger and pride (Table 3). Pair-wise comparisons based on a priori hypotheses confirmed that participants felt significantly more anger toward the angry poor target than any other condition, $F(1, 68) = 6.42, p < .01$ and more pride in response to the ashamed poor target compared to all other conditions $F(1, 68) = 4.09, p < .05$.

Contrary to hypotheses, there was no significant interaction between organization and target’s emotion for pity. Participants’ feelings of pity for the target were unaffected by whether she was ashamed about being poor or ashamed about having cancer.

**Behavioral intention**

To test the hypothesis that participants would reward the target who expressed shame about her poverty, we conducted a bivariate logistic regression analysis. Participants who said they would donate money to the emotional ad at any level

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**Table 2.** Means, (standard deviations), and main effect $F$-test results for participant emotional responses to the advertisement emotion and the advertisement organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant emotion</th>
<th>Ad emotion</th>
<th></th>
<th>Ad organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>$F$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>2.24 (0.97)</td>
<td>1.37 (0.81)</td>
<td>20.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>1.58 (0.83)</td>
<td>1.86 (1.03)</td>
<td>3.32+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pity</td>
<td>2.30 (0.92)</td>
<td>3.49 (0.98)</td>
<td>39.19***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p ≤ .001, *p ≤ .05, +p ≤ .10

**Table 3.** Means and (standard deviations) for participants’ emotional responses to the target’s emotional expression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target emotion</th>
<th>Poor woman</th>
<th>Sick woman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant emotion</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>2.71 (0.92) a</td>
<td>1.35 (0.86) b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>1.59 (0.80) c</td>
<td>2.29 (1.16) d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pity</td>
<td>2.35 (0.93) e</td>
<td>3.41 (0.87) f</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Corresponding letters indicate that the means are not significantly different from each other. Different letters indicate that the means are significantly different from each other.
were coded as ‘0’ and those who said they would donate money to the neutral ad at any level were coded ‘1’, creating a dichotomous variable reflecting an inclination to donate in response to the neutral ad rather than the emotion ad. Again, we tested whether the order in which participants viewed the ads affected participants’ preferences to donate in response to the emotion vs. the neutral ad. To do this, we conducted a Pearson’s chi-square, finding that there was an effect for the order of the ads; when participants watched the emotion ad first they were more likely to donate in response to the neutral ad, c² (1, N = 67) = 8.11, p = .004. Therefore we controlled for the order of the ads in the following analyses.

Results indicated that the probability that participants preferred to donate in response to the neutral ad over the emotion ad was significantly less in the ashamed poor condition compared to all other conditions. Nagelkerke’s R-Square, a measure of strength of association, was .50. As shown in Table 4, compared to the ashamed poor condition, the odds that participants would chose the neutral ad over the emotion ad were 61 times greater for participants in the angry poor condition and 43 times greater in the angry sick condition. In contrast, in the ashamed sick condition participants were 10 times more likely to choose the emotion ad over the neutral ad. Thus, results confirmed that for the poor target, expressing shame was effective and expressing anger was markedly ineffective in eliciting donations.

**Mediation**

Last, we tested whether the anger and pride felt by participants toward the target mediated their preference to donate to the organization in response to the emotional or the neutral ad. We did not test whether participants’ pity mediated their ad preference because the previous ANCOVA analysis did not reveal an interaction between ad emotion and ad organization for pity.

To test for mediation, we followed the four steps established by Baron and Kenny (1986). The first step, establishing a relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable, and the second step, establishing a relationship between the independent variable and the mediator variable, were met through the ‘Behavioral Intentions’ and ‘Emotional Responses’ analyses respectively.

### Table 4. Logistic regression analysis of the odds of choosing the neutral advertisement over the emotion advertisement for all four conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Chose neutral ad / total in condition</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Odds ratio</th>
<th>Wald</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shame about poverty</td>
<td>1/17</td>
<td>REF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger about poverty</td>
<td>14/17</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>60.74</td>
<td>10.95***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame about cancer</td>
<td>8/18</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>9.87</td>
<td>3.88*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger about cancer</td>
<td>12/16</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>42.76</td>
<td>9.56**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p ≤ .001, **p ≤ .01, *p ≤ .05

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Third, using logistic regression, we tested whether the level of anger or pride that participants felt in response to the experimental condition (controlling for the emotion they expressed to the neutral ad) predicted participants’ preference to donate to the neutral ad vs. the emotion ad (the relationship between the mediator variable and the dependent variable). As expected, the odds that participants preferred to give money in response the neutral ad instead of the emotion ad were significantly higher when they reported higher levels of anger ($Wald = 13.03, B = 2.01, p < .001$). Preference to donate in response to one ad over another was not related to participant’s reported pride.

Finally, we tested whether the relationship between the experimental condition and preference for giving to the neutral vs. emotion ad was diminished when we included the participant’s emotion (controlling for neutral emotion baseline and the order the participants viewed the ads) in the logistic regression equation. Results revealed full mediation when controlling for participants’ anger (the Wald statistic dropped from 10.95, $p < .001$ without participants’ anger or pride included in the analysis to 1.65, $p = .20$ with participants’ anger included in the analysis). This means that the emotion that participants felt in response to the ad accounted for the relationship between the experimental condition and their preference for giving. The more anger participants felt toward the target, the greater the probability that they would prefer donating in response to the neutral advertisement. We also tested for moderated mediation, that is, whether the mediation results were moderated by whether the woman depicted in the ad was poor or sick. Results did not indicate moderated mediation. In other words, participants’ emotional response to the ad accounted for the association between the experimental condition and their preference for giving, regardless of whether the woman in the ad they viewed was poor or sick.

**Discussion**

Results from this study support the proposition that poor women’s performance of emotions contributes to whether people respond in a positive or negative manner toward them. This was evidenced in participants’ emotional responses, with participants feeling more negative emotions toward a woman who expressed anger about being poor and more positive emotions in response to a woman who expressed shame about being poor. Additionally, participants reported that they preferred to donate money in response to an advertisement in which the woman was ashamed rather than angry about being poor. Further, we found that the emotion that participants themselves felt toward the target accounted for the relationship between the target’s emotional expression and participants’ willingness to donate in response to the emotional ad. Specifically, anger toward the target mediated participants’ willingness to give.

When a woman indicated that she was angry compared to ashamed about being poor, participants felt more anger toward her. This pattern also held for a woman who was angry (compared to ashamed) about having cancer; however, participants
responded with significantly more anger toward the woman who was angry about being poor than they did toward the woman who was angry about having breast cancer. This finding implies that there is a general social expectation that neither poor nor sick women should express anger, but the consequences are greater when women are angry about being poor than being angry about illness.

This finding complements research on gender and emotion that has repeatedly found that there are sanctions against women’s anger (Cox et al., 2000; Lewis, 2000; Thomas, 1995). However, these results suggest that poverty is perceived as a less acceptable reason for women to feel angry than illness. When women are discouraged from anger, they are denied an important pathway to political mobilization. Given that women are more likely to be poor than men (Legal Momentum, 2004), minimizing women’s anger may be a mechanism maintaining the ‘feminization of poverty’.

One alternative explanation for participants’ anger toward the angry poor woman is that they were not angry at her, but were angry with her, perhaps in solidarity with her plight. However, the differential in participants’ willingness to donate indicates that this is not the case. Further, there were differences in participants open-ended responses that belie this explanation. Typical responses included ‘Lisa seemed too aggressive in this one [ad]… just didn’t like it’, and ‘She seemed like she blamed everyone else for her problems’. These responses were very different in tone from those of participants who viewed the target with cancer. While participants did not like the anger expressed by Lisa in the cancer condition, they were more understanding. For instance, one participant wrote: ‘[I was] a little irritated by her attitude, but of course I don’t blame her for it. In addition, I do feel bad that she has to go through such a terrible disease.’

Conversely, participants felt more pity for the ashamed target compared to the angry target (regardless of whether she was poor or sick). This implies that if women find themselves in positions in which they need to elicit help from others (the action tendency associated with pity (Weiner, 1995)) it behooves them to act in an ashamed manner. Arguably, this finding has greater impact for the poor than for the sick. The poor may regularly find themselves in situations requiring them to request help from strangers (e.g., the help of social workers, help from organizations that provide material assistance). Although women with cancer may also need help, both from medical personnel and from intimates, the former is an economic transaction and the latter is a different relationship from the kind of anonymous solicitation our experiment simulates.

Participants’ feelings about themselves were also affected by the emotional expression of the woman in the ad. Participants reported feeling more proud, confident and self-assured when the woman expressed shame about poverty than in any of the other conditions. Notably, participants’ level of pride was unaffected by whether the woman was ashamed or angry about having cancer; therefore participants’ pride was not simply a response to the target’s shame. In the social transaction between a poor woman who requests assistance and the privileged person who provides it, the poor woman’s performance of shame can be
understood as emotional labor (Hochschild, 1979), the work of cultivating certain emotional states in others, in this case, the benefactor’s sense of pride. Hochschild argues that this type of labor reflects prevailing ideologies and is a form of social control.

This finding is consistent with Shields’s (2005) argument that performance of emotion can legitimize existing relationships between dominants and subordinates. When the poor express shame, suggesting that they accept blame for their poverty, those with class privilege appear to be able to feel pride about their ‘accomplished’ higher standing. Although it might be expected that this finding would interact with the observer’s social class, we did not find this in our study. This may be a result of the relatively privileged class status of the population from which our sample was drawn, that is, students from a selective, highly ranked university.

When participants were asked to choose which ad would most likely elicit their donation, participants almost unanimously preferred the emotional ad when the woman was ashamed about being poor. This was the only ad where there was a clear preference for the emotion ad over the neutral ad. In both of the angry conditions (Anger–Poverty and Anger–Cancer) participants preferred the neutral ad and in the Shame–Cancer condition, participants were nearly evenly split between preferring the emotion ad and preferring the neutral ad. It is not surprising that participants did not think that an angry woman would be an effective spokesperson for a fund-raising ad. However, their evaluations of the ads for the cancer organization were less strongly affected by the emotion expressed by the spokesperson, suggesting that these ratings are not merely an assessment of the woman’s anger, but of the appropriateness of the anger given her status. Taken together with the finding that the Angry–Poor woman elicited greater anger from the respondents, and that participants’ anger toward the woman mediated their preference to donate in response to the neutral ad (or conversely, their preference not to donate in response to the emotional ad), these findings are consistent with Gault and Sabini’s (2000) research finding that state anger predicted endorsement of policies addressing social problems through punitive measures rather than human services.

This study has several limitations. First, because we designed the study scripts to be in line with appraisal theories of emotion, we necessarily confounded emotion with appraisals of responsibility. When the target expressed anger, she claimed her situation was undeserved (unjust appraisal), thus she also denied responsibility for her poverty/illness. When she indicated that she was ashamed, she said she felt it was her fault (appraisal of not measuring up), thus accepting responsibility. We chose to do this because we theorized that feeling rules result precisely because of dominant narratives about poverty and responsibility. However, it is important in future research to tease apart the emotion expression from attributions of responsibility.

Second, the small sample of undergraduates limits this study’s generalizability. It would be particularly useful to replicate this study with samples of individuals who are likely to serve the poor (e.g., social workers, public school teachers), because these groups can control poor women’s access to opportunities and
resources. Although findings were robust in this small sample, future research with larger samples should investigate other possible moderators and mediators, such as participants’ own class background and attitudes toward the poor. Finally, in the USA, stereotypes of the poor, particularly of poor women, are conflated with race (Hancock, 2004). For this reason, we used a white woman as the target in this study; future research should explore whether the race of the target influences the effect of target’s emotion on participants’ behavioral responses.

Hochschild’s (1979) foundational work on feeling rules encourages scholars to incorporate emotion into our understanding of ideology. Her research has pointed to the relevance of emotional labor for women, arguing that emotional labor falls more heavily on women (1983). There has been far less attention paid to emotional labor at the intersection of gender with other forms of subordination (Chong, 2009). Research incorporating an intersectional analysis can thus add to our understanding of the social construction of emotional labor. Further, incorporating an explicit focus on feeling rules can contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways that the intersections of different axes of oppression contribute to systemic social inequity.

The findings from this study suggest that emotions are not blindly felt toward women regardless of their other social group memberships. Rather, observers’ responses to a stigmatized woman were influenced by whether the woman’s behavior fulfilled a feeling rule linked to her class status. Anger is distinguished from other negative emotions by attributions that hold others accountable and an action tendency toward expression of opposition (Kuppens et al., 2003). Thus anger may be a precursor to political consciousness or mobilization (Iyer et al., 2007). Indeed, group-based anger is related to endorsement of collective action on behalf of a disadvantaged in-group (van Zomeren et al., 2004). Thus, treating poor women’s anger as outside of normative feeling rules may ultimately serve to further politically disempower this already marginalized group.

Despite the possibility that poor women’s anger might represent a political opportunity, those who purport to assist the poor may be among the most likely to institutionalize practices discouraging them from expressing anger. For example, some companies that hire women on welfare have instituted programs ‘to enhance the personal and professional lives of their new hires’ by teaching them about ‘the power of a positive attitude’ and ‘personal responsibility’ (Turner-Bowker, 2001, p. 316). Such interventions aim to help poor women not by directly assisting them materially, but by training them to perform the emotional labor that reassures observers of the legitimacy of a system that metes out rewards based on the deservingness of individuals rather than as a general human right (Loury, 2001). This sentiment was expressed by one participant in the Anger–Poverty condition of our study who wrote: ‘I felt amazed by Lisa’s tone during her testimony. I didn’t like how she said she didn’t deserve this [poverty] because the tone evokes less sympathy. She no longer looks like a victim... I had a difficult time feeling sympathy for her with her bitter attitude.’ The effects of such policies and attitudes on poor women are demonstrated by findings that welfare recipients feel that there is no
way for them to express frustration or anger about the demeaning treatment they receive in exchange for government services (Nicolas and JeanBaptiste, 2001).

From the perspective of poor women, it is more dangerous to be the recipient of anger than pity, so it may behoove them to stay in their shameful, emotionally subordinate place. The poor are only able to avoid anger and gain pity from those with power by expressing emotions that suggest they accept the blame for poverty. In doing this, those with class privilege are able to feel pride about their ‘accomplished’ higher standing, thus justifying inequities in the class system. Although this emotional script may serve to elicit the generosity of the economically privileged, we argue that helping the poor simultaneously reifies the superiority of the dominant group because they are the ones in a position to help. Consequently, the class privileged are not forced to reckon with their beliefs because they feel subjectively positive toward some members of the subordinated group whom they help, though many poor people would not need the help if they did not face systematic discrimination (Reese, 2005; Ryan, 1972). The feeling rules described in this article, and their consequences, may represent another mechanism through which those who are not poor distance themselves from those who are (Lott, 2002). These findings contribute to the literature exploring the role emotion plays in legitimizing inequity generally (Fiske et al., 2002) and of poor women specifically (Gunaratnam and Lewis, 2001; Hancock, 2004; Reay, 2004). Because of the embodied experience of emotion, people may perceive their emotions as natural, and thus not detect the role of cultural ideologies in shaping emotional responses. If we are to address the inequities found at the intersection of sexism and classism, we will also need to address the feeling rules that contribute to discrimination against poor women.

References


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