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EXPLORING EFFECT OF FEAR OF NEGATIVE EVALUATION ON GUILT AND SHAME PRONENESS AMONG PAKISTANI YOUNG ADULTS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SELF-SILENCING

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Abstract
The present study examined the relationship between fear of negative evaluation, self-silencing, and guilt/shame proneness among Pakistani young adults, with self-silencing as a proposed mediator. A mixed-methods research design was used that included both qualitative and quantitative methods with a convenience sample of 140 Pakistani young adults (aged 18-26 years). Three validated self-report measures were administered: Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (BFNE), the Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (GASP), and the Silencing the Self Scale (STSS). Qualitative data were gathered through an open-ended question, and were analyzed using Thematic Analysis. Results revealed significant positive correlations among all study variables. Fear of negative evaluation significantly predicted guilt and shame proneness. Mediation analysis confirmed that self-silencing fully mediated the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and guilt/shame proneness. No significant demographic differences were found across gender, age, socioeconomic status, family type, birth order, residential background, living situation, marital status, or study year. Thus, these results indicate self-silencing as an important psychological process mediating the association between fear of negative evaluation and guilt and shame in Pakistani collectivist culture.

INTRODUCTION

Young adults defined as individuals aged 18-26 years. This stage of life, labeled "emerging adulthood" by Arnett (2000) is a period of exploration, instability of roles and relations, and hypersensitivity to social evaluation and the approval of others. The current age group of 18-26 years is of particular interest within the Pakistani cultural context as it represents a crucial developmental period wherein young adults are constantly negotiating between traditional collectivist expectations of group harmony, respect and obedience, and family reputation and modern individualistic needs and aspirations, such as career opportunities and romantic love as chosen by self. The psychological toll that this cultural tightrope may exert renders this age group as being uniquely susceptible to the negative effects of the above variables. As such they are the ideal group in which to test the relation between fear of social disapproval, self-silencing and guilt proneness.

According to Leary (1983), FNE is defined as "the concern and anticipation that other people

hold negative opinions of oneself''. The anxious individual is worried about others' approval and feels that they will be criticized if they expose themselves and individuals with higher FNE fear what others are thinking and anticipate negative judgments from them and perceive themselves as being threatened whenever a social setting is established, which could lead to negative judgment from others (Carleton et al., 2007). Although FNE has been widely investigated in Western contexts with its individualistic nature, the fear of negative evaluation in a collectivistic culture may manifest differently and influence one's actions and thoughts due to the social dictates that this fear imposes upon individuals. The present study, therefore, investigates how this culturally salient fear of negative evaluation influences guilt and shame proneness among Pakistani young adults, with self-silencing as a proposed mediating mechanism.

Shame and guilt are fundamental human emotions that serve a purpose both for individuals and within relationships. Shame is a self-conscious emotion that is associated with negative emotions, desire to withdraw, feelings of inferiority, and desire to hide, escape, or deny (Tangney et al., 2007). Guilt arises when a person believes they have done something wrong or violated a personal standard of behaviour, which in turn brings remorse, regret, and self-reproach (Mahmood et al., 2025).

Lamia (2017) described shame as a matter of concealing oneself. People work to prevent shame from arising in social situations so that they do not feel worthless, inadequate or deficient. Shame and guilt have a lot in common, as both are self-conscious emotions that call for self-reflection and self-evaluation. (Tangney & Tracy, 2012). Unlike shame, guilt focuses on a specific behaviour and generally makes us make amends or take corrective steps. Although guilt may be uncomfortable, it is usually seen as a more adaptive emotion than shame, as it can bring about positive changes in behaviour and relationships.

Self-silencing is another variable that has caught the interest of many research scholars. According to Jack (1999), self-silencing is the inability to express one's thoughts, emotions, and feelings within an intimate relationship or a general lack of expression in a relationship. Many researchers have described the relationship between self-silencing and depressive symptoms. Jack (2001) explained the role of self-silencing in bringing about depression among women, with early studies focusing mainly on depressed women; this idea was later rejected by various studies showing that both men and women are prone to self-silencing tendencies to make their relationships work (Abrams et al., 2019; Granski et al., 2020). How do Pakistani young adults describe their experiences of fear of negative evaluation in everyday social and cultural situations?

Theoretical framework:

Social Anxiety Theory developed by Schlenker & Leary (1982) and further refined by Leary (1983), defines that Fear of Negative Evaluation constitutes the cognitive-affective core of social anxiety. According to this theory, individuals are fundamentally motivated to create favourable impressions on others; when they doubt their ability to do so or anticipate that others will judge them unfavourably, they experience subjective distress. This distress, termed FNE, leads individuals to adopt protective behaviors such as avoidance, withdrawal, and suppression of self-expression.

Silencing the Self Theory developed by Jack (1991), explained higher rates of depression among women but has since been applied more broadly. Jack proposed that certain individuals, particularly those raised in relational, hierarchical, or collectivist cultures, learn to suppress their authentic thoughts, feelings, and needs in order to maintain relationships and avoid conflict or disapproval. The theory identifies four schemas: externalized self-perception (judging oneself by external standards), care as self-sacrifice (prioritizing others' needs over one's own), silencing the self (actively suppressing authentic expression), and the divided self (presenting a false exterior while feeling inauthentic internally). More importantly, self-silencing behavior is particularly strengthened in anticipation of

negative evaluation, namely when FNE is high. Repeated self-silencing leads to internal inconsistency, self-disparagement and negative self-conscious emotions.

Self-Conscious Emotion Theory eveloped by Lewis (1971) and extensively elaborated by Tangney & Dearing (2002), distinguishes guilt from shame as two distinct emotional responses to negative self-evaluation. Guilt is focused on a specific behavior and is accompanied by the self-statement "I did something bad," leading to repair motivation and confession. Shame, on the other hand, involves a global negative evaluation of the entire self, captured by the self-statement "I am bad," leading to hiding, withdrawal, and feelings of worthlessness. Both emotions require self-awareness and evaluation against internal or social standards, but shame is more closely linked to social scrutiny and fear of exposure, while guilt is more linked to specific moral violations. It explains why FNE, as an anticipation of negative judgment by others, should lead specifically to these self-conscious emotions rather than to other emotional states such as anger or sadness. When an individual chronically fears being evaluated negatively by others, they engage in constant self-monitoring and self-evaluation against perceived social standards, a cognitive process that directly triggers shame (global self-condemnation) and, under certain conditions, guilt (behavior-focused self-condemnation).

Self-Discrepancy Theory

Developed by Higgins (1987), proposes that individuals hold three types of self-representations: the actual self (who one currently is), the ideal self (who one aspires to become), and the ought self (who one believes they should be based on duties and obligations). According to the theory, discrepancies between these self-representations produce specific negative emotions. Discrepancies between the actual self and the ideal self, lead to dejection-related emotions such as disappointment and sadness. In contrast, discrepancies between the actual self and the *ought* self, lead to agitation-related emotions such as guilt, shame, and anxiety. Chronically suppress their own feelings, beliefs and desires by always trying to appear a certain way, while the true self remains concealed and is not presented to the outside world. The discrepancy exists between the true self, that is, the self that exists inside and the ought self; the self which an individual feels he or she ought to be (e.g., honest, truthful or simply conforming to family ideals). In a collectivistic society such as Pakistan, the ought self is determined by factors external to the self-such as; family honor (izzat), the elders in the family, public disgrace (sharam) etc. Self-silencing, therefore, produces an actual-ought discrepancy, which Higgins (1987) predicts will result in guilt and shame. Thus, this theory explains the psychological mechanism by which self-silencing translates into the specific emotional outcomes of guilt and shame.

The integration of these four theories yields a sequential mediation model. Specifically, Fear of Negative Evaluation (Leary, 1983) triggers self-silencing (Jack, 1991) as a protective strategy against anticipated disapproval. This self-silencing creates an actual-ought self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987), which produces agitation-related emotions such as guilt and shame. Self-Conscious Emotion Theory (Tangney & Dearing, 2002) further distinguishes guilt from shame as distinct emotional responses.

Rationale of the study:

While Social Anxiety Theory (Leary, 1983), Silencing the Self Theory (Jack, 1991), Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987), and Self-Conscious Emotion Theory (Tangney & Dearing, 2002) have each been studied separately, no study has yet merged these four frameworks into a single mediation model explaining how Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) leads to guilt and shame through self-silencing. Despite evidence for bivariate relationships among these constructs, no study has directly tested the full mediation pathway (FNE → Self-Silencing → Guilt/Shame) in a single sample. The vast majority of research on these constructs has been conducted in Western individualistic contexts. Pakistan, a collectivist, honour-based culture, remains understudied. Recent research has examined

FNE in Pakistan (Ishrat et al., 2024), but no study has explored self-silencing as a mediator between FNE and self-conscious emotions in this context. Understanding the mechanisms that lead to guilt and shame among Pakistani young adults can inform culturally sensitive mental health interventions, particularly given the limited mental health resources and high stigma surrounding psychological problems in Pakistan (Suhail & Chaudhry, 2020). Thus, in order to fill in this void the current study investigated the possible role of self-silencing as a mediator in the Fear of Negative Evaluation, guilt and shame proneness relationship among Pakistani young adults.

Objectives:

- To explore the association between FNE, self-silencing and guilt/shame proneness among young adults (Relationship).
- To examine the mediating effect of self-silencing on the relation between FNEE and guilt/shame proneness among young adults (Prediction).
- To identify the demographic (gender, age and education) differences on the variables under study (Demographics).

Research questions:

- In what ways do Pakistani young adults engage in self-silencing as a response to fear of negative evaluation within their relationships?
- How do Pakistani young adults experience and describe feelings of guilt when they remain silent in situations that call for them to speak up?
- How do Pakistani young adults experience and describe feelings of shame in relation to fear of negative evaluation and self-silencing?

How does the experience of fear of negative evaluation and self-silencing shape Pakistani young adults' sense of self-worth?

Conceptual model:



LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) is defined as the fear of the distress and anticipations involved in receiving negative evaluations from others (Leary, 1983). Those who scored high on the FNE expressed persistent concerns regarding others' opinions of them, predicted that they would be negatively evaluated, and felt threatened in social contexts where they could be judged by others (Carleton et al., 2007).

Studies have consistently revealed positive relations between high levels of FNE and many other negative psychosocial variables. Left unaddressed, high levels of FNE can lead to Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), and have negative implications on mental health, academic and vocational outcomes in the future (Fink et al., 2009; Villarosa-Hurlocker et al., 2018). Gilbert et al. (1994) showed considerable overlap between fear of negative evaluation and shame and implicated submission in both conditions, as well as in depression. While extensive research has been done on FNE within Western individualist settings, FNE might manifest differently in collectivist settings such as Pakistan. In collectivist societies like Pakistan, maintaining family reputation, honor and group cohesion take precedence over the individual's self-expression and individuality (Hofstede, 2001); fear of being negatively evaluated is likely to be magnified. Disapproval from family members, friends and the broader community have huge repercussions

– social isolation, and the loss of 'face' which could bring disgrace upon the family. Recently in Pakistan, there has been a growing effort to research FNE among young adults. Ishrat, Khan, and Nawaz (2024) researched FNE in correlation with self-esteem and tolerance for disagreement among Pakistani university students and found that high levels of both self-esteem and tolerance for disagreement negatively correlate with FNE. The students also reported that women high FNE students scored higher on FNE in relation to their male peers. Similarly, Maheen et al. (2023) investigated FNE among dark-skinned young adults in Pakistan in association with self-criticism and collective self-esteem, and reported that a significant negative relationship exists between FNE and collective self-esteem.

According to Uysal et al. (2010), those with a high FNE are more likely to suppress authentic self-expression in social situations as a means to avoid possible critique or judgment. In collectivistic cultures, self-silencing can be culturally approved as prosocial or respectable. Ali and Toner (2019) reported that in a Pakistani young adult sample, self-silencing can be interpreted as respect for elders and authority and thus there may be an especially strong link between FNE and self-silencing in Pakistani culture. Across a range of studies, self-silencing has been correlated with depression, anxiety, and diminished well-being (Jack, 1999; Harper & Welsh, 2007).

The link between FNE and self-conscious emotions has gained empirical support. Fergus et al. (2010) found that those with higher FNE also tended to be more shame-prone and maladaptively guilty, suggesting that negative anticipation primes self-conscious emotional reactions. Darby (2018) found that self-condemnation and fear of negative evaluation predict avoidance motives post-transgression. Shame (sharam) acts as a powerful social control mechanism in collectivistic, honor-based societies like Pakistan, regulating the way individuals interact from interpersonal behaviors to family honor (Nisbett, 2019). While shame is a purely negative emotion in the West, in Pakistan, shame functions as a moralizer, serving to reinforce social order and family honor. Because maintaining izzat (family honor) while avoiding sharam (shame) are important components of Pakistani culture, it is expected that Pakistani young adults with higher FNE will be shame-prone as they fear the negative judgment of their families and communities (Munir et al., 2024).

There is limited empirical data directly investigating FNE-Shame/Guilt through self-silencing. However, studies have consistently shown FNE and self-silencing are correlated in samples of Westerners and non-Westerners alike (Lynch, 2018; Uysal et al., 2010) while self-silencing correlates with guilt and shame across clinical and non-clinical samples (Jack, 1999; Stenbergh et al., 2018). Self-criticism, a closely related concept, is linked to both FNE and negative self-conscious emotions (Maheen et al., 2023). No study to date, however, has tested the entire indirect model (FNE Self-Silencing Shame/Guilt) within the same sample, or at all within a Pakistani young adult sample.

Pakistan is generally characterized as collectivist, hierarchical and honor-based culture (Hofstede Insights, 2021). Young adults in Pakistan are exposed to conflicting developmental tasks as they are encouraged to uphold family obligation and reputation, and to focus on group welfare while being exposed to the individualistic globalized culture in forms of media, technology and schooling (Marium & Khurshid, 2020). This situation provides an optimal environment for FNE, self-silencing and self-conscious emotions to thrive. Empirical work in Pakistan has evidenced the prevalence of FNE issues in young adults. Ishrat et al. (2024) have found negative correlation between FNE and self-esteem of Pakistani university students. Females had a greater tendency towards having FNE as compared to males. Majeed et al. (2025) have found that FNE affects the online self-presentation styles via social anxiety of young adults in Pakistan. The concepts of sharam (shame) and izzat (honor) form important aspects of social interactions in Pakistan. Public judgment holds considerable significance as it could impact both the individual and the reputation of family members. Given this cultural

background, it is plausible to find Shame Proneness to be significant in Pakistani young adults who dread negative evaluation.

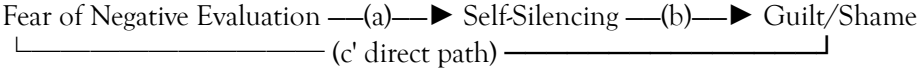
HYPOTHESES:

H_1: There would be a significant positive relationship between fear of negative evaluation, guilt and shame proneness and self-silencing among Pakistani young adults.

H_2: There would be a significant positive relationship between fear of negative evaluation and guilt/shame proneness among Pakistani young adults.

H_3: Self-silencing will mediate the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and guilt/shame proneness.

H_4: There will be significant demographic differences (e.g., gender, age, education level) in fear of negative evaluation, self-silencing, and guilt/shame proneness.



METHODS

Research design:

It is both quantitative and qualitative type of research, and a Mix-method research design was used to conduct the research.

Sampling technique:

To acquire data, a convenient sampling strategy was applied. It is a non-random sampling technique in which the sample is selected by the researcher at his/her convenience without any specific criteria.

Participants:

The sample of this research was consisted of 140 participants. The participants were different in terms of age, gender, education, family background. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 26 years.

Inclusion/ Exclusion criteria:

Only adults of age range 18-26 who voluntarily and independently participate in the study met the criteria for inclusion, while Participants outside age range, non-Pakistani nationals are excluded/ not taken.

Operational definition:

Brief fear of negative evaluation (B-FNE):

Fear of negative evaluation refers to the degree to which an individual dread being judged unfavorably by others, anticipates negative appraisals, and experiences distress in situations involving evaluative scrutiny. Operationally, it is measured by the Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (BFNE; Leary, 1983), a 12-item self-report instrument (refined from the original 30-item FNE by Watson & Friend, 1972).

Guilt and Shame Proneness:

Guilt and shame are both self-conscious moral emotions, but they differ in focus and functional consequences. Operationally, both are measured by the Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (GASP; Cohen et al., 2011), a 16-item self-report scale presenting hypothetical scenarios followed by likely behavioral or cognitive responses. Shame proneness is operationally defined as the tendency to experience a global, negative evaluation of the *self* (e.g., "I am a bad person") following a perceived failure or transgression. While, Guilt proneness is operationally defined as the tendency to experience negative affect about a specific *behavior* (e.g., "I did a bad thing") and motivation to repair the harm caused.

Self-silencing:

Self-silencing refers to the tendency to suppress one's thoughts, feelings, opinions, and needs in interpersonal relationships, particularly intimate ones, in order to avoid conflict, gain approval, or maintain the relationship. Operationally, it is measured by the silencing the self-scale (STSS; JACK & DILL, 1992), a 31-item self-report

questionnaire rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

Instruments:

Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (B-FNE)

A questionnaire consisting of demographic sheet, consent form, debriefing form, and the various measures was administered that include Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (B-FNE), Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (GASP) and Silencing the Self-Scale (STSS). Firstly, the scale B-FNE was developed by Leary (1983), this scale consisted of 12 items, and it is a Likert-type scale. The brief scale exhibits strong inter-item reliability (.97) as well as two -week test-retest reliability (.94). Eight of the items are straightforwardly scored, and four items are reverse-scored.

Guilt and Shame Proneness (GASP)

Guilt and Shame Proneness (GASP) was developed by Cohen et al. (2011), this scale consisted of 16-item, and it is 7-point Likert survey (1=Very Unlikely, 7=Very Likely) that measures 4-item subscales: Guilt-Negative Behavior Evaluation (NBE), Guilt-Repair, Shame-Negative Self-Evaluation (NSE), and Shame-Withdraw. Subscale scores are computed by averaging the four items (range: 1-7), with higher scores indicating higher susceptibility to that emotion. The subscales show acceptable to good internal reliability, typically with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding .60 in various studies. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) supports a four-factor model with good fit indices (e.g., CFI =.94, RMSEA =.065). Shame proneness is assessed through two subscales, Self-Negative-Evaluation (Negative feelings about the whole self), Withdraw (The desire to hide or disappear in response to shame). While Guilt proneness is assessed by, Behavior-Negative-Evaluation (Negative feelings focused on the specific act), Repair (Motivation to correct or make amends for the wrongdoing).

Silencing the self-scale (STSS)

Silencing the self-scale (STSS) was a 31-item instrument developed originally by Jack and Dill (1992) which was used to measure individual's ability to suppress emotions and feelings. The scale was used in present study to identify the effect of self-silencing as a covariate. The items were rated on 5 points Likert scale with 1 corresponding to "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree". This scale has a well-defined validity with a test retest reliability ranging 0.88 to 0.94. It comprises of four subscales, Silencing the self (Inhibiting self-expression and needs to avoid conflict or loss), Externalized Self-Perception (Judging oneself through others' eyes rather than one's own standards), Divided Self (Experiencing a split between an outward compliance and inner feelings) and Care as Self-Sacrifice (Placing others' needs consistently above one's own)

Procedure:

Data were collected from young adults, age range from 18-26 years, through online forms and physically. Before joining, the participants were told about the study, and their rights as the participants. Informed consent was taken from the participants. A questionnaire was administered to assess how fear of being judged by others relates to feelings of guilt and shame, and how the tendency to silence one's own needs (self-silencing) might play a role in this relationship. The questionnaire took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. They responded by selecting options on rating scales. There were no right or wrong answers; only their honest options were important. Responses were used only for academic and research purposes. Data were reported in summarized form only, and individual responses will not be identifiable. All collected data were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher and academic supervisor.

One open-ended question was given to 140 participants. The question asked them to describe a real experience in which they held back their thoughts or feelings because they were afraid of being judged, and to share how that experience made them feel about themselves.

The question was "Recount a time when you withheld your thoughts or feelings to avoid

judgment or criticism from others. How did that make you feel about yourself?''

Analysis:

Analysis was done using SPSS. Data pertaining to the participants demographics was summarized using descriptive statistics. The relation between Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation, Guilt and Shame Proneness and Self-Silencing was analyzed using Pearson's correlation. Regression was used to determine the mediating effect of self-silencing. Independent samples t-test was performed for the gender groups. A one-way ANOVA was performed to analyze if there was any difference among the groups in regard to family type, age, marital status, type of residential background, year of study, residence arrangement, birth order and socioeconomic status. Thematic analysis was used for understanding the responses. It is a stepwise method whereby the researcher reads through the whole of the data to pull out significant features or patterns, classifies and categorizes together the similar features to form themes, and describes the meaning of each theme. It is a popular qualitative approach because it is flexible and is highly effective in analyzing personal experience.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS :

Results:

Table no. 1 Demographic characteristics of the participants (N=140)

Variables		Groups	Frequency	%
1.	Age	18-20 years	60	42.9
		21-23 years	55	39.3
		24-26 years	25	17.9
		Total	140	100.0
2.	SES	below 30,000	22	15.7
		30,000-60,000	41	29.3
		60,000-100,000	29	20.7
		above 100,000	48	34.3
		Total	140	100.0
3.	Gender	Male	50	35.7
		Female	90	64.3
		Prefer not to say	0	0
		Total	140	100.0
4.	Marital status	Single	134	95.7
		Married	6	64.3)
		Divorced	0	0
		Total	140	100.0
5.	Family type	Nuclear	80	57.1
		Joint	60	42.9
		Total	140	100.0
6.	Residential background	Urban	69	49.3
		Rural	50	35.7
		Town	21	15.0
		Total	140	100.0
7.	Study year	Matric	3	2.1
		Intermediate	0	0
		1st year (1-2 sem)	17	12.1
		2nd year (3-4 sem)	57	40.7

		3rd year (5-6 sem)	37	26.4
		4th year (7-8 sem)	20	14.3
		Graduate	6	4.3
		Total	140	100.0
8.	Living situation	With Family	97	69.3
		Hostel	41	29.3
		With spouse	1	0.7
		Alone	1	0.7
		Total	140	100.0
9.	Birth-order	Only child	5	3.6
		First-born	53	37.9
		Middle child	57	40.7
		Last born	25	17.9
		Total	140	100.0

Table no. 1 showed the demographic characteristics of the sample including: Age, SES, Gender, Marital Status, Residential Area, Family type, Living situation, Birth-order, Study year.

Table no. 2 Descriptive Statistics of Brief fear of negative evaluation Guilt and shame proneness, Silencing the self-scale (N=140)

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	N	**Minimum**	**Maximum**	**Mean**		**Std. Deviation**	**Skewness**		**Kurtosis**	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
BFNE	140	12.00	58.00	33.2643	.56113	6.63933	.495	.205	1.526	.407
GASP	140	21.00	112.00	61.2929	1.73370	20.51337	.268	.205	-.668	.407
STSS	140	49.00	133.00	91.7571	1.46711	17.35904	.380	.205	-.350	.407

Table no. 3 Reliability Analysis For the study measures

Scales	*K*	*A*
1. Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation	12	.600
2. Guilt and Shame Proneness scale	16	.901
3. Silencing the self-scale	31	.847

Note: K (No. of items)

Table no. 3 showed the results of **reliability analysis of study measures** (Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation, Guilt and Shame Proneness, Silencing the Self-scale). It indicated that Brief fear of negative evaluation scale has showed the Cronbach's alpha coefficient as .60, which indicates marginally acceptable internal consistency reliability. While Guilt and shame proneness, scale has showed Excellent Cronbach's alpha reliability, and Silencing the Self-scale has showed Good Cronbach's alpha reliability.

Table no. 4 Inter-correlation among sub-scales of Gasp (Guilt-NBE, Guilt-repair, Shame NSE, Shame-withdraw), STSS (ESP, CSS, SS, DS) and BFENE-total.

Variables		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.	BFNETotal	1	_	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
2.	GuiltNBE	.295**	1	_	_	_	_	_	_	_
3.	Guiltrepair	.268**	.741**	1	_	_	_	_	_	_
4.	shameNSE	.396**	.712**	.759**	1	_	_	_	_	_
5.	Shmwth	.397**	.485**	.529**	.618**	1	_	_	_	_
6.	ESPSS1	.476**	.544**	.450**	.518**	.483**	1	_	_	_
7.	CSSss2	.409**	.404**	.365**	.365**	.361**	.610**	1	_	_
8.	SSss3	.364**	.434**	.423**	.432**	.435**	.684**	.566**	1	_
9.	DSss4	.389**	.321**	.322**	.352**	.470**	.633**	.520**	.537**	1

Note: P < .01

Table no. 4 shows the results of **Pearson correlation analysis** among BFNE total, GASP and STSS subscales. Results revealed that Fear of Negative Evaluation (BFNE) was significantly and positively correlated with all guilt and shame subscales, with coefficients ranging from r = .268 to r = .397 (p < .01), indicating that higher fear of negative evaluation is associated with greater guilt and shame proneness. Similarly, BFNE showed moderate positive correlations with all STSS subscales (r = .364 to .476, p < .01). Among the GASP subscales, the strongest correlation has been observed between Guilt Repair, and Shame-NSE, r = .759, p < .01. The STSS subscales (ESP, CSS, SS, DS) has also showed strong inter-correlations r = .520 to .684, (p < .01).

Table no. 5 BFNE as predictor of Guilt-Negative Behaviour Evaluation among young adults (n=140)

I.V	B	Standard error	*β*	t	R^2	p
BFNE	.267	.074	.295	3.626	.087	<.001

Table no. 5 showed the results of **linear regression analysis** by taking BFNE as predictor of Guilt-Negative Behaviour Evaluation among young adults. It indicated that BFNE proves to be

a significant positive predictor of Guilt-Negative Behaviour Evaluation (β= .295, p < .001) by accounting 8.7% of variance.

Table no. 6 BFNE as predictor of Guilt-repair among young adults (n=140)

I.V	B	Standard error	β	t	R^2	P
BFNE	.247	.076	.268	3.262	.072	.001

Table no. 6 showed the results of **linear regression analysis** by taking BFNE as predictor of Guilt-repair among young adults. It indicated that BFNE proves to be a significant positive predictor of Guilt-repair (β= .268, p= .001) by accounting 7.2% of variance.

Table no. 7 BFNE as predictor of *Shame-Negative Self-Evaluation* among young adults (n=140)

I.V	B	Standard error	β	t	R^2	P
BFNE	.371	.073	.396	5.061	.157	<.001

Table no. 7 showed the results of **linear regression analysis** by taking BFNE as predictor of Shame-Negative Self-Evaluation among young adults. It indicated that BFNE proves to be a significant positive predictor of Shame-Negative Self-Evaluation (β= .396, p < .001) by accounting 15.7% of variance.

Table no.8 BFNE as predictor of *Shame-withdraw* among young adults (n=140)

I.V	B	Standard error	β	t	R^2	P
BFNE	.335	.066	.397	5.085	.158	<.001

Table no. 8 showed the results of **linear regression analysis** by taking BFNE as predictor of Shame-withdraw among young adults. It indicated that BFNE proves to be a significant positive predictor of Shame-withdraw (β= .397, p < .001) by accounting 15.8% of variance.

Table no. 9 Mediation Analysis

	B	SE	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
Path a: BFNE → STSS	1.29	.19	6.64	<.001	.90	1.67
Path b: STSS → GASP	.61	.09	6.61	<.001	.43	.80
Direct Effect: BFNE → GASP	.43	.24	1.77	.078	-.04	.91
Indirect Effect: BFNE → STSS → GASP	.79	.18	_	_	.46	1.17

Note: B = unstandardized coefficient; SE = standard error; LLCI = Lower Limit Confidence Interval; ULCI = Upper Limit Confidence Interval. Bootstrap samples = 5000, 95% Confidence Interval.

Mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2022) with 5000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals to examine the mediating role of self-silencing in the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and guilt and shame proneness. Regarding Path a, fear of negative evaluation significantly predicted self-silencing (B = 1.29, SE = .19, t = 6.64, p < .001), indicating that higher fear of negative evaluation was associated with greater self-silencing. Regarding Path b, self-silencing significantly predicted guilt and shame proneness (B = .61, SE = .09, t = 6.61,

p < .001), indicating that greater self-silencing was associated with higher guilt and shame. The direct effect of fear of negative evaluation on guilt and shame proneness became non-significant after introducing self-silencing as a mediator (B = .43, SE = .24, t = 1.77, p = .078), suggesting that the effect of BFNE on GASP was fully transmitted through self-silencing. The indirect effect was statistically significant (Effect = .79, BootSE = .18, 95% CI [.46, 1.17]), as the confidence interval did not include zero, confirming full mediation.

Table no. 10 Gender differences on BFNE scale, sub-scales of GASP, and sub-scales of STSS.

DV	Gender		T(df)	95%confidence interval		Cohen's d
	Male (N=50) Mean SD	Female (N=90) Mean SD		LL	UL	
BFNE	34.26(6.75)	32.71(6.55)	1.326(138)	-.760	3.858	.234
Guilt-NBE	16.22(5.78)	14.82(6.09)	1.324(138)	-.689	3.485	.234
Guilt-repair	16.14(5.71)	16.37(6.38)	-.209(138)	-2.372	1.919	-.037
Shame-NSE	16.34(6.25)	15.29(6.20)	.958(138)	-1.118	3.220	.169
Shm-Wth	13.36(5.39)	14.39(5.70)	-1.043(138)	-2.979	.921	-.184
ESPss1	17.60(4.99)	17.72(5.59)	-.084(138)	-2.020	1.855	-.015
CSSss2	27.90(4.73)	26.39(5.30)	1.678(138)	-.269	3.291	.296
SSss3	27.34(5.17)	26.04(5.67)	1.335(138)	-.623	3.214	.236
DSss4	20.92(4.85)	20.47(4.48)	.557(138)	-1.156	2.063	.098

Independent samples t-test has been conducted to examine gender differences in all study variables. Results revealed no significant gender differences in fear of negative evaluation (t(df) = 1.326(138), guilt proneness, shame proneness, or self-silencing subscales (p > .05). These findings suggest that males and females did not differ significantly on any of the study variables.

Table no.11 Family type differences on BFNE scale, sub-scales of GASP, and sub-scales of STSS.

DV	Family type		T(df)	95%confidence interval		Cohen's d
	Nuclear(N=80) Mean SD	Joint(N=60) Mean SD		LL	UL	
BFNE	33.16(6.43)	33.40(6.96)	-.209(138)	-2.487	2.012	-.036
Guilt-NBE	14.95(6.10)	15.82(5.88)	-.845(138)	-2.895	1.162	-.144
Guilt-repair	16.28(5.77)	16.30(6.26)	-.024(138)	-2.102	2.052	-.004
Shame-NSE	15.40(6.07)	16.02(6.45)	-.579(138)	-2.721	1.488	-.099
Shm-Wth	13.85(5.55)	14.25(5.68)	-.418(138)	-2.294	1.494	-.071
ESPss1	17.10(5.40)	18.60(5.63)	-1.690(138)	-3.445	.270	-.289
CSSss2	26.55(5.23)	27.43(5.01)	-1.007(138)	-2.618	.852	-.172
SSss3	26.38(5.43)	26.67(5.67)	-.295(138)	-2.148	1.590	-.050
DSss4	20.63(4.86)	21.25(4.19)	-1.388(138)	-2.637	.462	-.237

Independent samples t-test has been conducted to examine family type differences in all study variables. Results revealed no significant differences between nuclear and joint family participants in fear of negative evaluation (t (df) = -.209(138), guilt proneness, shame proneness, or self-silencing subscales (p > .05). Cohen's d values indicated small effect sizes across all variables.

These findings suggest that family type did not significantly influence any of the study variables.

Table no. 12 Marital status differences on BFNE scale, sub-scales of GASP, and sub-scales of STSS.

DV	Marital status		T(df)	95%confidence interval		Cohen's d
	Single(N=134) Mean SD	Married(N=6) Mean SD		LL	UL	
BFNE	33.41(6.53)	30.00(8.76)	1.233(138)	-2.057	8.878	.515
Guilt-NBE	15.44(6.05)	12.50(3.83)	1.179(138)	-1.996	7.891	.492
Guilt-repair	16.38(6.17)	14.00(4.93)	.933(138)	-2.671	7.448	.389
Shame-NSE	15.70(6.27)	14.83(5.26)	.334(138)	-4.278	6.014	.139
Shm-Wth	14.03(5.59)	13.66(6.08)	.158(138)	-4.259	5.001	.066
ESPss1	17.83(5.59)	14.50(2.73)	1.450(138)	-1.213	7.885	.605
CSSss2	27.07(5.15)	23.66(3.61)	1.598(138)	-.8078	7.623	.667
SSss3	26.55(5.59)	25.50(3.50)	.456(138)	-3.511	5.616	.190
DSss4	20.66(4.65)	19.83(3.43)	.431(138)	-2.979	4.641	.180

Independent samples t-test has been conducted to examine Marital status differences in all study variables. Results revealed no significant differences between single and divorced participants in fear of negative evaluation [t (df) = .158(138)], guilt proneness, shame proneness, or self-silencing subscales ($p > .05$). Cohen's d values indicated small effect sizes across all variables. These findings suggest that Marital status did not significantly influence any of the study variables.

Table no. 13 ANOVA Results for Variables Across Age Groups

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
BFNE	Between Groups	17.438	2	8.719	.196	.823
	Within Groups	6109.783	137	44.597		
	Total	6127.221	139			
GuiltNBE	Between Groups	.675	2	.338	.009	.991
	Within Groups	5003.861	137	36.525		
	Total	5004.536	139			
Guiltrepair	Between Groups	30.136	2	15.068	.398	.673
	Within Groups	5192.435	137	37.901		
	Total	5222.571	139			
shameNSE	Between Groups	189.712	2	94.856	2.507	.085
	Within Groups	5183.509	137	37.836		
	Total	5373.221	139			
ShmWth	Between Groups	158.207	2	79.103	2.587	.079
	Within Groups	4188.729	137	30.575		
	Total	4346.936	139			
ESPSS1	Between Groups	10.613	2	5.307	.171	.843
	Within Groups	4249.180	137	31.016		
	Total	4259.793	139			
CSSss2	Between Groups	27.997	2	13.998	.527	.592
	Within Groups	3641.289	137	26.579		
	Total	3669.286	139			

SSss3	Between Groups	8.376	2	4.188	.136	.873
	Within Groups	4220.617	137	30.807		
	Total	4228.993	139			
DSss4	Between Groups	26.953	2	13.477	.632	.533
	Within Groups	2919.732	137	21.312		
	Total	2946.686	139			

Note: p < .05*, p < .01, p < .001*****

One-way ANOVA has been conducted to examine Age differences (18-20years, 21-23years, 24-26years) in all study variables among young adults. Results revealed no significant differences across age groups.

Table no. 14 ANOVA Results for Variables Across Study Year Groups

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
BFNE	Between Groups	208.898	5	41.780	.946	.454
	Within Groups	5918.323	134	44.167		
	Total	6127.221	139			
GuiltNBE	Between Groups	137.425	5	27.485	.757	.583
	Within Groups	4867.111	134	36.322		
	Total	5004.536	139			
Guiltrepair	Between Groups	82.399	5	16.480	.430	.827
	Within Groups	5140.172	134	38.359		
	Total	5222.571	139			
shameNSE	Between Groups	213.173	5	42.635	1.107	.360
	Within Groups	5160.048	134	38.508		
	Total	5373.221	139			
ShmWth	Between Groups	165.146	5	33.029	1.058	.386
	Within Groups	4181.789	134	31.207		
	Total	4346.936	139			
ESPSS1	Between Groups	29.727	5	5.945	.188	.967
	Within Groups	4230.066	134	31.568		
	Total	4259.793	139			
CSSss2	Between Groups	147.502	5	29.500	1.122	.352
	Within Groups	3521.784	134	26.282		
	Total	3669.286	139			
SSss3	Between Groups	135.593	5	27.119	.888	.491
	Within Groups	4093.399	134	30.548		
	Total	4228.993	139			
DSss4	Between Groups	94.130	5	18.826	.884	.494
	Within Groups	2852.556	134	21.288		
	Total	2946.686	139			

Note: p < .05*, p < .01, p < .001*****

One-way ANOVA has been conducted to examine study year differences (Matric, intermediate, 1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year, 4th year, graduate) in all study variables among young adults. Results revealed no significant differences across study year groups.

Table no. 15 ANOVA Results for Variables Across Residential Background Groups

		Sum-of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
BFNE	Between Groups	60.960	2	30.480	.688	.504
	Within Groups	6066.261	137	44.279		
	Total	6127.221	139			
GuiltNBE	Between Groups	65.495	2	32.748	.908	.406
	Within Groups	4939.040	137	36.051		
	Total	5004.536	139			
Guiltrepair	Between Groups	126.227	2	63.114	1.697	.187
	Within Groups	5096.344	137	37.200		
	Total	5222.571	139			
shameNSE	Between Groups	23.663	2	11.832	.303	.739
	Within Groups	5349.558	137	39.048		
	Total	5373.221	139			
ShmWth	Between Groups	3.517	2	1.758	.055	.946
	Within Groups	4343.419	137	31.704		
	Total	4346.936	139			
ESPSS1	Between Groups	3.993	2	1.997	.064	.938
	Within Groups	4255.800	137	31.064		
	Total	4259.793	139			
CSSss2	Between Groups	5.619	2	2.809	.105	.900
	Within Groups	3663.667	137	26.742		
	Total	3669.286	139			
SSss3	Between Groups	28.294	2	14.147	.461	.631
	Within Groups	4200.699	137	30.662		
	Total	4228.993	139			
DSss4	Between Groups	10.934	2	5.467	.255	.775
	Within Groups	2935.752	137	21.429		
	Total	2946.686	139			

Note: p < .05*, p < .01, p < .001*****

One-way ANOVA has been conducted to examine residential background differences (Urban, Rural, Town) in all study variables among young adults. Results revealed no significant differences across residential background groups.

Table no. 16 ANOVA Results for Variables Across birth-order Groups

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
BFNE	Between Groups	168.017	3	56.006	1.278	.284
	Within Groups	5959.204	136	43.818		
	Total	6127.221	139			
GuiltNBE	Between Groups	15.211	3	5.070	.138	.937
	Within Groups	4989.325	136	36.686		
	Total	5004.536	139			
Guiltrepair	Between Groups	38.025	3	12.675	.332	.802
	Within Groups	5184.547	136	38.122		
	Total	5222.571	139			
shameNSE	Between Groups	6.324	3	2.108	.053	.984

	Within Groups	5366.897	136	39.462		
	Total	5373.221	139			
ShmWth	Between Groups	46.363	3	15.454	.489	.691
	Within Groups	4300.573	136	31.622		
	Total	4346.936	139			
ESPSS1	Between Groups	23.479	3	7.826	.251	.860
	Within Groups	4236.314	136	31.149		
	Total	4259.793	139			
CSSss2	Between Groups	60.317	3	20.106	.758	.520
	Within Groups	3608.969	136	26.537		
	Total	3669.286	139			
SSss3	Between Groups	63.002	3	21.001	.686	.562
	Within Groups	4165.991	136	30.632		
	Total	4228.993	139			
DSss4	Between Groups	51.333	3	17.111	.804	.494
	Within Groups	2895.353	136	21.289		
	Total	2946.686	139			

Note: p < .05*, p < .01, p < .001*****

One-way ANOVA has been conducted to examine birth order differences (only child, first born, middle child, and last born) in all study variables among young adults. Results revealed no significant differences across birth order groups.

Table no. 17 ANOVA Results for Variables Across Living Situation Groups

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
BFNE	Between Groups	110.909	3	36.970	.836	.476
	Within Groups	6016.313	136	44.238		
	Total	6127.221	139			
GuiltNBE	Between Groups	93.031	3	31.010	.859	.464
	Within Groups	4911.505	136	36.114		
	Total	5004.536	139			
Guiltrepair	Between Groups	100.542	3	33.514	.890	.448
	Within Groups	5122.029	136	37.662		
	Total	5222.571	139			
shameNSE	Between Groups	92.670	3	30.890	.796	.498
	Within Groups	5280.551	136	38.828		
	Total	5373.221	139			
ShmWth	Between Groups	117.056	3	39.019	1.255	.293
	Within Groups	4229.880	136	31.102		
	Total	4346.936	139			
ESPSS1	Between Groups	46.908	3	15.636	.505	.680
	Within Groups	4212.885	136	30.977		
	Total	4259.793	139			
CSSss2	Between Groups	28.331	3	9.444	.353	.787
	Within Groups	3640.954	136	26.772		
	Total	3669.286	139			
SSss3	Between Groups	16.986	3	5.662	.183	.908

	Within Groups	4212.007	136	30.971		
	Total	4228.993	139			
DSss4	Between Groups	12.890	3	4.297	.199	.897
	Within Groups	2933.795	136	21.572		
	Total	2946.686	139			

Note: p < .05*, p < .01, p < .001*****

One-way ANOVA has been conducted to examine living situation differences (with family, hostel, with spouse, and alone) in all study variables among young adults. Results revealed no significant differences across living situation groups.

Table no. 18 ANOVA Results for Variables Across SES Groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
BFNE	Between Groups	255.869	3	85.290	1.976	.121
	Within Groups	5871.352	136	43.172		
	Total	6127.221	139			
GuiltNBE	Between Groups	45.078	3	15.026	.412	.745
	Within Groups	4959.457	136	36.467		
	Total	5004.536	139			
Guiltrepair	Between Groups	118.920	3	39.640	1.056	.370
	Within Groups	5103.651	136	37.527		
	Total	5222.571	139			
shameNSE	Between Groups	30.865	3	10.288	.262	.853
	Within Groups	5342.357	136	39.282		
	Total	5373.221	139			
ShmWth	Between Groups	209.145	3	69.715	2.291	.081
	Within Groups	4137.790	136	30.425		
	Total	4346.936	139			
ESPSS1	Between Groups	32.103	3	10.701	.344	.793
	Within Groups	4227.690	136	31.086		
	Total	4259.793	139			
CSSss2	Between Groups	68.008	3	22.669	.856	.466
	Within Groups	3601.278	136	26.480		
	Total	3669.286	139			
SSss3	Between Groups	79.671	3	26.557	.870	.458
	Within Groups	4149.322	136	30.510		
	Total	4228.993	139			
DSss4	Between Groups	45.629	3	15.210	.713	.546
	Within Groups	2901.057	136	21.331		
	Total	2946.686	139			

Note: SES = Socioeconomic Status measured by monthly family income. **p < .05*, p < .01**, p < .001*****

One-way ANOVA has been conducted to examine differences across socioeconomic status groups (below 30,000, 30,000-60,000, 60,000-100,000, and above 100,000 monthly family income) in all study variables, suggesting that monthly family income did not significantly influence any of the study variables.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

This study also employed a qualitative thematic analysis method (Braun & Clark) used to illustrate the experiential reality behind the statistical findings in the main study. Each response was thoroughly examined and grouped under various themes based on what the participant primarily narrated. The response was then allocated a participant number and a short code that represented the theme. Some respondents did not answer or provide detailed replies, which is characteristic of authentic survey data and also appeared here and were appropriately labeled in the table for transparency. When a response touched on more than one theme, it was placed in the theme that was most strongly reflected in what the person wrote. In total, five themes were identified from the usable responses.

Theme 1: Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)

It was also a very prominent theme across all of the respondents that it wasn't just about the negative feedback they had received, they were already anticipating the worst even before they even started speaking and the expectation was enough to silence them. This was particularly evident across all the responses concerning technology as many of the participants spoke about having typed a response and then having deleted it without posting, or even having had fake profiles online to voice something that they were afraid to state under their own name. This confirms the fear of being judged follows Pakistan's young adults all the way into their phones and the internet.

(a) Anticipatory Withdrawal from Opportunities

Beyond momentary hesitation, several participants described opting out of opportunities altogether – leadership roles, accommodations, support – because they anticipated being judged if seen to struggle or fail.

"The leadership position that I abandoned, I abandoned because I feared judgment from others if I failed. To this day, I regret that I didn't allow myself to move past the fear." (FNE-16)

"I did not disclose my anxiety disorder to my university administration despite needing accommodations. Fear of judgment cost me academically." (FNE-17)

"I wanted to reach out to my university counselor, but never reached out. I was so afraid of being perceived as not being able to 'cut it' and this fear led me to struggle even more." (FNE-18)

(b) Digital Self-Censorship

Many participants described editing or deleting their own words on social media and messaging apps before others could see them, anticipating judgment purely from the act of posting.

"In the social media, I wrote a comment about what I actually think then deleted it without sending. I felt anxious and cowardice at once." (FNE-06)

"Deleting my typed messages before I send them in WhatsApp group chats is a habit that occurs very often. I'm afraid of being assessed as not intelligent enough. It's one of the reasons that keeps me feeling worried at all times." (FNE-09)

(c) Silencing in Evaluative and Academic Settings

In testing, classroom, and meeting contexts, participants anticipated exposure so strongly that it silenced them even when they were confident in what they knew.

"During every test and assessment, I feel like a fake who is sure to be discovered eventually, and the thought of this prevents me from speaking up, even when I'm sure of the answer." (FNE-15)

"I sat silent during a team meeting with nothing volunteered when it was clearly a problem I knew more about than anyone else. I was too afraid of being questioned so I stayed quiet." (FNE-19)

"In an important exam I couldn't ask for clarification for fear that the invigilator would think I wasn't intelligent, it is stupid and I still feel it." (FNE-20)

Theme 2: Self-Silencing (SS)

The topic describes responses where participants explained that they have habitually concealed their feelings, needs, and beliefs in order to maintain harmonious relationships or to avoid hurting others in their lives. In contrast to specific incidents, the majority of responses identified a habit that has occurred for months, if not years. The most evident thing from all of the responses was just how much were being sacrificed in order to maintain peace. The majority of the respondents were withholding their career aspirations from their family, their emotional state from others, and their desires for relationships from the people who mattered because staying quiet felt like the safe thing to do. Agreeing with other people on the exterior and feeling something altogether different on the interior was a common pattern for most of the respondents; many participants referred to two separate selves, the self they demonstrated to others and the self they kept hidden within themselves. They all felt tired, drained, and fundamentally removed from themselves after constantly concealing parts of themselves over a period of time. Familial pressures, along with cultural ones, were also a significant factor causing the silencing within these descriptions.

(a) Suppression of Needs in Close Relationships

Participants described withholding their needs and feelings from romantic partners and family, prioritizing the relationship's harmony over their own expression.

"I had a relationship where I always kept my emotions in check. I never asked my partner what I needed. I felt lost later on." (SS-04)

"I was involved in a relationship and in order to keep the relationship functioning, I never allowed myself to be truly honest with my emotions and what I needed from my partner." (SS-28)

"I can never say the words of romance because I fear the reaction of my family. To me silence feels like a jail." (SS-29)

(b) Chronic Performance of "Being Fine"

A recurring pattern was the habitual performance of wellbeing that masked ongoing distress, leaving participants feeling drained and disconnected from their authentic selves.

"My emotions after living with pretending I am fine for so many years when I really was not is a vast exhaustion and an overwhelming sense of grief at the alienation I have from my own life." (SS-27)

"The thing is after years of pretending I am alright when I am not, I feel utterly exhausted." (SS-30)

"I often find myself saying 'I am OK' even when I am clearly not. I am so tired from always wearing the mask that I feel so out of touch with myself." (SS-31)

(c) Withholding Under Familial and Authority Pressure

Participants described burying their true feelings and opinions when family decisions or expectations overrode their own preferences, leaving unresolved resentment turned inward.

"The subject they picked for me. I wanted to rebel, but I buried my feelings deep down inside of me. I hated them, but I hated myself for hating them more." (SS-12)

"I have never voiced an opinion different to that of my father, and just the mere thought makes me so uncomfortable I feel as though I will throw up." (SS-32)

"I have to do everything my parents want even when they have impossible standards. I feel controlled and end up hating myself." (SS-33)

Theme 3: Guilt Proneness (GP)

This is about those respondents who felt guilty at their silence; the guilt was not necessarily related to their identity, but specifically to what they did not do. I will present accounts of those who failed to challenge something, failed to report something or failed to state something that needed to be stated. One of the fascinating things about all these answers is that participants knew the "correct" thing to do; the thing that was right and ethical, but fear stopped them, and then often guilt was worse than the fear, or they carried that guilt with them for a long time, or even for years. One also comes to appreciate how guilt and silence reinforce one another; remaining silent leads to guilt and discomfort and sometimes that guilt would cause people to

"withdrawal" even more since facing the situation again was too painful.

(a) Guilt from Witnessing Injustice in Silence

Witnessing wrongdoing directed at someone else without speaking up produced lasting guilt, even when participants were not personally responsible for the injustice.

"I have been silent in a situation when one of my classmates has been unfairly accused of an act they didn't commit. I know the truth, but my words were still unspoken. It's one of the most agonizing guilty feelings that has ever existed." (GP-04)

"My sibling was being treated unfairly by my parents, and although I saw it, I said nothing. I felt guilty for being a witness and saying nothing." (GP-22)

"I noticed injustice happening to a classmate but I stayed silent to protect myself. I felt guilty and still carry that guilt." (GP-23)

(b) Guilt from Prioritizing Peace over Honesty

Participants described staying silent or agreeing outwardly to avoid conflict, later regretting having prioritized peace over speaking the truth.

"I knew what could solve a family fight, and I didn't say a word to end it. I felt terrible later, choosing peace over honesty." (GP-21)

"At a family gathering my opinion on politics was different. I kept quiet fearing backlash. Afterward I felt guilty for choosing silence over truth." (GP-24)

"My parents decided the path of my studies and asked nothing from me, I wanted to object, I did not. I held my anger and I felt guilt about feeling it." (GP-25)

(c) Guilt from Ethical Compromise through Inaction

Failing to report dishonesty or wrongdoing out of fear of social consequences left participants feeling they had compromised their own values.

"The experience that made me aware of an issue and led me to take an action was one time that I saw academic dishonesty occur and did not report it due to fears of negative social consequences. I felt ethically compromised and guilty about this for a long time." (GP-09)

"The one time I didn't report cheating I observed, I was afraid of the social stigma I could face. I felt ethically wrong and ashamed of my decision for a long period of time." (GP-26)

"I saw online harassment take place once, but I didn't report it. This inaction seemed like cowardice to me and *since I have felt ashamed." (GP-27)*

Theme 4: Shame Proneness (SP)

This theme covers answers where people were not simply remorseful for having done or failed to do something, but rather had a negative evaluation of their self, that is, felt bad about themselves in their entirety. When faced with criticism or when choosing not to say something in tough situations, participants expressed the feelings of being revealed, ashamed, and somehow flawed. Shame in these participants seemed quite distinct from guilt. Unlike guilt which appeared to be related to one particular action, shame seemed to involve the total self, e.g., "I felt worthless," "I felt like I did not belong,' and 'I felt like they could see how weak I was." Of all of the emotional reactions, lastingness and behavioural impact seemed most profound here. One humiliation at the hands of the schoolteacher, or being publicly ridiculed by an employer, seemed sufficient to shut one individual up for months or indefinitely. Shame felt to participants in the face of a public audience seemed to be particularly severe in the culture that participants inhabit.

(a) Public Humiliation and Internalized Criticism

Being criticized in front of others produced acute humiliation, with participants internalizing the criticism rather than defending themselves in the moment.

"My manager said some horrible things to me about my work in front of my colleagues. I said nothing, though he was incorrect in what he said, and feel extreme humiliation at the whole event." (SP-01)

"My professor humiliated me for a wrong answer. I did not respond. I internalized the shame and started doubting my intelligence for months." (SP-26)

"After being criticized publicly by my senior I stayed quiet and smiled. I internalized the

criticism entirely and spent months questioning my abilities." (SP-27)

(b) Diminished Self-Perception from Repeated Disregard

Being repeatedly overlooked, interrupted, or outperformed eroded participants' sense of value over time, reinforcing feelings of inferiority and insignificance.

"I kept silent when a senior member interrupted me over and over in meetings. Because of keeping silent, over the time, I feel I have become more and more insignificant and less valuable." (SP-08)

"I was in a passionate argument in class and had a very good counter-argument in mind, yet I went completely blank. I was so embarrassed with myself and felt inferior to the rest of the class." (SP-28)

"What followed – being laughed at by the teacher at class on my oral English and not uttering a word back – was a feeling of mortification and eternal inferiority to my own language." (SP-29)

(c) Long-Lasting Avoidance Following a Shaming Incident

A single shaming experience, particularly in a public or academic setting, was often enough to produce lasting avoidance of similar situations well beyond the original incident.

"I have been in public speaking, and repeatedly felt extreme shame, believing others watched it all and were critical of me. I am unable to speak again for this reason." (SP-25)

"My written English was made fun of in class by a teacher. I did not speak in that class ever again. The shame redefined my own intelligence to myself." (SP-30)

"I have given up speaking in seminars since an embarrassing incident in the first year. In my view my professors and tutors have lost interest in me." (SP-31)

Theme 5: Low Self-Worth (LSW)

This theme involved all participants who spoke about an overarching and perpetual sense that their thoughts and emotions do not seem to hold the same value as those belonging to other people. While shame appeared to be triggered by something that happened in the past, a sense of low self-worth seemed to be ever present for participants in this theme. What was striking about this theme was how many participants talked about an 'enclosed cycle' that was very difficult to exit. Participants believed their silence to be warranted, not believing they had anything worth saying; however, they did not ever get to test their belief, due to their silence. In turn the continued silence simply became proof they were not 'worthy' of being heard. Participants expressed to us how they had given up opportunities; not apply for positions they were more than qualified for, letting others 'take their idea', as they already believed that they were not 'worthy'. An entrenched belief that one is less 'worthy' is a powerful concept to overcome, because it is not a fleeting belief related to the immediate fear of being judged.

(a) Belief That One's Voice Doesn't Matter

Participants described a persistent belief that their opinions and thoughts were inherently less valuable than those of others, making silence feel like the safest or most sensible option.

"I have always felt that my opinions are less important than those of people around me. Silence feels like the safest and most honest response I can give." (LSW-13)

"I often feel that others are inherently more capable and deserving of speaking than I am. This belief has limited my participation in every setting." (LSW-26)

"I don't voice my worries when I am in a group because I have a sense that other people's thoughts are better than my own." (LSW-27)

(b) Erosion of Self and Identity Over Time

Prolonged self-silencing left several participants feeling hollow, disconnected, or unable to locate an authentic sense of self beneath the habit of staying quiet.

"My feelings after years of silencing myself to be accepted are a hollowness and a growing inability to remember what I actually think or believe." (LSW-23)

"After silencing myself for years to gain acceptance, the effect is this sense of emptiness

and growing amnesia as to what I actually do, or am, or believe." (LSW-28)
"I have been nodding with people all my life and, on the other hand, have been thinking that something else. It causes a feeling of non-being." (LSW-29)

(c) Foregone Opportunities Reinforcing Unworthiness

A belief that one is inherently less deserving led several participants to withdraw from opportunities – career applications, negotiations, ideas – which in turn reinforced their sense of unworthiness.
"Time after time I did not put myself forward for positions in the knowledge that I would not be given the job. My career path has followed the same course dictated by this insecurity." (LSW-30)
"I have never negotiated a salary or academic favor because I assume I am not worth more than what is initially offered. This belief has cost me a great deal." (LSW-31)
"I had a great research idea and persuaded myself it wasn't innovative enough and it was never followed through. I bitterly regret allowing my own insecurity to rule." (LSW-32)

DISCUSSIONS

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between fear of negative evaluation, self-silencing, and guilt/shame proneness among Pakistani young adults. Also, the mediating role of self-silencing was investigated. Furthermore, demographic differences in study variables were also explored. The findings are discussed below in relation to each hypothesis, followed by an integration with the qualitative themes that evolved from participant's narratives.
The first hypothesis stated that there would be a significant positive relationship between fear of negative evaluation, guilt and shame proneness, and self-silencing among Pakistani young adults. Results of Pearson correlation analysis fully supported H_1 as fear of negative evaluation showed significant positive correlations with all guilt and shame subscales ($r = .268$ to $.397$, $p < .01$) and all self-silencing subscales ($r = .364$ to $.476$, $p < .01$).
These findings are theoretically consistent with Social Anxiety Theory (Leary, 1983) which proposes that individuals who fear negative evaluation experience subjective distress and adopt protective behaviors including suppression of self-expression. The positive correlations between BFNE and self-silencing subscales suggest that Pakistani young adults who fear social disapproval tend to suppress their authentic thoughts and feelings which is consistent with Jack and Dill (1992) who proposed that self-silencing emerges as a strategy to avoid conflict and negative evaluation.
Furthermore, the significant positive correlations between BFNE and guilt and shame subscales support the findings of Fergus et al. (2010) who found that individuals with high FNE reported greater shame proneness and maladaptive guilt. This pattern is also consistent with a broader literature linking unaddressed FNE to negative psychosocial, academic, and vocational outcomes (Fink, Patalano, & Gendron, 2009; Villarosa-Hurlocker, Roush, & Capron, 2018), which underscores why the moderate to strong associations observed here are clinically, and not merely statistically, meaningful. The pattern also converges with Darby (2018), who found that self-condemnation and fear of negative evaluation jointly predict avoidance motivations following perceived transgressions, suggesting that the FNE, guilt/shame link observed among Pakistani young adults may reflect a broader avoidance-oriented response to anticipated social judgment. Within the Pakistani cultural context in which "sharam" (shame) and "izzat" (honor) drive social behavior (Nisbett, 2019), these associations may be stronger because the punishment for social disapproval is significant, and can involve face-loss and shame on one's entire family.
Among the GASP subscales the strongest correlation was observed between Guilt Repair and Shame-NSE ($r = .759$, $p < .01$) suggesting considerable overlap between guilt and shame experiences among Pakistani young adults. This is consistent with Tangney and Tracy (2012) who noted that guilt and shame share many

similarities as both are self-conscious emotions requiring self-reflection and self-evaluation. The strong inter-correlations among self-silencing subscales ($r = .520$ to $.684$, $p < .01$) further indicate that the four dimensions of self-silencing represent a coherent psychological construct in this sample.

The second hypothesis proposed that fear of negative evaluation would significantly predict guilt and shame proneness among Pakistani young adults. Results of linear regression analysis fully supported H_2 as BFNE proved to be a significant positive predictor of all guilt and shame subscales. Specifically, BFNE significantly predicted Shame-Negative Self-Evaluation ($\beta = .396$, $p < .001$) accounting for 15.7% of variance and Shame-Withdrawal ($\beta = .397$, $p < .001$) accounting for 15.8% of variance. BFNE also significantly predicted Guilt-Negative Behaviour Evaluation ($\beta = .295$, $p < .001$) accounting for 8.7% of variance and Guilt-Repair ($\beta = .268$, $p < .001$) accounting for 7.2% of variance.

It was also observed that shame subscales showed stronger prediction compared to guilt subscales. This differential pattern is theoretically meaningful and consistent with Self-Conscious Emotion Theory (Tangney & Dearing, 2002) which distinguishes shame as a global negative evaluation of the entire self-captured by the self-statement "I am bad" and more closely linked to social scrutiny and fear of exposure. Guilt, on the other hand, involves a behavior focused self-condemnation captured by the self-statement "I did something bad". Since FNE specifically involves anticipation of negative judgment by others, it is theoretically expected to be more strongly linked to shame which is inherently social in nature than to guilt which is more internally focused.

These findings are also consistent with Gilbert, Pehl, and Allan (1994) who found that shame and fear of negative evaluation have considerable overlap with submissive behavior implicated in both shame and depression. Furthermore, in the Pakistani cultural context the cultural emphasis on maintaining izzat (family honor) and avoiding sharam (shame) suggests that shame proneness is particularly elevated among Pakistani young adults who fear negative evaluation from family and community members (Nisbett, 2019). The present findings therefore extend existing Western literature by demonstrating that FNE is a predictor of both guilt and shame in a collectivist Pakistani cultural context.

From the perspective of Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) these findings suggest that individuals high in FNE experience discrepancies between their actual self and their ought self which is defined by external standards such as family honor, respect for elders, and avoidance of public shame in Pakistani culture. These actual-ought discrepancies produce agitation related emotions such as guilt and shame which is consistent with the present regression findings.

The third hypothesis proposed that self-silencing would mediate the relationship between fear of negative evaluation and guilt and shame proneness. Results of mediation analysis using PROCESS Macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2018) with 5000 bootstrap samples fully supported H_3 as self-silencing was found to be a full mediator in this relationship. The direct effect of fear of negative evaluation on guilt/shame proneness became non-significant after introducing self-silencing as a mediator ($B = .43$, $p = .078$) while the indirect effect remained significant (Effect = .79, 95% CI [.46, 1.17]) confirming full mediation.

This finding suggests that fear of negative evaluation does not directly cause guilt and shame but works completely through self-silencing. In other words, when Pakistani young adults fear being negatively evaluated by others they begin to suppress their authentic thoughts, feelings and opinions through self-silencing which subsequently leads to increased guilt and shame. This sequential process is precisely what the theoretical integration of Social Anxiety Theory (Leary, 1983), Silencing the Self Theory (Jack, 1991), Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987), and Self-Conscious Emotion Theory (Tangney & Dearing, 2002) predicted.

According to Social Anxiety Theory (Leary, 1983) individuals high in FNE adopt protective behaviors such as avoidance and suppression of self-expression when they anticipate negative

evaluation. Silencing the Self Theory (Jack, 1991) explains how this suppression takes the form of self-silencing particularly in collectivist cultures where authentic self-expression is sacrificed to maintain relationships and avoid disapproval. Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) then explains how chronic self-silencing creates an actual-ought self-discrepancy as the individual suppresses their authentic self while attempting to conform to external standards of behavior. This discrepancy finally produces the agitation-related emotions of guilt and shame as explained by Self-Conscious Emotion Theory (Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

This finding supports Uysal, Lin and Knee (2010) finding that those who hold high FNE, use self-suppression of genuine self-expression in social situations to avoid being criticized or rejected by other social actors. It also converges with Lynch (2018), who reported robust FNE–self-silencing associations across both Western and non-Western samples, and with Steenbergh, Runell, and Cheatham (2018), who found self-silencing to be a consistent correlate of shame proneness across both clinical and non-clinical populations. In Pakistani culture, Ali and Toner (2019) suggested that self-silencing is seen as an aspect of showing deference and respect towards elders and authority figures, therefore leading to an even stronger relation between FNE and self-silencing in the sample.

Given that self-silencing has independently been linked to poorer relational and psychological functioning (Harper & Welsh, 2007) and that self-criticism, a construct closely related to self-silencing has been tied to both FNE and negative self-conscious emotions among Pakistani samples (Maheen, Zohaib, & Khan, 2023), the present full-mediation finding situates self-silencing as the key transmission mechanism through which culturally salient fears translate into guilt and shame.

The finding that mediation is fully mediated is particularly noteworthy because it implies that self-silencing perfectly explains the relationship between FNE and guilt and shame in the Pakistani sample. This has clinical implications for the potential effectiveness of interventions targeted at modifying self-silencing behaviors in reducing guilt and shame among Pakistani young adults high in FNE. Techniques within Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (Beck, 1979) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy that focus on increasing awareness and modifying self-silencing behavior will be particularly helpful in this sample.

The fourth hypothesis proposed that there would be significant demographic differences in fear of negative evaluation, self-silencing, and guilt/shame proneness. However, results of independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences across any demographic variables including gender, age, family type, marital status, residential background, study year, living situation, birth order, and socioeconomic status, thus H_4 was not supported.

No significant gender differences were found in any of the study variables. This finding is contrary to some western studies suggesting that females tend to score higher on self-silencing (Jack & Dill, 1992) and FNE (Ishrat et al., Gilbert et al, 2024). It is, however, consistent with more recent work by Abrams, Hill, and Maxwell (2019) and Granski, Javdani, Sichel, and Rentko (2020), who found that self-silencing tendencies are not confined to women and are similarly reported by men seeking to preserve relationships and social standing. In the Pakistani context, both males and females may face similar social evaluation pressures rooted in collectivist cultural norms of maintaining family honor and avoiding social disapproval. This cultural homogeneity in social evaluation pressures may explain the absence of gender differences in the present sample.

No significant age differences were found across age groups of 18-20, 21-23, and 24-26 years. This may be attributed to the fact that all participants were within a relatively narrow developmental period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) characterized by similar identity exploration challenges and heightened sensitivity to social evaluation. The similar developmental pressures experienced across this age range may have produced comparable levels of FNE, self-silencing, and guilt/shame proneness.

No significant differences were found between nuclear and joint family participants suggesting that family structure does not significantly influence fear of negative evaluation, self-silencing, or guilt/shame proneness among Pakistani young adults. This finding suggests that regardless of whether young adults are raised in nuclear or joint family systems they experience similar levels of these psychological constructs which may reflect the pervasive influence of Pakistani collectivist cultural values across both family structures. No significant marital status differences were found which may be largely attributed to the highly unequal distribution of the sample with 95.7% of participants being single and only 4.3% being married. This significant imbalance severely limits the ability to detect meaningful differences between groups and therefore these findings should be interpreted with considerable caution. No significant differences were found across urban, rural, and town participants suggesting that residential background does not significantly influence the study variables. This may reflect the increasingly homogeneous social media and digital culture among Pakistani young adults across different residential settings which has reduced differences in social evaluation pressures between urban and rural contexts (Marium & Khurshid, 2020). A pattern also noted by Majeed, Riaz, and Saleem (2025), who found that FNE shapes online self-presentation similarly across diverse young-adult subgroups in Pakistan via social anxiety.

No significant socioeconomic differences were found across income groups. Although shame withdrawal approached significance ($F(3, 136) = 2.291$, $p = .081$) it did not reach the conventional threshold of $p < .05$. This trend suggests a possible relationship between SES and shame withdrawal that warrants further investigation in future research with larger samples. The absence of significant SES differences may reflect the relatively homogeneous socioeconomic composition of the university student sample.

No significant differences were found across birth order groups or living situation groups suggesting that neither birth order nor living arrangement significantly influences fear of negative evaluation, self-silencing, or guilt/shame proneness among Pakistani young adults. It should be noted however that the living situation variable had highly unequal group sizes with only one participant each in the with spouse and alone categories which severely limits the reliability of these comparisons.

The overall non-significant demographic findings suggest that fear of negative evaluation, self-silencing, and guilt/shame proneness are experienced universally among Pakistani young adults regardless of their demographic background. This may reflect the pervasive influence of Pakistani collectivist cultural values which create similar social evaluation pressures across different demographic groups. Alternatively, the relatively homogeneous nature of the university student sample may have limited the variability needed to detect demographic differences.

Daily Pakistani young adults are silencing themselves out of fear of being judged. Yet, this suppression has detrimental effects. It leads to feelings of guilt, shame, emptiness, and of lacking worth. The replies also clearly illustrated the function of self-silencing as the bridge between the experience of fear of judgment and subsequent painful emotions. Every response included an explanation for why they chose to silence themselves due to the fear of judgment and then the feeling of guilt and/shame they experienced as a result. The consistent, three-step progression in the replies effectively, and personally, brings the main thesis of this research to light.

Family and culture also emerged strongly. It was evident in many of the responses that self-silencing occurred specifically due to expectations from family members, elders' authority, and societal norms about maintaining harmony. Many participants expressed how they would forego their voice, desires, and sometimes even their mental well-being in order to conform to their home environment or to not disturb others. An observation consistent with Jack's (1999) foundational account of self-silencing as a

relational strategy learned within hierarchical family and cultural systems.

The differences between guilt and shame were also prominent within the responses. When the participants described guilt, they were distressed by a specific action they failed to perform, and wished they had done something differently. Participants experiencing shame, however, felt ashamed of themselves as individuals, and not just for one action in particular, echoing Lamia's (2017) conceptualization of shame as fundamentally about hiding the self rather than about a discrete behavior. This differentiation highlights the unique impact that these two emotions have on individuals, and suggests that they may require different forms of support, particularly given the limited mental health resources and high stigma surrounding psychological difficulties in Pakistan (Suhail & Chaudhry, 2020).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION:

All ethical guidelines were followed to ensure the protection of participants' rights and respect for their well-being. Participants were provided informed consent after being fully briefed about the study's purpose and procedures. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants' responses were strictly maintained.

LIMITATIONS:

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size of 140 participants was relatively small which may have limited the statistical power to detect significant demographic differences particularly for smaller subgroups. Secondly, the sample was limited to young adults primarily from university settings which restricts the generalizability of findings to other populations and age groups. Thirdly, the cross-sectional design of the study prevents causal conclusions from being drawn about the relationships among study variables. Fourth reliance on self-report measures may have introduced response bias as participants may have responded in socially desirable ways particularly given the culturally sensitive nature of shame and guilt in Pakistani culture. Fifth, the marginal internal consistency reliability of the BFNE scale (α = .60) may have affected the accuracy of measurement of fear of negative evaluation. Sixth, highly unequal group sizes in some demographic categories such as marital status with only 6 married participants and living situation with only 1 participant each in the with spouse and alone categories severely limited the reliability of group comparisons. Seventh, the mediation analysis examined only self-silencing as a mediator and other potential mediating variables such as social anxiety, self-esteem, and self-criticism were not examined.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the present findings and their limitations several directions for future research are recommended. Firstly, future studies should employ larger and more diverse samples including participants from clinical populations and different age groups to improve generalizability and statistical power. Secondly, longitudinal designs should be employed to establish causal relationships among fear of negative evaluation, self-silencing, and guilt/shame proneness. Third, future research should explore other potential mediators such as social anxiety, self-esteem, self-criticism, and attachment styles in the relationship between FNE and guilt/shame proneness. Fourth, cross cultural comparative studies examining these relationships in both collectivist and individualistic cultures would provide valuable insights into the cultural specificity of the present findings. Fifth, future studies should investigate the clinical implications of these findings by examining whether therapeutic interventions targeting self-silencing effectively reduce guilt and shame among individuals high in FNE. Sixth, future research should develop and validate culturally adapted measures of self-silencing and shame that capture the unique cultural expressions of these constructs in the Pakistani context.

CONCLUSION:

In this paper, we provide empirical evidence to support the theoretically derived mediation model suggesting that self-silencing acts as a full mediator between fear of negative evaluation and proneness to guilt and shame among Pakistani young adults. These were not fleeting or minor emotions; for several participants a singular event where silence was forced upon them seemed to leave a lasting impression-a memory that remained for months or even years. It is these relationships which the qualitative answers render real. They remind us that behind every score on a questionnaire is a real person carrying a real experience. Understanding those experiences more deeply is an important step toward finding ways to help. Fear of negative evaluation was found to be a significant positive predictor of all guilt and shame subscales with shame subscales showing stronger prediction than guilt subscales consistent with Self-Conscious Emotion Theory. Most importantly the full mediation finding demonstrates that fear of negative evaluation operates through self-silencing to produce guilt and shame rather than directly causing these emotions. This finding integrates Social Anxiety Theory, Silencing the Self Theory, Self-Discrepancy Theory, and Self-Conscious Emotion Theory into a coherent explanatory model. No significant demographic differences were found across any demographic variables suggesting that these psychological processes operate similarly across different demographic groups within Pakistani young adult culture. These findings contribute to the limited literature on FNE, self-silencing, and self-conscious emotions in collectivist Pakistani cultural contexts and have important implications for culturally sensitive mental health interventions targeting fear of negative evaluation and self-silencing behaviors among Pakistani young adults.

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