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Social Comparison as a Predictor of Shame Proneness Dimensions

ABSTRACT: *This study aimed to examine the role of social comparison in predicting two dimensions of a moral emotion, i.e. shame, among employees working in the private companies in the Greatcity of Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. The participants were 203 employees (99 males, 104 females, age average 28.75 years old, and standard deviation of the age 5.917 years), taken using purposive sampling technique. The measurement scales of this study were adapted and developed from Social Comparison Scale and Shame Proneness Scale. As many as 60 individuals participated in the measurement instrument's validity and reliability testing phase. Research design of this study is predictive correlational with simple linear regression as the statistical technique of data analysis. This study found that social comparison can predict Negative Self-Evaluation and Withdrawal Action Tendency, as the dimensions of shame, in negative ways. There are at least two theoretical contributions of this research to the literature of psychology of corruption. First, self-evaluation as a result of the general social comparison, which initially has no moral weight, can have serious implications on one's morality, especially through the negative self-evaluation dimension of shame moral emotion. Second, this study provides scientific support to the everyday wisdom suggesting that we should not compare ourselves with others so as not to fall into immorality tendencies, including corruption.*
KEY WORD: *Emotion, moral, shame, comparison, social, employees working, Jakarta city, self-evaluation, predict, and psychology of corruption.*

RESUME: *"Perbandingan Sosial sebagai Prediktor Dimensi-dimensi Kecenderungan Rasa Malu". Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji peran perbandingan sosial dalam memprediksikan dua dimensi dari sebuah emosi moral, yakni rasa malu, pada pegawai swasta di DKI (Daerah Khusus Ibukota) Jakarta, ibukota Indonesia. Partisipan penelitian ini adalah 203 orang karyawan swasta (99 laki-laki, 104 perempuan, rata-rata usia 28.75 tahun, dan simpangan baku usia 5.917 tahun), diambil dengan teknik penyampelan purposif. Alat ukur penelitian ini diadaptasi dan dikembangkan dari Skala Perbandingan Sosial dan Skala Kerentanan/Kecenderungan Rasa Malu. Sebanyak 60 individu berpartisipasi dalam fase uji validitas dan reliabilitas alat ukur. Desain penelitian ini adalah korelasional prediktif dengan teknik analisis data berupa regresi linear sederhana. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukan bahwa perbandingan sosial mampu memprediksi Evaluasi Diri Negatif dan Tendensi Mengundurkan/Menarik Diri, sebagai dimensi-dimensi rasa malu, dalam arah negatif. Terdapat sedikitnya dua kontribusi teoritis dari penelitian ini terhadap literatur psikologi korupsi. Pertama, penilaian diri sebagai hasil perbandingan seseorang dengan orang lain, yang aslinya tidak memiliki bobot moral, dapat memiliki implikasi serius terhadap moralitas seseorang, khususnya pada dimensi evaluasi diri negatif dari rasa malu. Kedua, penelitian ini memberikan dukungan ilmiah terhadap kebijaksanaan hidup sehari-hari yang meminta agar kita tidak membanding-bandingkan diri dengan orang lain supaya tidak jatuh dalam kecenderungan imoralitas, termasuk berbuat korupsi.*
KATA KUNCI: *Emosi, moral, malu, perbandingan, sosial, pegawai, kota Jakarta, penilaian diri, memprediksi, dan psikologi korupsi.*

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INTRODUCTION

Those who were caught by the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission, or KPK (*Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi*), can still relax, smile, and waved their hands in front of the media, even though they are tightly guarded by officers of the Commission, or while using the detainee uniform for corruptors (Herdiyansyah, 2013). This happens due to the shame of the perpetrators of corruption has weakened (Sudibyo, 2013).

The many cases of corruption and gratification are just a number of examples of the lack of shame. Jalaluddin Rakhmat, as cited in Yemima Lintang Khastiti (2013), said that Indonesia is not suceed in becoming a considerable nation, because it has lost its shame whereas shame is the main asset in controlling behavior and to prevent misbehavior (Khastiti, 2013).

What is the psychological mechanism that link corruptive behavior with shame? Non-ethical behavior, such as corruption, is thought to be predicted by the individual's moral emotion. This is because moral emotion plays an important role in preventing non-ethical behavior and anti-social behavior, such as fraud, theft, vandalism, and aggression, as well as encouraging individuals to act according to the accepted standard (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; and Giacalone & Promislo, 2012).

One of the expected moral emotions is shame. Shame is a negative emotion that appeared when a violation that is performed is known by the public. Shame appeared when an individual evaluate him/herself as a whole-self negatively. Indications of shame is marked by tendencies of NSE (Negative Self-Evaluation) and WIT (Withdrawal Action) after performing a personal moral violation/transgression. The authors suggested that if shame is continuously disregarded, along with time, it will begin to erode from the individuals and cause insensitiveness toward their own moral emotions; thus, they are more susceptible to further acts of corruption.

Low-level shame can be predicted by feeling of deprivation. Steven Stosny (2012) stated that people whose core vulnerability is fear of harm, isolation, or *deprivation,* will accept shame, even humiliation if they have to, in order to feel safe, secure, or connected, or at least, to avoid feeling isolated (Stosny, 2012). Sennet, as cited in R. Coleman Curtis (2009), stated also that psychological deprivation (a subjective feeling of neediness; or "relative deprivation") brought people toward shame. Gilligan, as cited also in R. Coleman Curtis (2009), stated that from her study of inmates who performed the crime, it can be concluded that shame is one factor that brought people toward acts of violence (Curtis, 2009).

If those three arguments are integrated, it can be said that feeling of deprivation can raise shame (in a non-moral connotation) in individuals. People then try to overcome that kind of shame by filling that insufficiency feeling with "dare to shame (having a moral meaning)", reducing their moral weight, hence that shame is blunted when conducting non-ethical acts.

The feeling of deprivation is hypothetized to be linked with the behavior of comparing oneself toward others (social comparison). The more individuals compare themselves with others, who are better than them, the more they feel deprived (Buunk *et al.*, 2003). This is because social comparison can create a sense of injustice that leads to deprivation (Panning, 1983). If it is related to prior proposition, it can be summarized that the feeling of deprivation can lower the shame in individuals when they perform non-ethical acts, because of the aim of equaling their comparative target, to increase their situation in life.

Based on this thought, it is not surprising that perpetrators of corruption model their senior and colleagues who lived a lavish life than themselves (Schwenke, 2010; and Tamba, 2013). With the available description of the phenomenon, this research's goals are to find out: firstly, whether the social comparison is able to predict Negative Self-Evaluation of employees in DKI (*Daerah Khusus Ibukota* or Special Capital District) Jakarta; and secondly, whether social comparison is able to predict Withdrawal Action Tendency of employees in DKI Jakarta.

SOCIAL COMPARISON AND SHAME

Every individual, both consciously and unconsciously, is continuously involved in social comparison. Every time, they are faced with information regarding other people, they will relate that information with themselves. Likewise, every time, individuals want to evaluate themselves, they tend to compare themselves with other people (Corcoran, Crusius & Mussweiler, 2011).

According to Festinger, as cited in Frederick X. Gibbons & Bram P. Buunk (1999), social comparison is the process of influencing one another as well as competitive behavior in social interaction that occurs due to the need to evaluate to assess oneself. Every person has the urge to assess their own opinion and ability by comparing them with other people's opinion and ability (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). By that comparison, they are able to know whether their opinion is correct or incorrect, as well as the amount of ability they possess (Sarwono, 2011).

In the theory, there are three motives underlying the social comparison process, namely: evaluation, improvement, and enhancement. In relation to self-evaluation motive, Robert A. Baron & Donn Byrne (2003) reckoned that human tends to question whether they are good or bad through self-evaluation, and the relevant main information source of that evaluation is other persons (Baron & Byrne, 2003).

In relation to self-improvement motive, based on the research conducted by Frederick X. Gibbons & Bram P. Buunk (1999), individuals will use social information to facilitate self-improvement. There is an impetus to perform unidirectional drive upward, i.e. change for the better. However, it only occurs in terms of differences in ability and not in terms of differences in opinion with the comparative target. Self-enhancement is defined as a comparison intended to raise self-esteem or self-concept (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999).

According to Katja Corcoran, Jan Crusius & Thomas Mussweiler (2011), self-enhancement is based on the need of maintaining a positive self-image and also leads to choose of lower comparison standard. The processes in social comparison are downward social comparison and upward social comparison (Corcoran, Crusius & Mussweiler, 2011). Downward social comparison occurs when individuals compare themselves with others, who are worse in certain attributes. Upward social comparison occurs when individuals compare themselves with others, who are better in certain attributes (Baron & Byrne, 2003).

Both upward and downward social comparison can raise various effects on the individual that did it. The effects are: firstly, sense of inferiority and dissatisfaction that occurs from upward social comparison (Gilbert, 2000); and secondly, sense of concern and threatened that occurs from downward social comparison due to their concern and intimidated feeling that they are like the comparison target or even will be like the target who has a lower status (Buunk & Gibbons, 2006).

Shame is one form of moral emotions. Moral emotions can motivate ethical behavior and encourage individuals to act according to standard both correct and incorrect (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Shame will appear if there is stress that occurs as an effect of moral violations that have been performed. Shame is an emotion that occurs from self-consciousness as a result of self-reflection and evaluation. Shame is also an impetus for self-regulation, according to Tracy & Robins, as cited in Taya R. Cohen *et al.* (2011).

According to Paul Gilbert (2000), shame is generally a painful feeling associated with the perception toward *personal attributes*, such as body shape and size, non-moral domain; *personal characteristics,* such as lazy, dishonest, or dull; and *involvement of a behavior,* such as theft and lying, have moral weight. Therefore, shame is a condition where individuals have negative views or feeling of their selves. Shame focused on appraisal of aspects that are believed that other people will reject or attack if their mistakes are known by the public. The focus of shame is the self (Gilbert, 2000).

Other definition of shame can be viewed
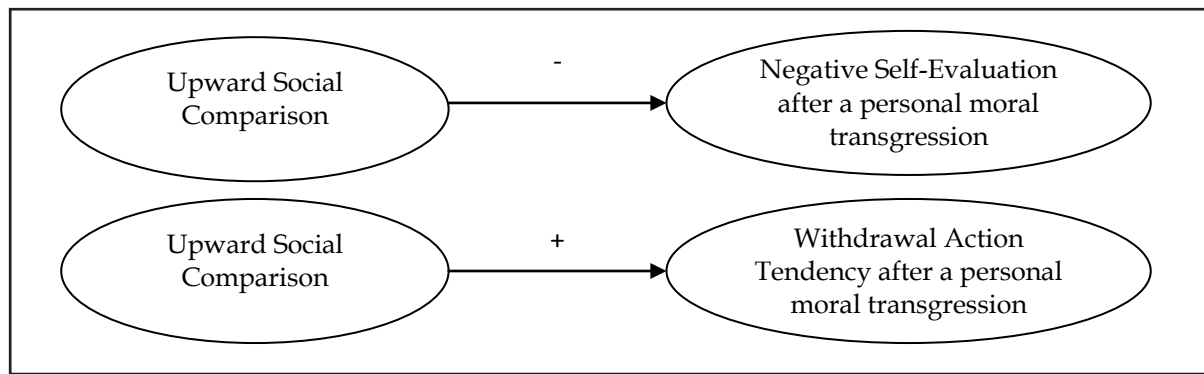
Notes: (-) negative predictive correlation
    (+) positive predictive correlation

Figure 1:
Hypothetical Model

based on two differentiations. *First,* it is the differentiation between self and behavior. Shame emerges when individuals create stable and global internal attributions regarding themselves thus referring to negative feelings of themselves globally. *Second*, viewed based on public and private distinctions. Shame is a negative feeling that appears when individuals perform a mistake, and their mistake is known by the general public (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

Taya R. Cohen *et al*. (2011) reckoned that there are two indicators of shame, namely: NSE (Negative Self-Evaluation) and WIT (Withdrawal Action). NSE is a negative feeling of individuals toward themselves following a moral breach (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). An example of the NSE is when a person broke the office printer and did not confess, and then he felt like an irresponsible person. In this case, the person's NSE is high (i.e. high shame). WIT is a retreating behavior that is done after the mistake has been performed which is known by the public, and a form of irresponsibility of the mistake that has been done (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). An example of the WIT is when an individual tries to avoid conversation about the broken printer. In this case, the person's withdrawal action is high (i.e. high WIT = low shame).

High or low shame does not occur instantly in individuals rather due to learning process obtained from the environment (Probyn, 2004; and

Lansky, 2005). Learning process from the environment can be in the form of life experience, such as social comparison. This suggestion is in line with the social-relational nature of shame (Bailey, 2011; and Abraham & Gunawan, 2014). The tendency of individuals to view their position among others, in term of ability and opinion, can influence the dynamics of shame within individuals after conducting non-ethical behaviors.

According to Festinger, as cited in Katja Corcoran, Jan Crusius & Thomas Mussweiler (2011), one of the motives in social comparison is self-improvement, especially when individuals perform upward social comparison. The urge drive of the individuals to continuously improve the self to be equal to their target can be continued ceaselessly and indefinitely (Corcoran, Crusius & Mussweiler, 2011). It is hypothesized that this situation can indirectly give rise to dissatisfaction or deprivation within one self; hence, individuals that often perform upward social comparison will disregard shame within them self after performing unethical behaviors. They will assume that shame is something that is less meaningful, because what is important for them is they can equal their upward target even if they have to perform unethical behavior.

Based on the rationales described above, the hypotheses of this research are: *First*,

social comparison is able to predict the NSE of employees in DKI (*Daerah Khusus Ibukota* or Special Capital District) Jakarta in a negative direction (H1), meaning the more a person performs upward social comparison then the lower the NSE. *Second*, social comparison is able to predict the WIT of employees in DKI Jakarta in a positive direction (H2), meaning that the more a person performs upward social comparison, then the WIT will be higher. See figure 1.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Participants and Design. The criteria of the participants of this study were as follows: *first*, about 18-55 years old of age both men and women, because based on Indonesian National Labor Law, Number 13, Year 2003, the minimum permissible age to work is 18 years old, whereas in Article 2 states that the normal retirement age for employee is 55 years old.[1] *Second*, have working experience in the private companies, such as manufacturing, mass media, banking, etc., in DKI (*Daerah Khusus Ibukota* or Special Capital District) Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, for a minimum of six months with the consideration that the employees have experience to adapt to their working environment and condition. Lastly, *third*, have a minimum of high school education background, with the purpose that the participant can understand well the language used in the questionnaire, thus the survey process can run smoothly. Participants are filtered using a purposive sampling technique according to the criteria above.

There are 203 participants with the following characteristics: (1) Range of 19-49 years old of age, mean of age 28.75 years old, standard deviation of age 5.917 years; (2) About 99 men and 104 women; (3) Latest education, Bachelor: 156 persons, Diploma: 33 persons, High school: 8 persons, and Master Degree: 6 persons; (4) Mean of working period 3.77 years; (5) Marriage status: 132 unmarried, 71 married; and (6)

Mean of income 3.72 million Rupiah per month, with a standard deviation of 1,369 million Rupiah. Pilot study on instrument try-out is conducted on 60 participants outside of the field study participants.

The design used in this study is quantitative, non-experimental, and predictive-correlational. The use of non-experimental design is due to the absences of experimental manipulation, subject randomization, and variables control. The predictor variable is social comparison, and the criterion variables are NSE (Negative Self-Evaluation) and WIT (Withdrawal Action).

Materials and Procedures. The criterion variables in this study are two dimensions of shame moral emotion, i.e. NSE (Negative Self-Evaluation) and WIT (Withdrawal Action), which are defined operationally as scores which result from the Shame Proneness Scale (part of GASP Scale) constructed by Taya R. Cohen *et al*. (2011). The instruction of this measuring tool is:

> *In this questionnaire, you will read about situations that people are likely to encounter in day-to-day life, followed by common reactions to those situations. As you read each scenario, try to imagine yourself in that situation. Then, indicate the likelihood that you would react in the way described.*

The response options of this measuring scale are: (1) Very unlikely, (2) Unlikely, (3) Slightly unlikely, (4) About 50% likely, (5) Slightly likely, (6) Likely, and (7) Very likely.

Examples of the NSE (Negative Self-Evaluation) items are as follows:

> (1) *You tear several sheets of the company's book and keep it for yourself. Your supervisor spotted you and announced it to other employees. How likely is the possibility that this situation will make you feel like a bad person?*

> (2) *You successfully exaggerate your damages in a lawsuit. Several months later, you are found lying and accused of perjury. Months later, your lies are discovered and you are charged with perjury. What is the likelihood that you would think you are a despicable human being?*

> (3) *You lie to people, but they never find out about it. What is the likelihood that you would feel terrible about the lies you told?*

(4) *You are forced to pretend that you are sick as a reason, because of your inability to complete a lot of work in a short period. How likely will you see yourself as incompetent?*

Examples of the WIT (Withdrawal Action) items are as follows:

(1) *After making a big mistake on an important project at work, in which people were depending on you, your boss criticizes you in front of your coworkers. What is the likelihood that you would feign sickness and leave work?*

(2) *A friend tells you that you boast a great deal. What is the likelihood that you would stop spending time with that friend?*

(3) *You took some office equipment home for your personal use, and your supervisor found out about it. How likely will this incident make you quit from your job?*

(4) *Your supervisor says that based on the data that he obtained, you use the majority of your time to establish your own reputation and not for the benefit of the team. How likely are you from resigning from the company?*

Reliability and validity testing showed an internal consistency index (Cronbach's Alpha) of NSE (Negative Self-Evaluation) and WIT (Withdrawal Action) dimension consecutively 0.745 and 0.660. Corrected item-total correlations (r_{it}) of NSE, and WIT's items consecutively ranged from 0.329 to 0.486 and 0.278 to 0.570. This indicated that instrument is reliable ($a \geq 0.600$) and items of the instrument are valid ($r_{it} \geq 0.250$).

The predictor in this study is social comparison, which is defined as the level of how often individuals compare themselves with other people, both upward and downward. In this study, the direction and frequency of operational social comparison is the score resulting from social comparison scale constructed by Sabine A. Geurts, Bram P. Buunk & Wilmar B. Schaufeli (1994); and which is then developed by Nicolas Michinov (2005).

The scale consists of 11 aspects of the working environment to see the direction and frequency in performing social comparison. The instruction of the measuring tool:

Below are 11 conditions representing aspects of a job. You are asked to answer questions of each aspect. As for the question "How often?", the meaning of this question is how often you compare yourself to other people in that aspect.

The eleven aspects are: (1) *Working environment*, e.g. peaceful, noisy, hot, smelly; (2) *Physical safety*, e.g. protection from hazardous machine; (3) *Autonomy and freedom at work*; (4) *Work variation*; (5) *Participation in decision making*; (6) *Rewards*, i.e. pay or other compensation; (7) *Promotion prospect*; (8) *Social condition*, i.e. leisure and training opportunities; (9) *Social situation*, i.e. relation with colleague and direct supervisor; (10) *Supervision/control*, i.e. the way a person is treated by the supervisor; and (11) *General working situation*.

The response options are: (1) "I *always* compare myself with other people who are *worse* in this aspect"; (2) "I *often* compare myself with other people who are *worse* than me in this aspect"; (3) "I *somewhat* frequently compare myself with other people who are *worse* than me in this aspect"; (4) "I *sometimes* compare myself with other people who are *worse* or better than me in this aspect"; (5) "I *somewhat* frequently compare myself with other who are *better* than me in this aspect"; (6) "I *often* compare myself with other people who are *better* than me in this aspect"; and (7) "I *always* compare myself with other people who are *better* than me in this aspect".

Reliability and validity testing showed an internal consistency index (Cronbach's Alpha) of Social Comparison scale 0.945 Corrected item-total correlations (r_{it}) of the items ranged from 0.678 to 0.845. This indicated that the instrument is reliable ($a \geq 0.600$) and items of the instrument are valid ($r_{it} \geq 0.250$).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Simple linear regression analysis about the predictive relation of social comparison with NSE (Negative Self-Evaluation) shows a result of $F(1, 201) = 5.090$, $p < 0.05$; $R^2 = 0.025$. See table 1.

The more frequent a person does upward social comparison, the lower his/her NSE when he/she performs unethical behavior (ß = -0.158, p < 0.05). H1 is supported by empirical data.

Table 1:
Simple Linear Regression Predicting *Negative Self-Evaluation*/NSE (*n* = 203)

Predictor Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*ß*	*p*
Social comparison	-0.133	0.059	-0.158	0.025

Note: R^2 = 0.025, *p* < 0.05; *SE* = standard error.

Table 2:
Simple Linear Regression Predicting *Withdrawal Action Tendency*/WIT (*n* = 203)

Predictor Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*ß*	*p*
Social comparison	-0.169	0.048	-0.241	0.001

Note: R^2 = 0.058, *p* < 0.01; *SE* = standard error.

Simple linear regression analysis regarding predictive relation of social comparison with WIT (Withdrawal Action) shows a result of $F_{(1, 201)}$ = 12.300, *p* < 0.01; R^2 = 0.058. See table 2.

The more frequent an individual performs upward social comparison, then the lower his/her WIT if he/she performs unethical behavior (ß = -0.241, p < 0.01). H2 is not supported by empirical data.

This study found that the more frequent a person does upward social comparison, the lower his/her NSE (Negative Self-Evaluation) when he/she performs unethical behavior. According to Bram P. Buunk *et al*. (2003), individuals that often perform upward social comparison (compare themselves with other people who are better than them) will be accompanied with increase sense of deprivation (Buunk *et al*., 2003).

That dissatisfaction can lower the shame of individuals when they perform unethical behavior, where according to Taya R. Cohen *et al*. (2011), the lack of shame is marked by the low NSE in individuals after performing unethical behavior. In addition, the dissatisfaction and deprivation can encourage a person to perform unethical behavior (Sharma *et al*., 2013). Continuous dissatisfaction and followed by repeated unethical behavior can weaken the shame proneness that a person has.

Indeed, in social comparison, there is a self-evaluation aspect, but there is no moral weight, because self-evaluation in social comparison is only to find out the position of the individuals among other people who are the target of comparison. However, the original contribution of this study is the finding that the self-evaluation in the *non-moral* domain can actually influence (or experience generalization into) the *moral* domain (the NSE dimension of shame moral emotion).

This study also found that the more frequent an individual performs upward social comparison, then the lower his/her WIT (Withdrawal Action) if he/she does unethical behavior. The authors offer explanation as follows: individuals with the tendency of performing upward social comparison will have the desire to emulate their target of comparison, and to be able to emulate their target individuals need resources in the form of salary, relations, or office facilities. If the individuals perform withdrawal action, they will not get the resources and their desire of emulating their comparison target will be difficult to achieve.

To strengthen the explanation, it can be described by using the example of the Hajj fund corruption case that is performed by an Indonesian Minister in 2013. The President of the Republic of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, at that time asked the Minister to resign from his position (Malau, 2014), which is regarded as a form of accountability to the people of Indonesia concerning the corruption that he did.

The case example illustrates the meaning for Indonesian people regarding resignation (withdrawal action) that should actually

be done as a form of responsibility. It is different from the meaning of resignation or withdrawal action by Taya R. Cohen *et al*. (2011) in Western people, i.e. most of all Taya R. Cohen *et al*. study samples, which is interpreted as a form of "escaping, hiding, not wanting to deal with, irresponsible" (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

Furthermore, the overall findings of this study actually provide empirical support for the following adage, which in essence means, according to Bauman, "*Don't compare yourself with others*", e.g.:

> *We live in a world of communication – everyone gets information about everyone else. There is universal comparison and you don't just compare yourself with the people next door, you compare yourself to people all over the world and with what is being presented as the decent, proper and dignified life. It's the crime of humiliation* (cited in Quote, 2014).

Furthermore, Canfield also stated as follows:

> *I generally find that comparison is the fast track to unhappiness. No one ever compares themselves to someone else and comes out even. Nine times out of ten, we compare ourselves to people who are somehow better than us and end up feeling more inadequate* (cited in Quote, 2014).

Social comparison has even been understood in everyday life as "the root of all evil" (*cf* Noch, 2011; Bailey, 2013; and Forged, 2014), but only just now, through this study, we have found the scientific foundations.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that social comparison is able to predict shame in a negative direction. The more individuals compare themselves with others who are better, higher, more qualified, the lower their shame moral emotion. This study can be expanded in future researches by including moderator variables between social comparison and shame, such as effort level.

The positive or negative effect resulting from upward social comparison on individuals that have high social comparison orientation can depend on the effort level in emulating the comparison target. If the upward social comparison is done simultaneously with a strong effort, then, the resulting effect can be positive (motivational). However, if upward social comparison is done without a strong effort (for example, through shortcuts), then, it will create a negative effect, including spurring unethical behavior through low shame. However, those propositions require further empirical testing.[2]

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[2]*Statement:* We hereby certify that this paper is our own work. So, it is not product of plagiarism, due acknowledgment is made in the text for materials written by other authors and researchers. We also declare that this paper has not been submitted and reviewed by other publishers as well as not been published by other scholarly journals.

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KPK Building in Indonesia
(Source: http://1000warnaindonesia.blogspot.co.id, 10/11/2015)

Those who were caught by the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission, or KPK (*Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi*), can still relax, smile, and waved their hands in front of the media, even though they are tightly guarded by officers of the Commission, or while using the detainee uniform for corruptors. This happens due to the shame of the perpetrators of corruption has weakened.