



# Posttraumatic stress symptom clusters predict components of shame in a veteran population

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## Introduction

- Shame is an emotion that involves the negative evaluation of the self and is accompanied by feelings of worthlessness and avoidant behaviors (Leskela et al., 2002).
- Three components of shame have been identified: characterological shame, behavioral shame, and bodily shame (Andrews et al., 2002).
- The relationship between shame and trauma is well documented (Saraiya & Lopez-Castro, 2016).
- Research supports the role of shame in the development and maintenance of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Taylor, 2015; Harman & Lee, 2010).
- Less research has been conducted on how specific PTSD symptoms predict feelings of shame.

## Aim

- Examine the relationship between PTSD symptom clusters and types of shame experienced in a residential, treatment-seeking sample of combat veterans.

## Methods

- This study was approved by the IRB as quality improvement.
- 115 combat veterans (99% male) in residential treatment for PTSD at the Coatesville VA completed a battery of self-report measures at admission.

### Measures:

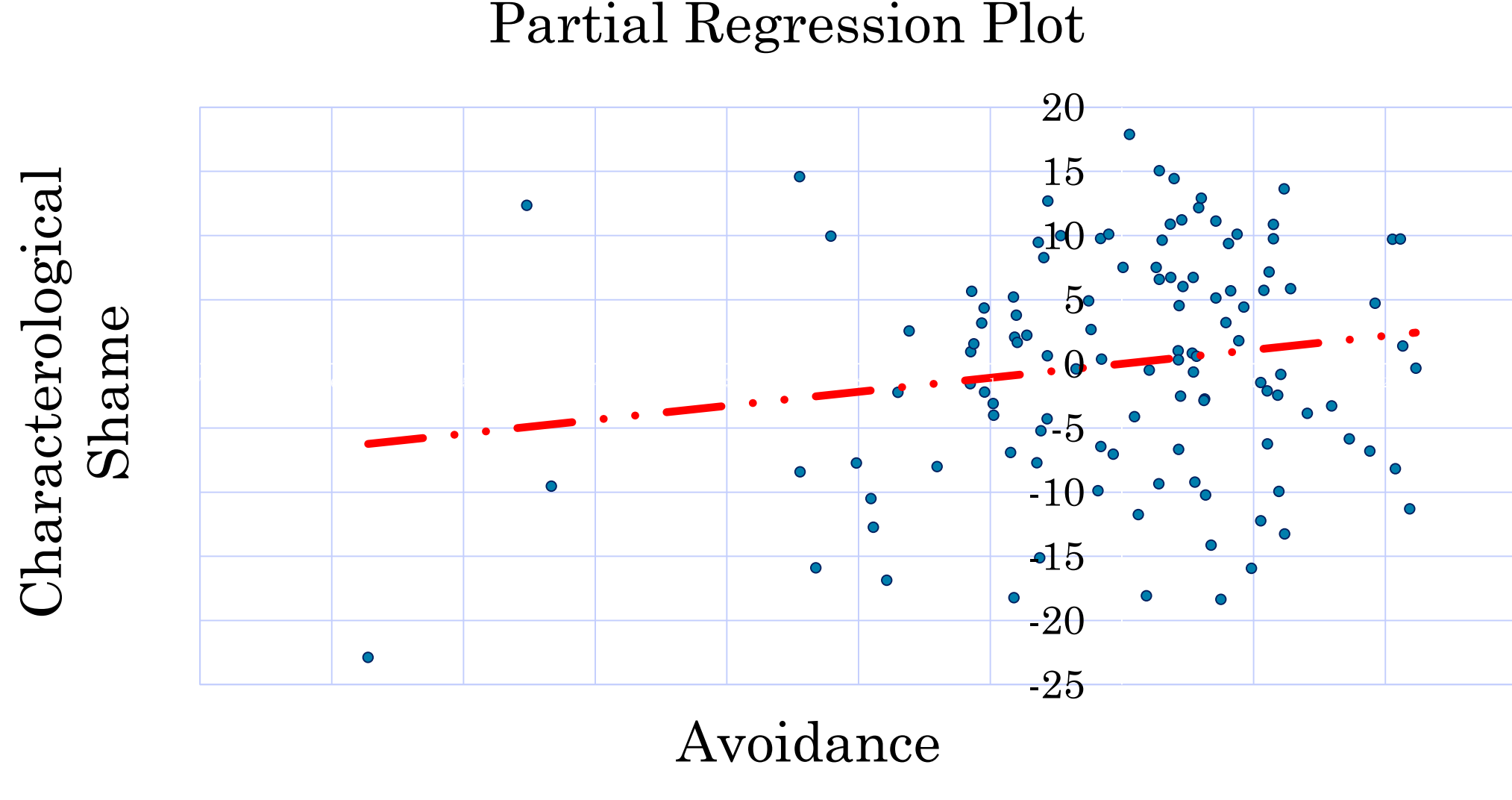
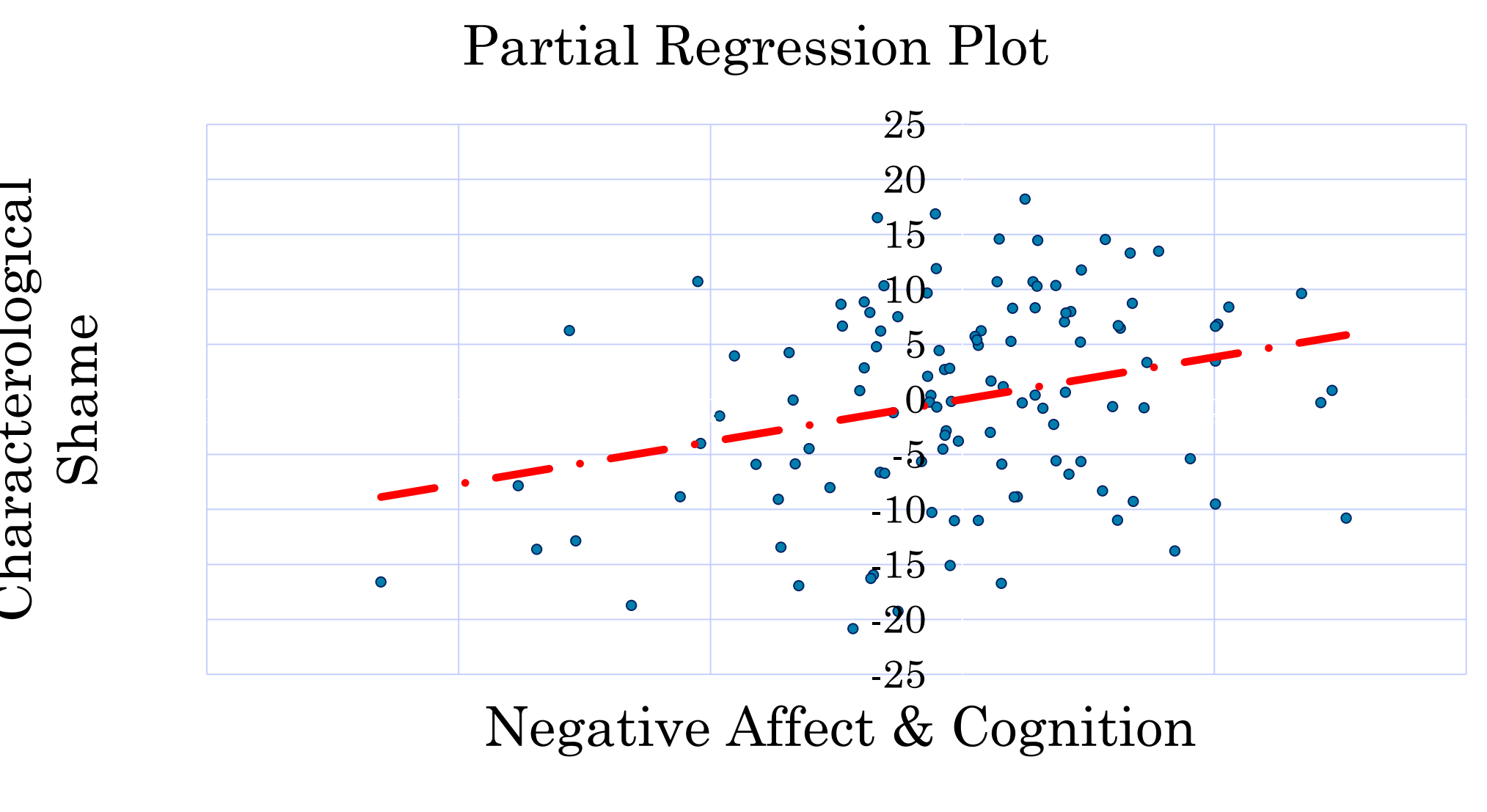
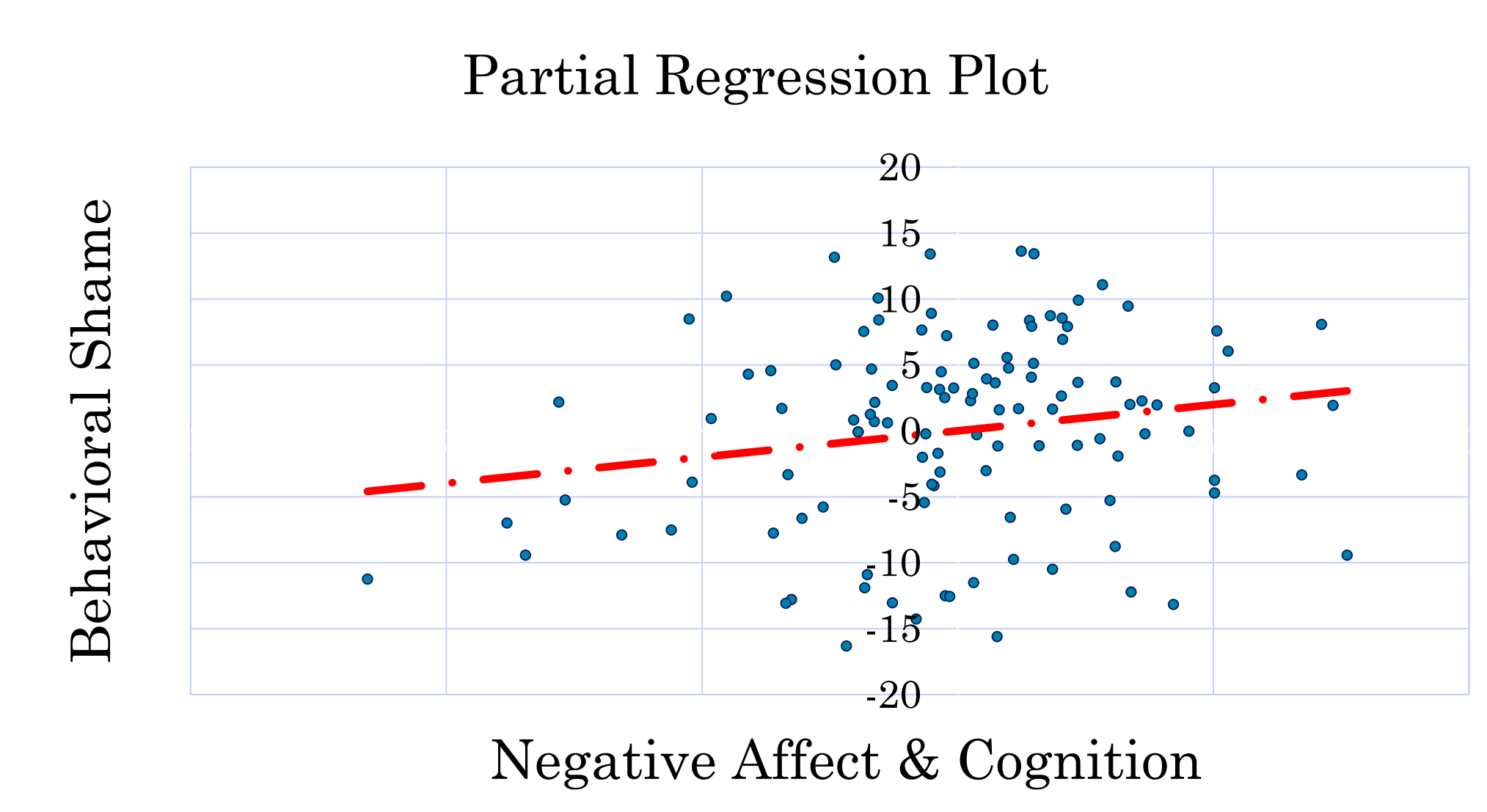
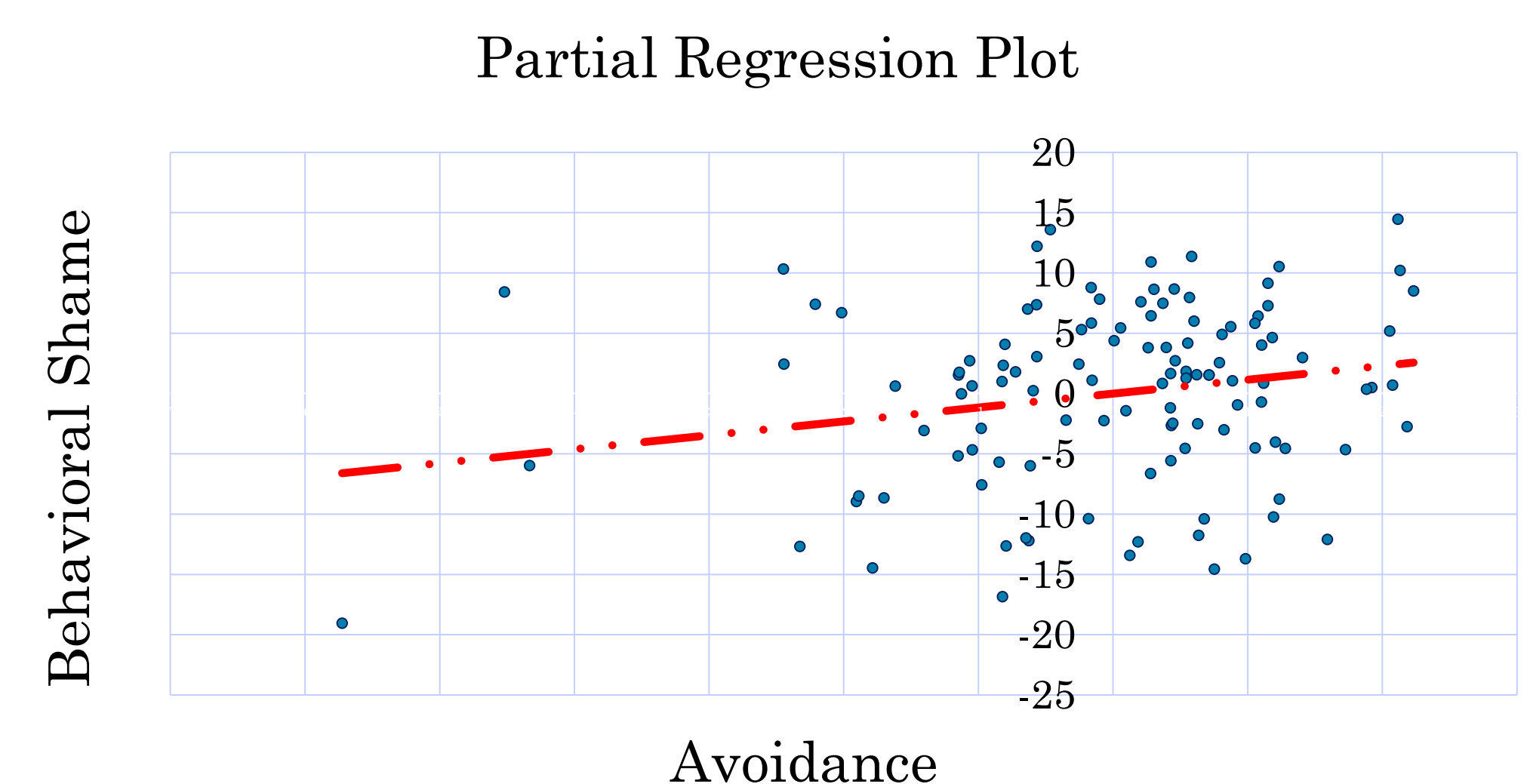
- PTSD: The Posttraumatic Stress Checklist for the DSM-V [PCL- 5] (Blevins et al., 2015)
- Shame: The Experiences of Shame Scale [ESS] (Andrews et al., 2002)

### Demographics (N = 115):

- Average Age: 41.6 years
- Ethnicity: White 69%; Black 15%; Hispanic 7%; Asian 3%; Native American 1%; Other 5%
- Branch of Military: Army 56%; Marines 21%; Navy 7%; National Guard 13%; Air Force 3%

## Results

- Both the models predicting to Characterological [ $F(4, 110) = 9.13, p < .01, r^2 = .25$ ] and Behavioral [ $F(4, 110) = 6.53, p < .01, r^2 = .19$ ] shame were significant.
- Negative alterations in mood and cognition significantly predicted characterological shame (see Table 1).
- Negative alterations in mood and cognition and avoidance significantly predicted behavioral shame (see table 1)



**Table 1.** Linear Regressions of PTSD Symptom Cluster Predicting to Components of Shame.

Variable	Characterological Shame			Behavioral Shame		
	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$
Avoidance	1.09	0.62	.17 <sup>a</sup>	1.15	0.51	.23*
Negative Mood/Cog.	0.77	0.25	.36**	0.40	0.20	.24*
Hyperarousal	0.42	0.3	0.16	0.41	0.24	.20 <sup>a</sup>
Re-experiencing	-0.28	0.26	-0.11	-0.31	0.21	-0.15

Note: <sup>a</sup>  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

## Discussion

- Our findings suggest that veterans experiencing greater negative thoughts and moods are reporting more shame about themselves as a person.
- Additionally, veterans endorsing more negative thoughts and moods and avoidance reported more shame regarding their behavior.
- These findings align with current front-line treatments for PTSD that address extreme cognitions or appraisals of the trauma, oneself, or others (Resick, Monson, & Chard, 2016) or address avoidant thoughts or behaviors that are causing distress (Foa, Hembree, & Rothbaum, 2007).
- These results may reflect a self-perpetuating cycle in which PTSD symptoms and shame exacerbate each other. For example, an individual may respond with avoidance to a trauma reminder, which may generate shame related to that behavior. This then leads to more avoidance as a means to assuage those feelings of shame.

## References

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**Acknowledgements & Disclaimer:** The contents of this report do not represent the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States Government. For more information, please email [Amanda.Vaught@va.gov](mailto:Amanda.Vaught@va.gov)