ABSTRACT

SHAME AND GUILT: PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICAN AND CHINESE COLLEGE STUDENTS

by Melissa Henkin

This study explored the similarities and differences between the cross-cultural experiences of shame and guilt in American and Chinese cultures. The manners in which shame and guilt are experienced by American and Chinese college students were analyzed within the framework of categorized and coded themes and categories. The themes and categories were created using an open coding procedure (Urquhart, 2000), and were utilized in a cross-cultural comparison of shame and guilt. Findings suggest shame is more closely related to the Chinese culture, and guilt is more closely related to the American culture. Results also indicate that similar scenarios experienced in different cultures can evoke dissimilar emotional responses. Limitations and implications of this study, as well as directions for future research are discussed.
SHAME AND GUILT:
PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICAN AND CHINESE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Introduction

The manner in which an individual defines shame and guilt affects the manner in which that individual experiences the emotion (Ha, 1995; Okano, 1994). The definition an individual assigns to the emotions of shame and guilt are influenced by the individual’s culture (Okano, 1994). This research focused on the experiences of shame and guilt felt by American and Chinese college students, and how these emotions are culturally constructed in American and Chinese societies.

The emotions of shame and guilt are similar in several ways, but are also phenomenologically different (Buss, 2001; Lewis, 1992; Lewis, 1971; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Morrison, 1996; Niedenthal, Tangney & Gavanski, 1994; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Wicker, Payne & Morgan, 1983). Differences between these two emotions have been identified within the constructs of severity, sense of control, and reactions to the emotion (Buss, 2001; Lewis, 1992, 1993; Lewis, 1971; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Niedenthal et al., 1994; Wicker et al., 1983).

Understanding the similarities and differences between the emotions of shame and guilt is an essential first step in the process of exploring these emotions cross-culturally (Shaver, Wu & Schwartz, 1992). There has been much discussion on the social construction of shame and guilt within American and Asian cultures (Chu, 1972; Fung, 1994; Ha, 1995; Marsella, Murray & Golden, 1974; Okano, 1994; Russel & Yik, 1996; Wilson, 1973). While such a discussion is significant for understanding how individuals from these cultures experience the emotions of shame and guilt, it is also necessary to explore the experiences that will elicit these emotions and the reactions they evoke (Russel & Yik, 1996; Tangney, 1990).

The objectives of this study were to explore culturally constructed experiences of shame and guilt, and scenarios that elicit these emotions in order to better understand how they are cross-culturally perceived. Based on participants’ reported scenarios, the feelings of shame and guilt experienced by American and Chinese college students were compared for cultural differences and similarities. Recognizing the importance of cultural sensitivity has applications for school psychologists when working with culturally diverse populations, specifically Chinese or Chinese-American populations who are living within the American culture. It is essential that individuals working and interacting with culturally diverse populations do not project their own cultural standards and expectations onto those from culturally different backgrounds, and that
these individuals recognize the importance of perception and how it can influence an individual’s reaction to an experience.
Literature Review

Recently there has been a growing interest in the study of the emotions shame and guilt (Scheff, 1995). Research has also focused on emotional development, individual differences in the expression of emotions, and the impact of emotions on social behavior (Lewis, 1992). In addition, there has been an interest in studying these emotions within a cross-cultural context (Ha, 1995; Hong & Chiu, 1992; Okano, 1994; Shaver et al., 1992). There exists a distinct juxtaposition of definitions and experiences of shame and guilt within Western and Asian cultures (Okano, 1994). The manner in which a culture or society defines shame and guilt determines to a large degree, the manner in which individuals within that particular culture will experience these emotions (Ha, 1995).

Before comparing shame and guilt cross-culturally, these two emotions should be compared to each other in order to identify their similarities and differences (Shaver et al., 1992). A distinct similarity between shame and guilt is that both involve negative self-evaluation (Niedenthal et al., 1994). Tangney, Marschal, Rosenberg, Barlow, and Wagner (1994) suggested that both shame and guilt involve moral transgressions. Buss (2001) discussed shame and guilt being similar due to the fact that they both involve negative self-labeling, sadness, and lowered self-esteem.

Shaver et al. (1992) indicated that research evidence for differences in emotion are harder to find than similarities, however, differences between these emotions are important to identify in order to compare them. One such difference between shame and guilt is that in shame, the focus is on the self, and in guilt the focus is on the self’s actions and behaviors (Lewis, 1992, 1993; Lewis, 1971; Niedenthal et al., 1994).

Another difference between shame and guilt deals with the severity of the emotions. Shame is considered a more severe and devastating emotion than guilt (Lewis, 1971). It was also suggested that shame is more incapacitating than guilt, and leaves the individual who experiences shame with less control of their emotions than one would have when experiencing guilt (Lewis, 1971; Wicker et al., 1983). With shame, the individual often feels the need to hide or escape, and with guilt the individual often wishes to engage in some sort of corrective action (Buss, 2001; Lewis, 1992, 1993; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984).
Common reactions to guilt include atoning or remedying, concern for others, behaving better, and negative self-reactions (Tangney, 1990). Some common reactions to shame include embarrassment, escape or avoidance, and berating oneself (Tangney, 1990). Understanding the similarities and differences between, and reactions to shame and guilt will help facilitate a cross-cultural comparison of these two emotions (Shaver et al., 1992).

**Guilt**

Except in this section, shame will be discussed before guilt. Guilt is presented first here because understanding guilt facilitates an understanding of, and comparison to shame. Guilt has been defined as “the emotional feeling associated with the realization that one has violated an important social, moral, or ethical regulation” (Chaplin, 1968). Guilt has also been defined as, “the state of one who has committed an offense especially consciously: feelings of culpability especially for imagined offenses or from a sense of inadequacy” (Merriam-Webster on-line http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary). Lewis (1992) explained that guilt “is produced when individuals evaluate their behavior as failure but focus on the specific features of the self or on the self’s action that led to the failure,” (p.76). Within this explanation, it is proposed that the self is differentiated from the object (Lewis, 1992). With guilt there is a focus on the self’s actions and behavior that could repair the failure, by taking corrective action (Lewis, 1992, 1993; Tangney, 1990).

Tangney and Dearing (2002) explained that those who feel guilt are more able to empathize with others, accept responsibility for negative events, and are less prone to anger. Guilt is explained as a private emotion that is characterized by “self-generated pangs of conscience” (Buss, 2001; Tangney & Dearing, 2002, p.14). Erikson (1950) defined guilt as “a sense of badness to be had all by oneself when nobody watches and everything is quiet-except the voice of the super-ego” (p.253).

Guilt is also characterized by regret and a desire to undo the deed that resulted in the emotion of guilt (Buss, 2001; Lewis, 1971; Lewis, 1993; Niedenthal et al., 1994). Phenomenologically, guilt is associated with behavior inconsistent with internalized standards, in which the self is seen as bad and justifiably liable to penalty but still able to engage in a reparative action (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Lynd, 1961; Tangney, 1990; Wicker et al., 1983).
Shame

While guilt is focused on the behavior of an individual who may think, “I did that horrible thing,” shame is an emotion focused on the self in which the individual may think, “I did that horrible thing” (Lewis, 1971, p.18). Shame has been defined as, “an emotion characterized by feelings of guilt, embarrassment, and avoidance” (Chaplin, 1968). Shame has been defined in the Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary (http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary) as “a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety: the susceptibility to such emotion: a condition of humiliating disgrace or disrepute.” Shame has also been defined as “the feeling we have when we evaluate our actions, feelings, or behavior, and conclude that we have done wrong” and a feeling that “generates a wish to hide, to disappear, or even to die” (Lewis, 1992, p.2).

Individuals who experience shame often blame the self for negative events, are prone to anger, and are less empathetic with others (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Erikson (1950) explained “shame supposes that one is completely exposed and conscious of being looked at; in a word, self-conscious. One is visible and not ready to be visible” (p.252). Lewis (1993) explained that in shame, the focus is on the global self, and that there is an inherent postural difference between shame and guilt, suggesting that with shame, the individual is metaphorically hunched over and has the need to hide or disappear (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984).

Morrison (1996) defined shame as “that feeling when we are convinced that there is something about ourselves that is wrong, inferior, flawed, weak, or dirty . . . a feeling of loathing against ourselves, a hateful vision of ourselves through our own eyes” (p.13). Although both shame and guilt involve negative self-evaluation, shame causes the individual to see the self as a bad person, who is small and worthless to the self and others (Buss, 2001; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Niedenthal et al., 1994; Tangney, 1990).

Shame was also described as a feeling experienced when an individual feels that he or she has not lived up to one’s own idea of excellence, and is painfully self-aware of being in a situation criticized by others (Lynd, 1961; Wicker et al., 1983). Although it has been theorized that guilt is a private emotion, and shame is a more public emotion in terms of how it is experienced (Buss, 2001; Lynd, 1961; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Wicker et al., 1983), a study based on autobiographical accounts of these emotions found that both shame and guilt were experienced in the presence of others (Tangney et al., 1994).
The public versus private nature of shame and guilt is one researched difference between these two emotions (Buss, 2001; Lynd, 1961; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Wicker et al., 1983). Another difference between shame and guilt that has been researched is the dichotomy of focus on self versus behavior in shame and guilt respectively (Lewis, 1992, 1993; Lewis, 1971; Niedenthal et al., 1994). A study conducted by Niedenthal et al. (1994) supported the differentiation of shame and guilt in regard to their distinct relationships with the constructs of the self and behavior. It has been theorized that guilt is an emotion associated with behavior that has occurred, and that shame is more focused on the self, or the individual experiencing shame (Lewis, 1971). Niedenthal et al. (1994) used the construct of counterfactual thinking, which enables an individual to reflect on how past events might have otherwise unfolded if some aspect of the situation or their behavior had been different.

In the above study, a sample of college students were given scenarios to read and then were asked to complete counterfactual statements directed at mutating or altering the self or the behavior in order to repair the scenario (Niedenthal et al., 1994). The students were then asked to rate how much shame or guilt they would experience with each scenario on a scale from 1 to 7 (Niedenthal et al., 1994). The researchers hypothesized that counterfactual self-alternatives would be associated with shame experiences, and counterfactual mutations of actions or behavior would be associated with guilt (Niedenthal et al., 1994). The hypothesis was supported and the researchers concluded that shame was associated with a focus on the self and guilt was associated with a focus on the behavior (Niedenthal et al., 1994).

*Shame and guilt in Western and Asian cultures*

Shaver et al. (1992) explained that a definition of emotion needs to be established in order to compare emotions cross-culturally. Frijda (1986) explained emotions as changes in action readiness, which have control precedence (thus interrupting or competing with alternative mental and behavioral activities), and are changes caused by appraising events as relevant to concerns (thus giving rise to positive or negative feelings). The question then becomes whether or not there are universal patterns of appraisal regarding events that produce emotions (Shaver et al., 1992). Cultural influences such as specialized emotion concepts, heavy focus on certain emotions, enhancement, distortion, or suppression of expression of certain emotions, may result in cross-cultural variation in representation of emotion (Shaver et al., 1992).
Shame and guilt are described as emotions that result from discrepancies between an individual’s moral standards and the manner in which he or she actually behaves (Tangney, Niedenthal, Covert & Barlow, 1998). Within Western and Asian cultures, shame and guilt are allocated different meanings. Benedict (1946) speculated that individuals in Western cultures are socialized to feel guilt more often than shame, as a result of the more individualized context within which guilt is experienced. The individualized component of guilt coincides with the construction of Western cultures as individualist and self-absorbed (Scheff, 1995).

Contrastingly, individuals in Asian cultures are believed to be more prone to experiencing shame, which has strong social implications and corresponds to the cultural norms that Asian cultures maintain with respect to social fear of inadequacy (Ha, 1995; Scheff, 1995). In Asian cultures, a certain degree of shame is in essence, expected in order to uphold levels of respect for others, and is also considered a form of social control (Ha, 1995; Marsella et al., 1974; Scheff, 1995).

The paradigms of definition and function that a culture or society assigns to shame and guilt, establish the manner in which an individual experiences these emotions within his or her culture or society (Ha, 1995; Okano, 1994). Russel and Yik (1996) explained that, “cultural differences in the antecedents of emotion might [therefore] suggest differences in how events are construed, and differences in how an event is construed would suggest differences in the emotional reaction to the event” (p.167). The most salient cultural influence that may affect appraisal behaviors and how individuals experience shame and guilt within the context of his or her culture is socialization (Lynd, 1961; Wilson, 1973). In this context, socialization refers to how individuals measure themselves against an ideal standard (Lewis, 1992; Wilson, 1973).

In the socialization of Chinese individuals there is an emphasis placed on learning and internalizing standards of appropriate behavior, and a failure to behave appropriately will result in a loss of positive self-identification and a loss of face (i.e. one’s positive self-identity) (Wilson, 1973). In Chinese culture it is assumed there will be harmony between the ideal self and actual behavior and thought (Wilson, 1973). Furthermore, socialization of Chinese children emphasizes the threat of ostracism by group members, family members, schoolmates, or other citizens in society (Wilson, 1973).

Chinese culture is considered a shame culture, and the threat of ostracism for violating societal norms is ingrained in the socialization of Chinese children (Chu, 1972; Wilson, 1973).
The Chinese culture therefore fosters the societal value of conformity to balance this threat (Chu, 1972; Wilson, 1973). The concept of conformity was explored in a study that selected two samples of 14-year-olds, one consisting of Caucasian American children and the other consisting of Chinese children (Wilson, 1973). Both samples were shown pictures of two groups of people (Wilson, 1973). The first group was dressed in the same clothing, and the second group was dressed in different clothing (Wilson, 1973). The two samples of children were asked which group of individuals they would dress like, and in concurrence with the notion that Chinese children are socialized to value conformity and American children are socialized to value individualism, 65% of the American children chose the group of people dressed differently and 7% of the Chinese children chose the differently dressed group (Wilson, 1973).

In Chinese culture there is a continuum of levels of shame ranging from the equivalent of very mild embarrassment to utter mortification (Wilson, 1973). The emotion of shame is hypercognized in Chinese languages relative to English, which means there are a large number of related concepts for the emotion of shame in the Chinese culture (Russel & Yik, 1996). Research has shown that cultural socialization does affect an individual’s experience of emotions, particularly shame (Fung, 1994; Wilson, 1973). A longitudinal study of the socialization of children in Taiwan found that 95% of Chinese preschoolers understood and had a vocabulary for the concept of shame by 2 ½ to 3 years of age, in comparison to 10% of American preschoolers of the same age who understood the concept of ashamed (Fung, 1994).

Although guilt and shame are experienced differently in Western and Asian cultures, there are certain components of both emotions that were thought to generalize to different cultures (Hong & Chiu, 1992). Hong and Chiu (1992) suggested there are specific distinguishing characteristics of shame and guilt that are present cross-culturally. This hypothesis does not suggest that the emotions are experienced in the same manner cross-culturally, nor does it suggest that shame and guilt as universally described, serve the same functions in different cultures. Hong and Chiu’s (1992) hypothesis suggests that the distinguishing features of shame and guilt are identified cross-culturally.

The study mentioned above involved 321 Chinese college students who were asked to recall an occasion when they felt guilty, and an occasion when they experienced shame (Hong & Chiu, 1992). The three distinctive models of shame and guilt examined in the study included personal inadequacy versus violation of moral norms, audience presence versus audience
absence, and personal responsibility (Hong & Chiu, 1992). The findings of this study revealed that guilt was experienced more frequently when individuals violated a moral norm than when they felt a sense of inadequacy, and the reverse was true for shame (Hong & Chiu, 1992). Also, individuals who experienced shame as compared with guilt were more sensitive to the judgments of others, hence more often including the presence of an audience in their accounts (Hong & Chiu). Finally, the study found that individuals were more likely to feel a sense of personal responsibility when they experienced guilt than when they experienced shame (Hong & Chiu, 1992). Hong and Chiu (1992) suggested these findings were consistent with those of studies exploring experiences of shame and guilt conducted in Western cultures, and could therefore be generalized transculturally.

Current research has explored differences in cross-cultural experiences of shame and guilt, but further research needs to be conducted to identify typical experiences of shame and guilt, in order to compare and contrast the experiences of these emotions in individuals. Furthermore, in studies of counterfactual thinking and studies of how familiar children are with the emotions of shame and guilt, the concept of cross-cultural experiences must be taken into account (Fung, 1994; Niedenthal, 1994). Although one emotion may be more identified or distinguished in a particular culture, this does not necessarily mean that all individuals experience the same emotions in the same manner, or that the same experiences will elicit the same emotions cross-culturally (Shaver et al., 1992).

The emotions of shame and guilt can guide behavior and influence self-perception (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). It is also possible to explore the proneness of individuals to experiencing shame and guilt based on the experiences they have had that may elicit these emotions (Tangney, 1990). Life experiences and world-views individuals hold are influenced by their cultural socialization. Educational and mental health professionals working in an increasingly multi-cultural society will be faced with the challenge of working with students who are navigating through the American culture with different, and often contrasting, cultural life experiences and the world-views of the Chinese culture. In order to better understand the presence of the Chinese culture in America, it is necessary to understand this history. The Asian-American experience, with particular focus on Chinese-Americans, in relation to the contexts previously mentioned, will be discussed in the following section.
The Chinese-American Experience

The first reports of Chinese immigration to the United States date back as early as 1785, but the largest wave of Chinese immigration to the United States occurred in the mid-nineteenth century (Cheng, 1999; Locke, 1998; Green, 1995). Individuals from China were the first people to come to the United States in large groups, and currently comprise the largest group of Asian immigrants in the United States (Cheng, 1999; Locke, 1998). The gold rush in California in the mid-nineteenth century was a major driving force for Chinese immigration to the United States (Locke, 1998). At this time there was a need for labor to build the transcontinental railroad, and this economic opportunity coupled with political unrest and overpopulation in China were major factors contributing to Chinese immigration to the United States (Locke, 1998). By 1860 almost all Chinese immigrants in the United States were located in the West, and predominantly in California (Locke, 1998).

American workers began to see the Chinese as a threat to job security (Locke, 1998), and thus oppression of the Chinese in the United States began. Oppression of the Chinese outside of the United States dates back to Colonial times when traders interested in material goods saw Chinese people as superstitious, strangely dressed, cruel, lacking courage, and dishonest (Locke, 1998). In mining districts where Chinese immigrants worked, oppression was reified by unconstitutional taxes placed on Chinese workers, and because they rarely defended themselves, they were an easy target for oppression (Locke, 1998). Anti-Chinese sentiments at this time led to a law preventing Chinese immigration, known as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was not repealed until 1943 (Locke, 1998).

In order to survive in a strange new land, Chinese individuals stuck together and strived to maintain their own cultural customs and traditions (Locke, 1998). These efforts of cultural preservation were the bases for communities known today as “Chinatowns,” (Locke, 1998, p.80). Still today, Chinese immigrants have not fully adapted to the United States culture, language or behavior (Locke, 1998). Understanding traditionally Chinese cultural characteristics is central to understanding the Chinese-American experience.

Some traditional cultural characteristics of the Chinese culture include a strong obligation to the family and the superior class, group loyalty and obedience, avoidance of embarrassing situations, modesty, humility, respect for superiors, and not complaining when facing hardship (Locke, 1998). Locke (1998) explained that in regard to economic concerns, Chinese people
have aspirations to independently operate, profit, and control one’s employment, usually through small family businesses. This desire may stem from the economic hardships and lack of opportunity many Chinese immigrants faced in their native countries. Common stereotypes of Chinese families working as restaurateurs, laundry operators, grocers, and garment factory workers, have historical bases (Locke, 1998). Laws that excluded Chinese individuals from certain occupations went unchanged until the 1940’s (Locke, 1998).

The Chinese culture possesses unique characteristics in the realm of language and the arts. In Chinese culture and art, nature is seen as harmonious with human nature (Locke, 1998). Chinese culture has a long continuous history of over 8,000 years (Locke, 1998). This history has left a great deal of art that is linked to religion, and portrays links between the past, present, and future (Locke, 1998). This link is representative of the strong regard for the past, and ancestor worship in the Chinese culture.

The Chinese culture has unique characteristics with regard to sociopolitical factors. Patrilineal kinship defines the traditional Chinese family (Locke, 1998). Traditionally, females join a kinship through marriage (Locke, 1998). Lineage was, and still is, used to organize social and economic life in Chinese communities (Locke, 1998). The patrilineal nature of the Chinese family is reinforced by the sacredness of the father and son relationship (Locke, 1998). Although this relationship is held in high regard in the Chinese family, the cultural trait of filial piety is extremely significant in the Chinese culture, and this absolute obedience and complete genuine devotion applies to both parents (Locke, 1998; Cheng, 1999). Genuine affection, interdependence, and an emotional bond between parents and child, also characterize filial piety (Locke, 1998).

Chinese parents are typically more indulgent than White parents, but they also maintain stricter discipline (Locke, 1998). This discipline is usually not expressed in the form of physical punishment, but rather withdrawal from privileges (Locke, 1998). Traditionally, Chinese children are typically well behaved, especially in public, particularly in fear of “losing face” in public (Locke, 1998). Losing face involves public embarrassment and is a shameful action.

A fear of losing face and filial piety are cultural factors directly related to one of the most pressing challenges that Asian-American youth face today. This challenge is that of parental pressure to excel in academics. Asian parents typically have very high expectations of their children in school (Fong, 2002). Fong (2002) explained that Asian parents feel responsible for
their child’s school achievement, and that this achievement is a direct reflection of parenting abilities. Parents may use shame and guilt to reinforce the strong obligation to the family, which can result in very self-critical students facing excessive expectations and high levels of stress and pressure to achieve (Fong, 2002, Ngo & Malz, 1998).

Parental pressure and stress are not the only challenges faced by today’s Chinese and other Asian-American youth in school. Asian-American students also face racial tensions and violence in schools (Fong, 2002). In a 1992 survey of Asian-American students in the 8th, 10th, and 12th grades, it was found that almost 16% of these students felt unsafe at school (Fong, 2002). A study of 266 Asian-American students yielded the following results: 24% had been physically attacked in school, 69% never reported acts of violence, 25% believed that teachers would not care if they reported violence, and 30% believed that teachers would not do anything if violence was reported (Fong, 2002).

Asian-American students are often easy targets for racial discrimination due to the fact that their racial differences are visible, they may have an accent if not born in the United States, they may be considered foreigners, and others are often jealous of their overachievement (Fong, 2002). Fong (2002) explains that there is racial tension between American born Asians and immigrant Asians, who are often seen by the former as well as peers and teachers, as “fresh off the boat.”

Violence against both American born Asians and immigrants does exist (Fong, 2002). In 1998, 17-year-old Loi Nguyen was involved in a fight between about five Asian-American students and about 30 White and Latino students off campus from his Arizona high school (Fong, 2002). Nguyen was suspended from school and brought home to his parents by the police (Fong, 2002). The dishonor of bringing shame to his family caused Nguyen to lock himself in his room and shoot himself (Fong, 2002). Through further exploration, it was discovered that Nguyen was constantly taunted at school (Fong, 2002). He was the victim of physical aggression, verbal slurs, and Anti-Asian graffiti (Fong, 2002). The principal of the school established a counseling center for students to help them deal with the suicide (Fong, 2002). Anti-Asian slurs were discovered on benches outside of the counseling center (Fong, 2002).

Racial violence and a mistrust of the school in helping victims of racial discrimination and acts of violence are challenging issues faced by today’s Asian-American youth (Fong, 2002). Another challenged faced by Asian-American students in school is Limited English Proficiency
There is an overrepresentation of Asian-American students in LEP programs based on the percentage of Asian-Americans in the population (Fong, 2002). Asian-Americans comprise 11% of the population of California and 1/3 of the state’s LEP students (Fong, 2002).

In 1970 Lau v. Nichols became a landmark LEP court case (Fong, 2002). In San Francisco Kinney Lau was failing out of school as a result of his LEP (Fong, 2002). A lawsuit was filed on behalf of Lau and 1,800 other Chinese students (Fong, 2002). The case lost in a federal district court, but it was appealed and won at the Supreme Court in 1974 (Fong, 2002). The High Court found that the school district failed to provide an equal opportunity for LEP students, and did not provide enough LEP teachers (Fong, 2002). Although the ruling was an accomplishment for the welfare of LEP students, the outcome has been marked by inconsistent implementation and a considerable lack of support for LEP students (Fong, 2002).

Rong (1998) explained that the quality of education for Asian-American students is lacking. There is a need for more Asian teachers, a need for more multicultural education, and a need to learn more than just European History (Rong, 1998). In addition to these needs, Asian-American students also face the challenge of navigating through an American school experience, which entails fundamental differences than a traditionally Asian school experience (Cheng, 1999). Cheng (1999, p.6) presents the following dichotomy of American Teachers’ expectations and Chinese parents’ expectations:

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American Teachers’ Expectations</th>
<th>Chinese Parents’ Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education is interactive and spontaneous.</td>
<td>Education is formal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and students work together in the teaching-learning process.</td>
<td>Teachers should tell students what to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students learn through participation and interaction. Homework is only part of the process.</td>
<td>Students learn through doing a lot of homework.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching is an active process; students are not passive learners. The teacher should teach and the students should study.

Factual information is readily available; problem solving, creativity and critical thinking are more important. Factual information is important, fantasy is not.

Teachers should facilitate and model problem solving; students learn by being actively engaged in the process. Students should be taught to solve problems.

Teachers need to be questioned and challenged. Teachers should not be challenged.

Reading is a constructive process. Reading is the decoding of information and facts.

As a result of the juxtaposition and different dynamics of Chinese and American classrooms and the expectations of Chinese parents, Asian-American students often struggle to manage classroom rules and practices with success, and may experience some confusion (Cheng, 1999). Cheng (1999) explained that this confusion may be misinterpreted by American teachers as being deficient, disordered, and undesirable. The following is a list of some behaviors that may be expressed by Chinese-American students and misunderstood by American teachers: delay, or hesitation in response, short responses, using a soft voice, avoiding risk, embarrassment over praise, confused facial expression, such as a frown signaling concentration rather than displeasure, and different greeting rituals, which may appear impolite, such as looking down when the teacher approaches (Cheng, 1999).

It is the responsibility of school personnel and mental health providers to assist Asian-American students with the challenges and struggles faced at school and in other areas of the
minority experience (Green, 1995). In addition to understanding the cultural background of a student and/or client, one should take into account the individual and how he or she is processing the experience of being an ethnic minority in America, as well as the social service needs of the individual (Cheng, 1999; Green, 1995). It is also necessary to recognize the fact that each Asian-American or Asian immigrant family and/or individual, practices cultural traditions and customs differently, and struggle with different issues (Green, 1995).

Knowledge of identity formation and the acculturation process (Gudykunst, 2001) is beneficial in order to gain insight into the worldview of a student and/or client. Cheng (1999) discussed three types of identity formation that ethnic minorities may experience. The first identity is termed Marginality, which involves living in two cultures and forming dual identities and loyalties (Cheng, 1999). Individuals developing a Marginal identity may experience a sense of inferiority when attempting to assimilate into the dominant culture, but are not accepted because of their differences (Cheng, 1999).

The second identity addressed by Cheng (1999) is described as a Bicultural identity. Cheng (1999) referred to W.E.B. Du Bois’ concept of the double consciousness to explain the Bicultural identity. By developing a Bicultural identity, an individual sees him/herself through the eyes of the other (Cheng, 1999). The individual’s sense of identity is guided by the manner in which the dominant culture views the other (Cheng, 1999). An experience described by Cheng (1999) as unique to Chinese-Americans is that those who are American born may feel American but are still seen as foreign based on the view of the dominant culture.

The third identity described by Cheng (1999) is called the Multiple Perspectives identity. By forming this identity, an individual experiences multiple consciousnesses (Cheng, 1999). The Multiple Perspectives identity transcends the Bicultural identity in that it is not just the dichotomy of the Chinese and the American views, but the view of the self is also a contributing factor to the self’s identity (Cheng, 1999). It is vital to understand how an individual engages in the process of identity formation in order to effectively serve his or her needs.

Understanding the social service needs specific to Asian-Americans is necessary in providing the best service possible to these individuals. Green (1995, p.281) described the following mental health issues that may be experienced by ethnic minorities: differential acculturation to American practices within families, intergenerational disagreements, trauma due to extreme conditions experienced prior to arrival in this country, presumptions of ethnic
foreignness by Whites, racism, and overall “high levels of stress but low levels of service utilization.”

Green (1995) explained that one factor contributing to low service utilization is the stigma attached to psychological services. Some ethnic minorities may rather hide problematic issues as opposed to bringing shame to the self or family for seeking help (Green, 1995). Professionals must understand that reasons for service underutilization are not only cultural (Green, 1995). Inequities in life experiences of the dominant and the minority culture may also contribute to underutilization of services (Green, 1995). Green (1995, p.283) described the importance of the concept of cultural contrasts, in which the service provider should have the insight to view him or herself as the “different” one. The burden of experiencing situations as the other should be placed on the professional (Green, 1995). Self-awareness is an essential component of providing effective service.

Self-awareness and an understanding of the life experiences and worldviews of ethnic minorities, are necessities to progressing towards cultural competence. Pedersen and Carey (1994) suggested the following strategies for improved multicultural competence:

1. Be open and honest in relationships with culturally different students.
2. Learn as much as possible about your own culture.
3. Seek to genuinely respect and appreciate culturally different attitudes and behaviors.
4. Take advantage of all available opportunities to participate in activities of cultural groups in the communities of cultural groups.
5. Keep in mind that culturally different students are both unique individuals and members of their cultural group as well.
6. Eliminate behaviors that suggest prejudice, racism, or discrimination against culturally different populations and work toward elimination of such behaviors from your students and colleagues.
7. Encourage teachers and administrators to institutionalize practices in each school that acknowledge the contributions of various racial and ethnic groups.
8. Hold high expectations of all students and encourage all who work with culturally diverse students to do likewise.
9. Ask questions about the culturally diverse.

10. Develop culturally specific programs to foster the psychological development of culturally different children.

(Pedersen & Carey, 1994, p. 56)

The above suggestions apply to culturally diverse individuals of any group. These principles are best applied to the Asian-American experience as the help provider has made an effort to gain insight into the past life experiences, cultural traditions, and current challenges of the individual and/or family. While it is important to be knowledgeable about Asian-American and Chinese culture, it is essential to understand that individual experiences vary (Green, 1995). The most effective service will be provided by accepting a student or client as an individual, and learning where he or she falls on the continuum of cultural traditions, practices, and individual worldviews (Green, 1995).

Current Research

This research explored the differing perceptions of the emotions of shame and guilt as experienced by Chinese and American college students. This difference is a small piece of evidence supporting the need for culturally competent professionals working with minority cultures. Understanding the differences in perceptions of emotion can serve as a step to understanding the varying experiences of different cultures, and the undeniable need for culturally competent and sensitive professionals who are willing to take these factors into consideration in everyday practice.

It is necessary to understand the context within which individuals associate emotions. The supposition of the current research was that understanding the experiences that elicit the emotions of shame and guilt across the American and Chinese cultures will provide a better understanding of how these emotions are incorporated into the emotional repertoires of culturally different individuals.

Working with a culturally diverse student population is a reality for present-day school personnel and mental health providers in the United States. In order to work effectively with culturally diverse students and their families, it is necessary to understand cultures different from one’s own, within various domains. It is crucial to be knowledgeable about where an individual came from with regard to the individual’s past experiences, as well as the past experiences of the
individual’s culture as a whole. It is also essential to be aware of a culture’s general traditions, customs, beliefs, practices, mores, and folkways.

In addition to being knowledgeable of a culture’s general characteristics, it is also imperative to understand how different individuals process their own identity and navigate through a United States culture that is often in conflict with their native culture. Understanding the challenges faced by both United States-born ethnic minorities, and by immigrants to the United States, is the first step in working with a culturally diverse student population. It is beneficial for school personnel and mental health providers to have cultural competence in order to provide effective service and to act as change agents for students and families who often need a voice.
Research Method

Subjects

Seventy-two college students from a public state university in Southwest Ohio participated in this study. There were 39 females and 33 males. The subjects were from a predominantly middle to upper class socio-economic status. Participants also included 146 Chinese college students. There were 73 males and 73 females. Socio-economic status is more consistent in the Chinese population than in the American population, and is not considered within the framework of class.

Materials

A questionnaire was developed in the Chinese language by Xie and Qian (2000), based on the instrument used by Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, and O’Connor (1987). The questionnaire asked the participants to include their age and gender, and asked them to recall and describe situations that caused them to experience either shame or guilt separately. Two forms of the questionnaire were distributed. 50% of the subjects were asked to recall an experience of shame first and an experience of guilt second, and the other 50% of the subjects were asked to recall an experience of guilt first and an experience of shame second to counter the order effect. The questionnaire was translated into English by a bilingual professor of Educational Psychology, and was then translated back into Chinese by a Chinese graduate student majoring in English. No major discrepancies were found between the translated and the original questionnaire. Since this is an open-ended questionnaire, validities and reliabilities were not examined, other than the fact that the questionnaire asked about and measured shame and guilt. See Appendix A.

Procedures

The questionnaire was given to the subjects either in classes at the university or individually at random with the consideration of representing students from different majors, genders, and class levels. The subjects were asked to complete the questionnaire in class, or to mail it to the researcher. The data were coded using an open coding procedure (Urquhart, 2000) and a cross-theme coding procedure. In order to check for the reliability of the cross-theme coding procedure, 10% of the total number of stories was recoded. The average correlation between the first and second cross-theme coding procedures was .84.
Data Analysis and Results

This research entailed the analysis of the data using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and an open coding procedure (Urquhart, 2000) with the steps of data screening, initial open coding, and cross-theme coding. Typical stories are presented. The most frequent themes and core categories are reported and analyzed in terms of the types of feelings they elicit, and are compared between American and Chinese student responses.

Data Screening

Narrative descriptions that were incomplete or irrelevant, in that they did not represent a specific personal experience, were eliminated from the document. The narrative accounts not considered stories were eliminated. Narrative accounts were considered stories if they “include an animate protagonist and some type of causal sequence,” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p.111). The stories were screened three times to ensure consistency in the screening. After the narratives were screened, the eligible stories were cut and pasted into a document to be used and analyzed for the study. Each story was then cut and pasted onto a separate index card. There were a total of 218 stories used in the analysis.

The index cards were separated into the four groups of American shame stories, American guilt stories, Chinese guilt stories, and Chinese shame stories as determined by the subjects who produced the stories and how they identified the experience. These groups were therefore, the original or natural groups that resulted from the data collection.

Initial Open Coding

The remaining stories of shame and guilt experiences produced by the subjects were closely studied and coded using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This approach allowed for the development of theory through the categorization and analysis of data using the constant comparative method (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) by which categorizations were compared in order to identify common themes and relationships among the stories.

The stories were coded based on themes that were identified in the stories. These themes emerged during the first several readings of the stories. The narrative accounts were read to identify themes, commonalities, and distinctions among the experiences of shame and guilt as described by both the American and the Chinese sample. They were compared, contrasted, and
coded based on the emergence of possible categories. The narratives remained separated by shame and guilt stories in order to preserve the perceptions of the subjects.

Beginning with the American shame stories, each narrative was read and analyzed for emergent themes using an open coding system, which was defined by Urquhart (2000, p.3) as, “a line by line examination of the data to generate concepts or codes.” The index cards with the narratives pasted on were physically separated into piles according to themes. When a theme emerged from the narrative, a pile was created. Each time a new theme emerged, a new pile was created. If a story contained a theme that was already identified, the index card was placed in that thematic pile. This process was repeated for the following remaining groups of stories in this order: American guilt stories, Chinese guilt stories, and Chinese shame stories.

The following is the breakdown of the stories within each category following this initial open coding process (Urquhart, 2000) involving a reading of each narrative on an index card, and a separation of the cards into thematic piles.

Table 2

Themes Created Through Initial Open Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Shame</th>
<th>Guilt</th>
<th>Total # of Stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>US</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deceit</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Do Something They Should Have</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheated (academics)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowingly Did Something Wrong</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Control</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infidelity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Typical Stories

In order to more clearly describe each of the 18 themes created by emergent patterns in the coding of the narratives, each theme was depicted by a typical story from that group. A typical story is defined by this researcher as a story that is illustrative of that theme based on an adapted version of an original narrative containing the essential information characteristic of that theme. The typical story is essentially an example of the theme it represents. The typical stories were selected based on three readings of the stories categorized in each theme in order to identify the scenario most typical of that theme.

The following information entails each theme and a typical story representative of that theme:
Embarrassed by Other's Actions. At my first middle school year, a drunken man I know broke into the bathroom when I was in. He did not notice me and was peeing in front of me, which made me very embarrassed. I felt ashamed. I hated that man and wished he could notice his mistake right away. I was in a dilemma of whether to leave the bathroom.

Infidelity. Cheating on my girlfriend made me feel guilty because I knew that I'd broken her trust. It happened because the girl and I were both willing. My feeling at the time was to go ahead and do it. I said nothing to the girl or to my girlfriend.

Poor Academic Performance. I failed my English college graduation requirement examination. This is the second time that I took this exam. I always thought that I could pass, although I failed twice. I was over confident and did not spend much time preparing. I thought I was the most misfortunate person in the world. I did not know how to face others and how they would look at me.

Deceit. I lied to my friend about being sick and then went out with a guy instead. I felt horrible.

Lost Control. I blew up at someone for a practical joke he played on me. I shouldn’t have gotten so upset. I got violent, and I let my emotions get the better of me.

Rude to Others. In elementary school, I said something that made a well-behaved boy cry. I was naughty and inconsiderate.

Knowingly Did Something Wrong. One time I tried to cause trouble between my boyfriend and myself to get attention. It was wrong of me to try to do such a thing. At the time, I knew it was wrong but did it anyway. Now, looking back, I realized it was wrong and would never do something like that again.

Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions. The thing happened when I was a kid. One day I found my grandmother buying some popcorn at the courtyard when I came back from school.

23
felt very happy and wanted to surprise her by giving her a big hug from the back. When
my hands touched her waist, the person turned around and stared at me very angrily. I
found that she was not my grandmother and I recognized the wrong person. I was afraid
that she would think of me as a bad girl (e.g. thief).

_Cheated (academics)._ One time when I was in high school I cheated on a test. It is the
only time I have ever cheated on a test in my life. I was doing a make-up test, and so at
the time I took it, I was the only one in the room. The teacher left me there all alone. My
books were right next to me on the desk. I could not help but peek at them. I felt horrible
for cheating but I was desperate since I read the wrong chapters.

_Regret_. The first winter vacation I came back home, I visited my relatives but I only
talked with my grandma for a half hour. I went out to play with classmates almost every
day. My grandma died of a cerebral hemorrhage. I did not spend much more time with
my grandma and only thought about myself.

_Naïveté_. Once I wrecked my car in high school. I did not call the police because the
person I hit said he was doing me a favor by not calling them, so I would not get a ticket.
When my dad got home he yelled at me like I was expecting him to. He screamed at the
fact that I did not call the police and that I got in a wreck in the first place. I was naïve in
assuming that I did not need to call the police because I had never gotten in a wreck
before. I did not say anything the whole time he was yelling at me because I felt like I
was the size of an ant and had no words to defend myself. I did eventually say I would
pay for everything and I apologized and cried some more and just went to my room.

_Forgetfulness_. A month ago my elder sister reminded me that my mother’s birthday was
in a few days. I stored the date in my computer, but I forgot on that day.

_Unfulfilled Obligations_. I did not call a friend to go out as I had promised. It happened
because this person was not the number one priority in my life at the time, and at that
time I really did not distribute my time equally among all of my friends. I made a lame
excuse about being too busy, and this person never found out I was with another friend. I was able to maintain this friendship, however, and I think this is why my feelings never developed into deep shame.

**Did Not Do Something They Should Have.** I went away for spring break instead of going home to visit my family. It was my fault for valuing myself over my family.

**Unintentionally Hurt Others.** I was thoughtless when I was a kid. I ran away from home, which made my mother very sad.

**Carelessness.** When I was babysitting my younger brother, I was absorbed in TV and forgot him. He fell down and hurt himself.

**Selfishness.** I was playing firecrackers with my cousin in our yard. We went outside of the yard to set off firecrackers. A neighbor’s wolfhound charged from the corner. My first response was to run toward our yard. The yard door was open. I rushed in and closed the door. I did not even think about my cousin outside. As a result, the wolfhound bit him while I was sound and safe. I was selfish. I felt very sorry for my cousin and his parents. I said something trying to cover what I did, such as the situation was very urgent, and etc. I did not speak much because I felt myself unjustifiable.

**Public Embarrassment.** In my third middle school year, the teacher in charge of my class criticized me for one hour and a half in front of the entire class because I was an extrovert. I did not abide by regulation well and liked to talk. I wished I could find a hole in the earth and hide myself.

**Cross-Theme Coding**

Shame and guilt are interrelated emotions, and many of the emergent themes created from coding the stories are interrelated as well. In order to further explore the themes embedded in the narrative accounts of shame and guilt experiences, the stories were removed from their thematic pile, combined and shuffled. Each story was then read and each theme that could be applied to the story was marked. For example, the following story was originally placed in the theme of Unfulfilled Obligations after the first open coding procedure, but because it also contains the theme of Unintentionally Hurt Others, it was counted in both themes:
Once I felt guilty when I was not able to go home for a holiday weekend. I was unable to go because I had a great deal of homework to complete that weekend for the next week of classes. I told my parents I felt badly about not making it home but they seemed a little disappointed.

Each story was read and coded according to the theme or themes it could fall under based on the themes embedded in each story. The order of the theme titles was rearranged in order to prevent any effect of associating themes with stories of shame or guilt or American or Chinese narratives, since each theme emerged with the reading of narratives from these groups. Table 3 displays the frequencies and percentages of each type of story placed in each theme.

Table 3

Frequency and Percentages of Themes by Emotion and Nationality Following Cross-Theme Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Shame US</th>
<th>Shame China</th>
<th>Guilt US</th>
<th>Guilt China</th>
<th>Total # of Stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deceit</td>
<td>9 (18.4 %)</td>
<td>3 (6.0 %)</td>
<td>16 (29.1 %)</td>
<td>13 (20.3 %)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Do Something They Should Have</td>
<td>1 (2.0 %)</td>
<td>1 (2.0 %)</td>
<td>10 (18.2 %)</td>
<td>5 (7.8 %)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheated (academics)</td>
<td>4 (8.2 %)</td>
<td>1 (2.0 %)</td>
<td>3 (5.5 %)</td>
<td>1 (1.6 %)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowingly Did Something Wrong</td>
<td>6 (12.2 %)</td>
<td>4 (8.0 %)</td>
<td>13 (23.6 %)</td>
<td>3 (4.7 %)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Control</td>
<td>11 (22.4 %)</td>
<td>4 (8.0 %)</td>
<td>2 (3.6 %)</td>
<td>8 (12.5 %)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashamed by Other’s Perceptions</td>
<td>14 (28.6 %)</td>
<td>14 (28.0 %)</td>
<td>2 (3.6 %)</td>
<td>7 (10.9 %)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infidelity</td>
<td>2 (4.1 %)</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
<td>2 (3.6 %)</td>
<td>1 (1.6 %)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassed by Others’ Actions</td>
<td>1 (2.0 %)</td>
<td>5 (10.0 %)</td>
<td>1 (1.8 %)</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
<td>2 (4.0 %)</td>
<td>15 (27.3 %)</td>
<td>3 (4.7 %)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfulfilled Obligations</td>
<td>12 (24.5 %)</td>
<td>3 (6.0 %)</td>
<td>16 (29.1 %)</td>
<td>16 (25.0 %)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unintentionally Hurt Others</td>
<td>3 (6.1 %)</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
<td>10 (18.2 %)</td>
<td>12 (18.8 %)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfishness</td>
<td>4 (8.2 %)</td>
<td>20 (40.0 %)</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
<td>2 (3.1 %)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Embarrassment</td>
<td>4 (8.2 %)</td>
<td>4 (8.0 %)</td>
<td>4 (7.3 %)</td>
<td>6 (9.4 %)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carelessness</td>
<td>2 (4.1 %)</td>
<td>1 (2.0 %)</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
<td>1 (1.6 %)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naiveté</td>
<td>6 (12.2 %)</td>
<td>9 (18.0 %)</td>
<td>2 (3.6 %)</td>
<td>5 (7.8 %)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Academic Performance</td>
<td>12 (24.5 %)</td>
<td>2 (4.0 %)</td>
<td>3 (5.5 %)</td>
<td>23 (35.9 %)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rude to Others</td>
<td>0 (0 %)</td>
<td>1 (2.0 %)</td>
<td>1 (1.8 %)</td>
<td>3 (4.7 %)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgetfulness</td>
<td>15 (30.6 %)</td>
<td>4 (8.0 %)</td>
<td>5 (9.1 %)</td>
<td>18 (28.1 %)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of Stories Coded Multiple Times</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of Stories</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Italicized themes represent the most frequent themes. The percentages were calculated based on the total number of stories in each emotion and demographic category (49, 50, 55, and 64).

Most Frequent Themes

Those themes that represented at least 18 % of the total number of stories in any demographic and/or emotion category, were considered the most frequent themes. If any of the categorical percentages associated with a theme were greater than 18%, it was selected to be graphed. The criterion of 18% was chosen based on the gap between representations by percentages between 12% and 18%. These themes are shown in Table 3 as italicized themes.
The total percentages do not add up to 100% because during the coding procedure, narratives were coded as containing more than one theme when it applied.

The themes considered most frequent (at least 18% of the total number of narratives in that group) in each of the groups were combined to create one list of most frequent themes (presented below). These themes were then graphed in order to examine their presence in the narratives. The 12 most frequent themes were compared based on emotion (shame or guilt), then by nationality (American or Chinese), and then by emotion and nationality combined as groups including American shame (AS), American guilt (AG), Chinese shame (CS), and Chinese guilt (CG).

Most frequent themes combined from the four groups:

1. Deceit
2. Did Not Do Something They Should Have
3. Knowingly Did Something Wrong
4. Lost Control
5. Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions
6. Unfulfilled Obligations
7. Unintentionally Hurt Others
8. Selfishness
9. Public Embarrassment
10. Poor Academic Performance
11. Rude to Others
12. Regret

Themes by Emotion, Nationality, and Both Emotion and Nationality
The theme of Deceit was found in 24.4% of the shame stories and in 49.4% of the guilt stories. Deceit was a theme found as more characteristic of guilt narratives than shame narratives. The theme Deceit was found in 47.5% of American stories and in 26.3% of Chinese stories. Deceit was a theme more characteristic of American narratives than Chinese narratives. The theme Deceit was found in 18.4% of American shame stories, in 29.1% of American guilt stories, 6% of Chinese shame stories, and in 20.3% of Chinese guilt stories. As seen in Figure 1, Deceit was more characteristic of guilt than shame experiences, and more dominant in American narratives than in Chinese narratives. For both nationalities, Deceit had a stronger representation in guilt stories than shame stories. Deceit was most strongly represented in American guilt narratives.
The theme Did Not Do Something They Should Have was found in 4% of shame stories and in 26% of guilt stories. Did Not Do Something They Should Have was a theme found as more characteristic of guilt narratives than shame narratives. The theme Did Not Do Something They Should Have was found in 20.2% of American stories and in 9.8% of Chinese stories. Did Not Do Something They Should Have was a theme more characteristic of American narratives than
Chinese narratives. The theme Did Not Do Something They Should Have was found in 2% of American shame stories, in 18.2% of American guilt stories, 2% of Chinese shame stories, and in 7.8% of Chinese guilt stories. As seen in Figure 2, Did Not Do Something They Should Have was more characteristic of guilt than shame experiences, and more dominant in American narratives than in Chinese narratives. For American and Chinese subjects, this theme was equally represented in shame stories, and more characteristic of guilt experiences. Did Not Do Something They Should Have was most strongly represented in American guilt narratives.

![Bar graph showing the percentage of Did Not Do Something They Should Have in shame and guilt stories by nationality.](image)

a. Knowingly Did Something Wrong by Emotion

![Bar graph showing the percentage of Did Not Do Something Wrong in American and Chinese subjects.](image)

b. Knowingly Did Something Wrong by Nationality
c. Knowingly Did Something Wrong by Both Emotion and Nationality

Figure 3. Knowingly Did Something Wrong

The theme Knowingly Did Something Wrong was depicted in 20.2% of shame stories and in 28.3% of guilt stories. Knowingly Did Something Wrong was a theme more characteristic of guilt stories than shame stories. The theme Knowingly Did Something Wrong was represented in 35.8% of American stories and 12.7% of Chinese stories. Knowingly Did Something Wrong was a theme more characteristic of American narratives than Chinese narratives. The theme Knowingly Did Something Wrong was found in 12.2% of American shame stories, in 23.6% of American guilt stories, 8% of Chinese shame stories, and in 4.7% of Chinese guilt stories. This theme was more dominant in guilt than shame stories, and more dominant in American than Chinese stories. For Americans this theme was more present in guilt than shame narratives, and for Chinese subjects it was more present in shame than guilt narratives. As seen in Figure 3, Knowingly Did Something Wrong was most strongly represented in American guilt narratives.

a. Lost Control by Emotion
The theme of Lost Control was found in 30.4% of shame stories and in 16.1% of guilt stories. Lost Control was a theme more characteristic of shame narratives than guilt narratives. The theme Lost Control was found in 26% of American stories and in 20.5% of Chinese stories. Lost Control was a theme more characteristic of American narratives than Chinese narratives. The theme Lost Control was found in 22.4% of American shame stories, 3.6% of American guilt stories, 8% of Chinese shame stories, and in 12.5% of Chinese guilt stories. Lost Control was more dominant in shame than guilt stories, and more dominant in American than Chinese stories. As seen in Figure 4, Lost Control was more characteristic of shame experiences than guilt experiences for Americans, and more characteristic of guilt experiences than shame experiences for Chinese participants. The theme Lost Control was most strongly represented in American shame stories.
The theme of Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions was depicted in 56.6% of the shame stories and in 14.5% of guilt stories. Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions was a theme found as more characteristic of shame narratives than guilt narratives. The theme Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions was found in 33.2% of American stories and in 38.9% of Chinese stories. Ashamed
by Others’ Perceptions was a theme more characteristic of Chinese narratives than American narratives. The theme Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions was found in 28.6% of American shame stories, 3.6% of American guilt stories, 28% of Chinese shame stories, and in 10.9% of Chinese guilt stories. This theme was more dominant in shame stories than in guilt stories, and more dominant in Chinese stories than in American stories. As shown in Figure 5, Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions was more strongly represented in shame stories than in guilt stories for both American and Chinese subjects. This theme was most strongly represented in American shame stories, although the difference between representation in American shame stories and Chinese shame stories was only .6%.

![Bar chart showing the percentage of American and Chinese stories for shame and guilt emotions.](image)

a. Unfulfilled Obligations by Emotion

![Bar chart comparing American and Chinese respondents.](image)

b. Unfulfilled Obligations by Nationality
c. Unfulfilled Obligations by Both Emotion and Nationality

Figure 6. Unfulfilled Obligations

The theme Unfulfilled Obligations was represented in 4% of shame stories, and in 32% of guilt stories. Unfulfilled Obligations was a theme more characteristic of guilt stories than shame stories. The theme Unfulfilled Obligations was found in 27.3% of American stories and in 8.7%, of Chinese stories. Unfulfilled Obligations was a theme more characteristic of American narratives than Chinese narratives. The theme Unfulfilled Obligations was found in 0% of American shame stories, 27.3% of American guilt stories, 4% of Chinese shame stories, and in 4.7% of Chinese guilt stories. This theme was more characteristic of guilt stories than shame stories, and more characteristic of American than Chinese stories. As seen in Figure 6, Unfulfilled Obligations was relatively more characteristic of guilt stories than shame stories for both American and Chinese subjects. Unfulfilled Obligations was most strongly represented in American guilt stories.

a. Unintentionally Hurt Others by Emotion
b. Unintentionally Hurt Others by Nationality

The theme of Unintentionally Hurt Others was present in 30.5% of shame stories and 54.1% of guilt stories. Unintentionally Hurt Others was a theme more characteristic of guilt narratives than shame narratives. The theme Unintentionally Hurt Others was depicted in 53.6% of American stories and in 31% of Chinese stories. Unintentionally Hurt Others was a theme more characteristic of American narratives than Chinese narratives. The theme Unintentionally Hurt Others was found in 24.5% of American shame stories, in 29.1% of American guilt stories, in 6% of Chinese shame stories, and in 25% of Chinese Guilt stories. This theme was more dominant in guilt than shame stories, and more dominant in American than Chinese stories. Figure 7 shows that Unintentionally Hurt Others was perceived as relatively more characteristic of guilt than shame experiences for both American and Chinese subjects. This theme was most strongly represented in American guilt stories.

c. Unintentionally Hurt Others by Both Emotion and Nationality

Figure 7. Unintentionally Hurt Others

The theme of Unintentionally Hurt Others was present in 30.5% of shame stories and 54.1% of guilt stories. Unintentionally Hurt Others was a theme more characteristic of guilt narratives than shame narratives. The theme Unintentionally Hurt Others was depicted in 53.6% of American stories and in 31% of Chinese stories. Unintentionally Hurt Others was a theme more characteristic of American narratives than Chinese narratives. The theme Unintentionally Hurt Others was found in 24.5% of American shame stories, in 29.1% of American guilt stories, in 6% of Chinese shame stories, and in 25% of Chinese Guilt stories. This theme was more dominant in guilt than shame stories, and more dominant in American than Chinese stories. Figure 7 shows that Unintentionally Hurt Others was perceived as relatively more characteristic of guilt than shame experiences for both American and Chinese subjects. This theme was most strongly represented in American guilt stories.
The theme of Selfishness was present in 6.1% of shame stories and 37% of guilt stories. Selfishness was a theme more characteristic of guilt narratives than shame narratives. The theme Selfishness was depicted in 24.3% of American stories and in 18.8% of Chinese stories. Selfishness was a theme more characteristic of American narratives than Chinese narratives. The theme Selfishness was found in 6.1% of American shame stories, in 18.2% of American guilt stories.
stories, in 0% of Chinese shame stories, and in 18.8% of Chinese Guilt stories. This theme was more dominant in guilt than shame stories, and more dominant in American than Chinese stories. Figure 8 shows that Selfishness was perceived as relatively more characteristic of guilt than shame experiences for both American and Chinese subjects. This theme was most strongly represented in Chinese guilt stories, although the difference between representation in American guilt stories and Chinese guilt stories was only .6%.

![Graph a. Public Embarrassment by Emotion](image)

b. Public Embarrassment by Nationality

![Graph b. Public Embarrassment by Nationality](image)
c. Public Embarrassment by Both Emotion and Nationality

Figure 9. Public Embarrassment

The theme Public Embarrassment was found in 48.2% of shame stories and 3.1% of guilt stories. Public Embarrassment was a theme found as more characteristic of shame narratives than guilt narratives. The theme Public Embarrassment was depicted in 8.2% of American stories and in 43.1% of Chinese stories. Public Embarrassment was a theme more characteristic of Chinese narratives than American narratives. The theme Public Embarrassment was found in 8.2% of American shame stories, 0% of American guilt stories, 40% of Chinese shame stories, and in 3.1% of Chinese guilt stories. Public Embarrassment is more dominant in shame than guilt stories, and more dominant in Chinese than American stories. As seen Figure 9, Public Embarrassment was relatively more characteristic of shame stories than guilt stories for both nationalities. This theme was most strongly represented in Chinese shame stories.

a. Poor Academic Performance by Emotion

b. Poor Academic Performance by Nationality
c. Poor Academic Performance by Both Emotion and Nationality

Figure 10. Poor Academic Performance

The theme Poor Academic Performance was found in 30.2% of shame stories and in 11.4% of guilt stories. Poor Academic Performance was a theme found as more characteristic of shame narratives than guilt narratives. The theme Poor Academic Performance was found in 15.8% of American stories and in 25.8% of Chinese stories. Poor Academic Performance was a theme more characteristic of Chinese narratives than American narratives. The theme Poor Academic Performance was represented in 12.2% of American shame stories, 3.6% of American guilt stories, 18% of Chinese shame stories, and in 7.8% of Chinese guilt stories. This theme was more dominant in shame than guilt stories, and more dominant in Chinese than American stories. As seen Figure 10, Poor Academic Performance was relatively more characteristic of shame stories than guilt stories for both nationalities. This theme was most strongly represented in Chinese shame stories.

a. Rude to Others by Emotion
b. Rude to Others by Nationality

Figure 11. Rude to Others

The theme of Rude to Others was found in 28.5% of the shame stories, and in 41.1% of the guilt stories. Rude to Others was a theme more characteristic of guilt narratives than shame narratives. The theme Rude to Others was found in 30% of American stories and in 39.9% of Chinese stories. Rude to Others was a theme more characteristic of Chinese narratives than American narratives. The theme Rude to Others was represented in 24.5% of American shame stories, 5.5% of American guilt stories, 4% of Chinese shame stories, and in 35.9% of Chinese guilt stories. This theme was more dominant in guilt than shame stories, and more dominant in Chinese than American stories. Figure 11 shows that Rude to Others is relatively more characteristic of shame stories than guilt stories for American subjects, and relatively more characteristic of guilt stories than shame stories for Chinese subjects. This theme was most strongly represented in Chinese guilt stories.
The theme of Regret was represented in 38.6% of shame stories, and in 37.2% of guilt stories. Regret was slightly more characteristic of shame than guilt stories. The theme of Regret was found in 39.7% of American stories, and in 36.1% of Chinese stories. Regret was a theme slightly more characteristic of American than Chinese narratives. The theme Regret was found in 30.6% of American shame stories, 9.1% of American guilt stories, 8% of Chinese shame
stories, and in 28.1% of Chinese guilt stories. This theme was slightly more dominant in shame than guilt stories, and slightly more dominant in American than Chinese stories. As seen in Figure 12, Regret was a theme more characteristic of shame stories than guilt stories for American subjects, and more characteristic of guilt than shame stories for Chinese subjects. Regret was most strongly represented in American shame stories.

Core Categories

After separating themes by emotion, the original 18 themes were grouped based on common themes so that core categories could be created in order to more clearly represent and simplify the themes of the original stories as told by the subjects. The core category is “the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are related,” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.116). The core categories are presented below along with the themes that essentially created these categories. The core categories emerged through the grouping procedure of the original 18 themes. Categories were created based on common themes. Once the themes were grouped together, a title or core category was created in order to represent these groups of themes.

Failure to Meet Expectations

Unfulfilled Obligations
Did Not Do Something They Should Have
Forgetfulness
Regret
Selfishness
Carelessness
Poor Academic Performance

Direct Action of Wrongdoing

Deceit
Infidelity
Cheated (academics)
Knowingly Did Something Wrong
Rude to Others

Embarrassment

Public Embarrassment
Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions
Naiveté

**Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences**
Unintentionally Hurt Others
Lost Control
Embarrassed by Others’ Actions

In order to better understand the similarities and differences regarding the experiences of shame and guilt as described by the participants, across American and Chinese cultures in a broader sense, the core categories were compared. The core categories include: Failure to Meet Expectations, Direct Action of Wrongdoing, Embarrassment, and Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences.

All 18 themes were taken into account for the following graphs. Each core category is displayed with its representation in shame and guilt stories, then American and Chinese stories, and then in American shame, American guilt, Chinese shame, and Chinese guilt stories using data from Table 3.

*Core Categories by Emotion, Nationality, and Both Emotion and Nationality*

![Bar graph showing the percentage of Failure to Meet Expectations by emotion and nationality.](image)

a. Failure to Meet Expectations by Emotion
b. Failure to Meet Expectations by Nationality

The core category Failure to Meet Expectations was found in 50.5% of shame stories and in 83.2% of guilt stories. Failure to Meet Expectations as a core category was more characteristic of guilt experiences than shame experiences. The core category Failure to Meet Expectations was found in 73.1% of American stories and in 64% of Chinese stories. Failure to Meet Expectations was more characteristic of American narratives than Chinese narratives. The core category Failure to Meet Expectations was found in 59.2% of American shame stories, 85.5% of American guilt stories, 42% of Chinese shame stories, and in 81.3% of Chinese guilt stories. Failure to Meet Expectations was more represented in guilt than shame stories, and more represented in American than Chinese stories. Figure 13 shows that the core category Failure to Meet Expectations was more characteristic of guilt experiences than shame experiences for both American and Chinese college students. This core category was most strongly represented in American guilt stories.

c. Failure to Meet Expectations by Both Emotion and Nationality

Figure 13. Failure to Meet Expectations
The core category Direct Actions of Wrongdoing was found in 43.4% of shame stories and in 65.5% of guilt stories. Direct Actions of Wrongdoing was more characteristic of guilt experiences than shame experiences. The core category Direct Actions of Wrongdoing was found in 67.3% of American stories and in 44.7% of Chinese stories. Direct Actions of
Wrongdoing was more characteristic of American narratives than Chinese narratives. The core category Direct Actions of Wrongdoing was found equally in 67.3% of both American shame stories and American guilt stories, in 20% of Chinese shame stories, and in 64.1% of Chinese guilt stories. This core category was more present in guilt than shame stories, and more present in American than Chinese stories. Figure 14 shows that Direct Actions of Wrongdoing was equally characteristic of guilt and shame experiences for American college students, and more characteristic of guilt than shame stories for Chinese students. This core category was most strongly represented, equally, in American shame and American guilt stories.

![Graph showing Embarrassment by Emotion]

a. Embarrassment by Emotion

![Graph showing Embarrassment by Nationality]

b. Embarrassment by Nationality
c. Embarrassment by Both Emotion and Nationality

Figure 15. Embarrassment

The core category Embarrassment was found in 55.6% of shame stories and in 10.1% of guilt stories. Embarrassment as a core category was more characteristic of shame experiences than guilt experiences. The core category Embarrassment was found in 21.2% of American stories and in 39.5% of Chinese stories. Embarrassment as a core category was more characteristic of Chinese narratives than American narratives. The core category Embarrassment was represented in 40.8% of American shame stories, 3.6% of American guilt stories, 70% of Chinese shame stories, and in 15.6% of Chinese guilt stories. Embarrassment was more present in shame than guilt stories, and more present in Chinese than American stories. Figure 15 shows that Embarrassment was more characteristic of shame experiences than guilt experiences for both American and Chinese college students. This core category was most strongly represented in Chinese shame stories.

a. Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences by Emotion
b. Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences by Nationality

Figure 16. Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences

The core category Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences was represented in 36.4% of shame stories and in 36.1% of guilt stories. Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences was slightly more characteristic of shame experiences than guilt experiences. The core category Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences was depicted in 41.3% of American stories and in 31.6% of Chinese stories. Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences was more characteristic of American narratives than Chinese narratives. The core category Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences was found in 49% of American shame stories, 34.5% of American guilt stories, 24% of Chinese shame stories, and in 37.5% of Chinese guilt stories. Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences was more slightly more present in shame than guilt stories, and more present in American than Chinese stories. Figure 16 shows that Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences was more characteristic of shame experiences for American college students, and more characteristic of guilt for Chinese college students. This core category was most strongly represented in American shame stories.
Discussion

*Dimensions of Shame and Guilt Based on Themes and Core Categories*

Shame and guilt both do appear to involve negative self-labeling, sadness, and a low self-esteem (Buss, 2001). It is likely that the definitions and experiences of these emotions are different in America and in China (Okano, 1994), and that they may be more blurred in one culture than they are in another. It seems likely that shame and guilt would be less blurred in China due to the severity of the experience of losing face, which is synonymous with the emotion of shame (Wilson, 1973).

Shame appears to be a more intense emotion. It appears to be more deeply seeded and more difficult to overcome (Lewis, 1971). Shame may have different meanings in the American culture and in the Chinese culture. Shame is closely related to embarrassment, and the concept of “the eyes of the other”. In the Chinese culture the concept of losing face is related to embarrassment and subsequently the emotion of shame (Wilson, 1973). According to past research, shame appears to have a strong focus on the self as an individual as opposed to the self’s behaviors (Lewis, 1992, 1993; Lewis, 1971; Niedenthal et al., 1994). There does not necessarily appear to be a desire for corrective actions in situations producing shame. Instead, an individual who feels shame tends to want to hide or escape the eyes of the public (Tangney, 1990). As a result, shame is defined as a more public emotion than guilt (Buss, 2001; Lynd, 1961; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Wicker et al., 1983). The judgment of others is a significant factor in the experience of shame and relates to the intensity of the emotion (Hong & Chiu, 1992).

Guilt entails a focus on the action of the self as opposed to the self as a whole (Lewis, 1992, 1993; Lewis, 1971; Niedenthal et al., 1994). Guilt may also be described as less severe than shame in intensity, in that it is not commonly experienced in the eyes of the other, and subsequently the judgment of others does no have the impact it does with experiences of shame (Hong & Chiu, 1992). Typically the individual feeling guilt is the one who experiences the emotion in a more private manner than with shame (Buss, 2001; Lynd, 1961; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Wicker et al., 1983). That is to say that the individual has a more personal responsibility to the self as opposed to the eyes of the other (Buss, 2001; Erikson, 1950; Tangney & Dearing, 2002, p.14).
According to research, there is often evidence of a desire for engaging in some sort of corrective action following an incident that produces guilt (Buss, 2001; Lewis, 1971; Lewis, 1992, 1993; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Niedenthal et al., 1994; Tangney, 1990). With guilt may come more of an opportunity for self control than with shame (Lewis, 1971; Wicker et al., 1983). It may be for this reason that shame appears to be a more intense emotion than guilt, in the sense that there is more of a loss of control and more of a difficulty to rectify the situation (Lewis, 1971; Wicker et al., 1983).

Previous research has identified three major dimensions by which the emotions of shame and guilt can be explored and differentiated (Buss, 2001; Lewis, 1992, 1993; Lewis, 1971; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Lynd, 1961; Niedenthal et al., 1994; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Wicker et al., 1983). These dimensions are set up in the form of dichotomies. The dimensions are: self vs. self’s actions, public vs. private, and hide/escape vs. corrective action. The aspects of the dimensions that have been used to describe the emotion of shame are self, public, and hide/escape. The aspects of the dimensions that have been used to describe the emotion of guilt are self’s actions, private, and corrective action. The dimensions are defined as follows:

*Self vs. self’s actions* refers to the manner in which an individual feels responsible for his or her action that resulted in a feeling of shame or guilt. Previous research describes that an individual who feels shame feels as if the *self* as a whole person is at fault for committing the action that resulted in shame (Lewis, 1971). On the other hand, an individual who feels guilt feels as if only a part of the self committed the action, and therefore guilt resulted from the self’s actions as opposed to the self as a whole (Lewis, 1971). An individual who feels shame may feel as if the entire self is bad or wrong, whereas a person who feels guilt may feel as if he or she made a bad or wrong, choice or decision.

*Public vs. private* refers to the audience with which an individual feels he or she experiences the emotions of shame and guilt. Previous research explains that an individual experiencing shame feels as if he or she is experiencing that emotion in the presence of others or in public (Buss, 2001; Lynd, 1961; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Wicker et al., 1983). On the other hand, an individual who feels guilt experiences the emotion in a more private manner (Buss, 2001; Lynd, 1961; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Wicker et al., 1983).
Hide/escape vs. corrective action refers to the manner in which the individual reacts to the emotions of shame and guilt. Previous research explains that an individual experiencing shame may wish to hide or try to escape the situation that caused him or her to feel shame, especially because an individual experiencing shame often feels as if he or she is experiencing shame in front of an audience (Buss, 2001; Lewis, 1992, 1993; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney, 1990). On the other hand, an individual who feels guilt often has the desire to rectify the situation by taking some sort of corrective action (Buss, 2001; Lewis, 1992, 1993; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney, 1990). Because an individual experiencing guilt feels as if only a part of the self committed the action, he or she may feel that action is able to be corrected, whereas an individual experiencing shame feels as if the entire self has caused the situation resulting in shame, and therefore a specific action was not committed that could be corrected.

In exploring the manner in which the four core categories fit into these dimensions by which shame and guilt can be explored and differentiated, it is helpful to survey the themes that compose these four categories. The themes that compose the core category Failure to Meet Expectations are: Unfulfilled Obligations, Did Not Do Something They Should Have, Forgetfulness, Regret, Selfishness, Carelessness, and Poor Academic Performance. The themes that compose the core category Direct Action of Wrongdoing are: Deceit, Infidelity, Cheated (academics), Knowingly Did Something Wrong, and Rude to Others. The themes that compose the core category Embarrassment are: Public Embarrassment, Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions, and Naiveté. The themes that compose the core category Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences are: Unintentionally Hurt Others, Lost Control, and Embarrassed By Others’ Actions.

In general, the core categories of Unfulfilled Obligations and Direct Actions of Wrongdoing were both considered guilt categories, based primarily on the themes that created them and the emotion (guilt) that is most typically associated with those themes. The core categories of Embarrassment and Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences were, in general, considered shame categories based primarily on the themes that created them and the emotion (shame) that is most typically associated with those themes.

Self vs. self’s actions

The two shame core categories, Embarrassment and Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences were fit into the dimension of the self, and the two guilt core categories, Unfulfilled
Obligations and Direct Actions of Wrongdoing, were fit into the guilt dimension of self’s action by looking at the individual themes creating the core category. For example, the shame theme Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions represents a fear of how others will view the self as a whole. The guilt theme of Knowingly Did Something Wrong represents an action that was performed and resulted in guilt.

Public vs. private

Following the same model, the two shame core categories, Embarrassment and Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences, were fit into the shame dimension of the public audience, and the two guilt core categories, Unfulfilled Obligations and Direct Actions of Wrongdoing, were fit into the guilt dimension of private experience, by looking at the individual themes creating the core category. For example, the theme Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions, which tends to produce shame, is experienced in the presence of an audience. The theme Deceit, which tends to produce guilt, is a more private and personal experience.

Hide/escape vs. corrective action

In order to fit the core categories into the dimension of hide/escape vs. corrective action, it was necessary to look at individual narratives that represent the themes that compose the core categories in order to examine the type of action the participant took in response to the emotion of shame or guilt. The typical narratives selected to represent each theme were used to describe what the participant did in response to the situation, and whether it fit into the dimension of hide/escape or corrective action. If no specific action was taken, it was considered as no corrective action.

In the core category of Failure to Meet Expectations, the typical story representing Unfulfilled Obligations contained the phrase, “I made a lame excuse about being too busy, and this person never found out I was with another friend.” This represents an attempt to hide or escape from the situation. The typical story representing Selfishness contained the phrase, “I said something trying to cover what I did, such as the situation was very urgent, and etc. I did not speak much because I felt myself unjustifiable,” which also represents an attempt to hide or escape from the situation. In addition, the typical story representing Poor Academic Performance contained the phrase, “I did not know how to face others and how they would look at me,” which represents and attempt to hide or escape from the situation. The typical story
representing Did Not Do Something They Should Have did not contain any sort of corrective action, nor did the typical stories representing Forgetfulness, Regret, and Carelessness.

In the core category of Direct Action of Wrongdoing, the typical narratives representing the following themes did not contain any sort of corrective action: Deceit, Cheated (academics), Knowingly Did Something Wrong, Rude to Others, and Infidelity.

In the core category of Embarrassment, the typical narrative representing Public Embarrassment contained the phrase, “I wished I could find a hole in the earth and hide myself,” which indicates a desire to hide or escape from the situation. The typical narrative representing Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions did not contain any corrective action. The typical narrative representing Naiveté contained the phrase, “I did eventually say I would pay for everything and I apologized and cried some more and just went to my room,” which indicates an attempt at a corrective action.

In the core category of Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences, the typical narratives representing Unintentionally Hurt Others and Lost Control did not contain any sort of corrective action. The typical narrative representing Embarrassed by Others’ Actions contained the phrase, “I was in a dilemma of whether to leave the bathroom,” which indicates a desire to hide or escape from the situation.

The selections from the narratives in the core category of Failure to Meet Expectations which was identified as a guilt category, included situations in which there did not appear to be any corrective action, as well as situations in which the respondent made an excuse and/or tried to conceal the situation. These actions are more in accordance with the dimension of hiding or escaping a situation, which is associated with shame experiences, and not guilt experiences.

The core category of Direct Action of Wrongdoing, which was identified as a guilt category did not consistently contain any sort of corrective action in the excerpts presented to represent the themes that structure the core category. Furthermore, the core category of Embarrassment, which has been identified as a shame category, included narratives in which there were instances of the desire to hide or escape as well as corrective actions. Therefore, this shame core category of Embarrassment cannot be only associated with the desire to hide or escape in response to a shame experience. The core category of Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences which was identified as a shame category, did contain one excerpt that evidences a desire to escape a situation, and two excerpts that do not evidence any sort of a reaction.
The typical stories were used in this analysis regarding how the themes and categories fit into the dimension of hide or escape versus corrective action. In some cases, other stories in the themes depicted by typical stories may have had a different outcome than the typical story. However, the variation in the reactions of the subjects within the themes indicates there is inconsistency with the association of themes and emotions with the dimension of hide or escape versus corrective action. After reviewing the excerpts from narratives representing the themes which compose the core categories, there does not appear to be enough evidence to support the idea that shame experiences consistently result in the desire to hide or escape, and guilt experiences consistently result in the desire to engage in some sort of corrective action (Buss, 2001; Lewis, 1992, 1993; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney, 1990). This finding suggests an alternate theoretical construct to the notion of shame and guilt fitting into these previously studied dimensions.

This finding may be explained by the level at which themes and narratives were explored in order to fit them into the dimensions. The dimensions of public vs. private, and self vs. self’s actions were explored by looking at the themes that composed the core categories. The implication of the theme provided enough information to fit the core categories into these dimensions. For the dimension of hide/escape vs. corrective action, the narratives that created the themes were examined. Because this dimension required more in depth analysis into the reaction of the individual, it is suggested that the reaction to an emotional situation is based on individual perception and processing of the experience, in addition to cultural socialization.

**Cultural Associations of Shame and Guilt Based on Themes and Core Categories**

The themes dominant in overall shame narratives were: Lost Control, Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions, Public Embarrassment, Poor Academic Performance, and Regret. The themes dominant in overall guilt narratives were: Deceit, Did Not Do Something They Should Have, Knowingly Did Something Wrong, Unfulfilled Obligations, Unintentionally Hurt Others, Selfishness, and Rude to Others.

The themes dominant in overall American narratives were: Deceit, Did Not Do Something They Should Have, Knowingly Did Something Wrong, Lost Control, Unfulfilled Obligations, Unintentionally Hurt Others, Selfishness, and Regret. The themes dominant in overall Chinese narratives were: Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions, Public Embarrassment, Poor Academic Performance, and Rude to Others.
The themes dominant in American shame narratives were Lost Control, Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions, and Regret. The themes dominant in American guilt narratives were: Deceit, Did Not Do Something They Should Have, Knowingly Did Something Wrong, Unfulfilled Obligations, and Unintentionally Hurt Others. The themes dominant in Chinese shame narratives were: Public Embarrassment, and Poor Academic Performance. The themes dominant in Chinese guilt narratives were Selfishness and Rude to Others. The theme Regret is equally present in American shame and Chinese guilt stories.

For nine out of the twelve themes considered most frequent, those themes that were dominant in shame stories as opposed to guilt stories were also dominant in Chinese stories as opposed to American stories, and those themes dominant in guilt stories as opposed to shame stories were also dominant in American stories as opposed to Chinese stories. The three themes that did not follow this pattern were Lost Control, Regret, and Rude to Others. Both Lost Control and Regret were dominant in shame and American stories. Rude to Others was dominant in guilt and Chinese stories.

When themes were dominant in overall groups of shame versus guilt, and American versus Chinese narratives, they were most strongly represented in the individual group (American shame, American guilt, Chinese shame, and Chinese guilt) that was composed of these overall groups. For example, Deceit was more characteristic of guilt than shame stories, and more characteristic of American than Chinese stories. Deceit was therefore most strongly represented in American guilt stories. Ashamed by Others’ Perceptions was a unique theme because although it was more characteristic of overall shame stories and overall Chinese stories, this theme was most strongly represented in American shame stories. Selfishness was also a unique theme because although it was dominant in overall guilt and overall American narratives, it was most strongly represented in Chinese guilt stories. The difference between both themes’ representations in the expected group and the actual group was only .6% in both cases.

The core categories dominant in overall shame narratives are Embarrassment and Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences. The core categories dominant in overall guilt narratives are Failure to Meet Expectations and Direct Actions of Wrongdoing. The core categories dominant in overall American narratives were Failure to Meet Expectations, Direct Actions of Wrongdoing, and Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences. The core category dominant in overall Chinese narratives was Embarrassment. The core category dominant in
American shame narratives is Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences. The core category dominant in American guilt narratives was Failure to Meet Expectations. Direct Actions of Wrongdoing was equally present in American shame and American guilt narratives. The core category dominant in Chinese shame narratives was Embarrassment. No core category was dominant in Chinese guilt narratives.

Those core categories that were dominant in shame stories as opposed to guilt stories were also dominant in Chinese stories as opposed to American stories. Subsequently, those themes dominant in guilt stories as opposed to shame stories were also dominant in American stories as opposed to Chinese stories. The core category that did not follow this pattern was Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences. This core category was more characteristic in American stories than Chinese stories, and was slightly more present in shame than guilt stories.

Following the pattern of the 18 themes that composed the core categories, it was expected that when core categories were dominant in overall groups of shame versus guilt, and American versus Chinese narratives, they would be most strongly represented in the individual group (American shame, American guilt, Chinese shame, and Chinese guilt) that was composed of these overall groups. For example, Embarrassment was more characteristic of shame than guilt stories, and more characteristic of Chinese than American stories. Embarrassment was therefore, most strongly represented in Chinese shame stories. The only core category that did not follow this pattern was Direct Actions of Wrongdoing. This core category was dominant in guilt stories as opposed to shame stories, and dominant in American stories as opposed to Chinese stories. However, this core category was equally present in American shame and American guilt stories.

The association of shame with the Chinese culture and guilt with the American culture supports previous research (Benedict, 1946; Ha, 1995; Scheff, 1995). Benedict (1946) hypothesized that Americans were more likely to experience guilt than shame because of the private manner in which guilt is usually experienced. This hypothesis takes into account the comparison of shame and guilt within the dimensions of public versus private experience, as well as the comparison of these emotions within a cultural context. The association of guilt with American culture found in this research follows the interpretation of the American culture as more individualist than Asian cultures (Scheff, 1995). Asian cultures, on the other hand, have been considered shame cultures in which this emotion is culturally socialized in order to maintain a fear of losing face and a social fear of inadequacy (Ha, 1995; Scheff, 1995; Wilson,
1973). The association of shame with the Chinese culture found in this research supports the previous research labeling Asian cultures as shame cultures that have been said to cultivate shame as a form of social control and a means to maintain respect for others (Chu, 1972; Ha, 1995; Marsella et al., 1974; Scheff, 1995).

Implications and Applications

The implication of this research is structured around the notion that situations experienced by individuals in different cultures evoke different emotions (Ha, 1995; Okano, 1994). A similar scenario encountered by an American student and a Chinese student can cause a different response. This idiosyncrasy is depicted in the following example in which two scenarios taken from the original 218 narratives in this study are similar in experience but different in the reaction of the participant. The excerpt taken from the group of original American guilt stories reads as follows:

“My sophomore year at Miami I received unsatisfactory grades. This happened partly because I was more involved with my fraternity than I was with my coursework and because I was just flat out lazy.”

The excerpt taken from the group of original Chinese shame stories reads as follows:

“The first semester of my freshman year, I failed two courses – Advanced Mathematics and Linear Algebra. I went for sightseeing with my high school classmates on vacation. I felt it very difficult to talk about when I was asked about my study.”

The two selected excerpts were very similar in the relation to the actual situation of performing poorly in school. However, the situation resulted in the emotion of guilt for the American student, and shame for the Chinese student. Through this example the notion that similar experiences produce varying emotions in different cultures, is reinforced.

This notion is also supported by the representation of several themes and categories in the emotion and nationality groups. The theme Knowingly Did Something Wrong produced more guilt than shame for American students, and more shame than guilt for Chinese students. The themes of Lost Control, Rude to Others, and Regret produced more shame than guilt for American students, and more guilt than shame for Chinese students. Furthermore, the core category Direct Action of Wrongdoing produced an equal amount of shame and guilt for American students, but resulted in more guilt than shame for Chinese students. Lastly, the core
category Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences resulted in more shame than guilt for American students, and more guilt than shame for Chinese students. These data support the concept that similar scenarios may result in different emotional experiences across cultures.

Students in the American school system who have culturally different backgrounds may find themselves struggling to manage their integration into the American society while maintaining the cultural perspectives and/or perceptions with which they were socialized (Gudykunst, 2001; Cheng, 1999). This struggle may be manifest or latent to the individual as well as to those with whom the student may interact; the struggle may be obvious or hidden. Living in a culture different from one’s own does not, and should not, require an individual to assimilate completely and discard his or her innate or learned perceptions or worldviews. Rather, professionals working with minority students with culturally different perspectives from the mainstream American culture should embrace the differences of their students and clients. It is imperative that all professionals working with culturally different individuals recognize the importance of cultural competence, and do everything possible to facilitate the incorporation of this skill into their practice.

Cultural awareness will increase cultural competence. An individual who is culturally competent will be better prepared to work effectively with students and families who are culturally different from themselves. These professionals will be more able to take on the role of the other and thus validate the cultural background of their students and/or clients. For example, a culturally competent professional may be able to recognize a behavior exhibited by a student as customary for his or her culture, whereas a teacher may not understand the behavior or inappropriately consider the behavior a sign of disobedience. In essence, culturally competent individuals may have more insight into the world views of their students and/or clients, which will enable them to engage in perspective-taking and become more aware of the multiple factors that impact a student or client’s life.

There exists a large body of research in the area of shame and guilt as well as in the area cross-cultural experiences of the American and Chinese cultures. Future research exploring the cross-cultural experiences of other emotions would also be beneficial. Exploring various socialization patterns of cultures that are infused into the American culture would facilitate an understanding of the minority experience in American society. This understanding would in turn, support the need for cultural competence when working with culturally different
individuals. Further quantitative research in the area of cultural competence would also be beneficial in order to explore the relationship of cultural competence to providing effective service.
Limitations

Several limitations existed within this research. These limitations mostly affected the narrative descriptions of experiences of shame and guilt identified by the subjects in the study. The analysis of the data was based on these narrative descriptions as they were given.

A limitation existed first and foremost, with the nature of self-report data, specifically when exploring these data on the basis of perceptions. This study explored perceptions of shame and guilt according to American and Chinese college students, how they differ, and how they are alike. A limitation existed with the self-report method of data collection due to the various perceptions of these emotions that may already exist within the minds of the subjects. It is difficult to deconstruct perceptions on the basis of nationality and understanding of emotion, when there may be multiple understandings of these emotions within the same culture. Self-report data is, by nature, subjective and this must be taken into account for this research.

Another limitation exists with the subjects from whom the data were gathered. First, there is a certain degree of homogeneity within the American population of subjects. The American subjects attended a public state university in Southwest Ohio. There were 39 females and 33 males. The subjects are from a predominantly middle to upper class socio-economic status. This population does not represent the diversity of the American college student population, which in turn minimizes the diversity of perceptions that may have been taken into account in this study if the population was more diverse.

Participants also included 146 Chinese college students. There were 73 males and 73 females. Socio-economic status was not a consideration in the Chinese population. The fact that socio-economic status was not a consideration in the Chinese population, and was relatively homogeneous in the American population, generates the possibility that socio-economic status may have been a confounding variable in this study of perceptions. It is possible that there is a correlation between socio-economic status and perceptions of shame and guilt.

Another possible limitation that may be noted is the fact that the sample consisted of more Chinese stories than American stories. However, percentages were used throughout this study thus eliminating the effect of quantities of stories. Additionally, the ultimate goal of this research was the generalization of the themes as opposed to the systematic evaluation of the emotions in a quantified manner.
The open-ended nature of the questionnaire used in this study is another potential limitation. The structure of open-ended questionnaires allows for the possibility for the subject to respond how they see fit. If a scenario or experience is not reported, it does not mean that such an experience does not exist for that subject. A quantitative, close-ended questionnaire would be beneficial to verify the findings. In addition, it would be beneficial to have a second rater perform the cross-theme coding. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, inter-rater reliability was not examined.

Regarding the generalization of this research, because the subjects were college students in the American and Chinese populations, the findings should not be generalized to non-college students or individuals from other cultures. This research can, however, provide a framework by which to explore other populations in the context of cross-cultural variation in the experience of emotion.
Summary

A total of four core categories were constructed from the original 18 themes created while coding the 218 narratives from American and Chinese college students. The core categories and the themes that compose them are associated with shame and guilt, and the American and Chinese cultures in various manners. By looking at these associations clear differences between the emotions and the cultures to which they are most closely related, were found.

At the level of emotion, the core categories most closely associated with shame are Embarrassment and Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences. The core categories most closely associated with guilt are Failure to Meet Expectations and Direct Actions of Wrongdoing. At the level of nationality, the core categories most clearly connected to American narratives are Failure to Meet Expectations, Direct Actions of Wrongdoing, and Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences. The core category most clearly connected to Chinese narratives is Embarrassment. Except for the core category Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences, the core categories linked to shame are also linked to Chinese narratives, and the core categories related to guilt are related to American narratives. From these findings, it appears that shame is an emotion experienced more often within the Chinese culture, and guilt is experienced more often within the American culture as represented by the participants in this study.

Unintentional/Uncontrollable Occurrences was linked to American shame stories. Although this category is divergent from the finding that guilt is more likely to result from American experiences and shame is more likely to result from Chinese experiences, it is noted that this core category was linked to the shame experiences of American participants, as opposed to guilt experiences, which is consistent with the relation of this core category to the emotion of shame.

This research supports previous research suggesting there is a cultural element to emotion. Cross-cultural experiences of emotion can be explored through the construct of cultural socialization. The way in which individuals are socialized within their culture has an effect on the manner in which these individuals navigate through their everyday lives. The American and Chinese cultures are inherently dissimilar in their values, customs, mores, and folkways. As a
result, it is not unexpected that emotions have different meanings in these cultures. The differing experiences of shame and guilt for American and Chinese college students in this research can be used as a template for understanding cross-cultural differences in perception. The inability to fit shame and guilt into the dimension of hide/escape vs. corrective action in the manner it had been associated in previous research, suggests that in addition to the cultural element of emotion, there is also an individual element to emotion. Within a culture, individuals perceive and process experiences in different ways that cannot always be attributed to cultural socialization. Professionals working with culturally different students should consider the cultural background and individual identity formation of the students and families with whom they work, as well as their own worldviews, in order to provide culturally competent service and increase service utilization.
References


Merriam-Webster Dictionary at [http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary](http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary)


Appendix A (Questionnaire)

Gender ___________ Age ___________

This is a study about emotions. Everything you provide will be kept confidential. It is not necessary for you to provide your name. We hope everything you provide in this questionnaire is true and accurate.

Thank you for all your kind assistance.

Please recall one event that made you feel very guilty and write about it. Use the reverse side of this sheet and additional sheets if you need more space. Try to be detailed. Be sure to include the following aspects in your answer.
1. What makes you feel guilty?
2. Why did that happen?
3. What was your feeling and notion at that time?
4. Did you say anything at that time? If you did say something, please explain.
5. If there is anything that hasn't been covered in the above questions, please include them also.

Please recall one event that made you feel very shameful and write about it. Use the reverse side of this sheet and additional sheets if you need more space. Try to be detailed. Be sure to include the following aspects in your answer.
1. What makes you feel ashamed?
2. Why did that happen?
3. What was your feeling and notion at that time?
4. Did you say anything at that time? If you did say something, please explain.
5. If there is anything that hasn't been covered in the above questions, please include them also.