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Guilt and guilt-proneness, shame and shame-proneness in Indian and Italian young adults

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Abstract

This study investigated the distinct affective experiences of shame and guilt as well as the shame- and guilt-proneness in Indian and Italian young adults. Two undergraduate samples (132 Indian and 134 Italian) were administered the Emotional Experience Questionnaire (EEQ) and the Test of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA). Data showed that both emotion specificity and culture explain sizable amount of the variance in the emotion reports. Particularly, the distinction between shame and guilt as separate emotional experiences was confirmed. Moreover, Indian participants reported to react more intensely to shame, and Italian ones tended to react more intensely to guilt. However, considering the proneness, Indian young adults turned out to be more sensitive both to guilt and shame. These findings highlight the distinction between shame and guilt experiences and shame- and guilt-proneness. Further, they suggest a revision of the traditional hypothesis of a basic distinction between shame (Eastern) and guilt (Western) cultures.

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1. Introduction

Guilt and shame, like pride and embarrassment, are “self-conscious” emotions and play a central role in the construction of the self. Although both of these emotions may result from moral

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transgressions or various shortcomings and involve a negative evaluation of self, they are distinct emotions: important differences in their phenomenology have emerged in terms of adjustment, pathology, and interpersonal relatedness (Woien, Ernst, Patock-Peckham, & Nagoshi, 2003).

The specific literature suggests a useful distinction between guilt and shame as emotional experiences on the one hand (Wallbott & Scherer, 1995) and guilt and shame as personal (Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, 1992) or cultural (Mead, 1937) proneness on the other hand. First, it is worth differentiating guilt and shame as emotional experiences. As a “self-oriented” emotion, shame involves a global, negative self-evaluation associated with a feeling of helplessness or a sense of passivity in correcting the perceived fault. In a shame experience, the focus is with the self in its entirety: a person attaches a negative evaluation to the self due to the transgression, such as “I am a bad person” (Lewis, 1971). Consequently, in this toxic experience he/she feels diminished and worthless. Usually, he/she feels exposed, and strongly desires to disappear. During the shame episode, most people try to hide, to withdraw, to distance from others, and to avoid looking at them by lowering the head (Lewis, 1992). Often, shame elicits strong self-deprecating reactions of the entire self. Initially, hostility is directed toward the self, and then, as a “defensive strategy”, is redirected toward the rejecting other in retaliation.

On the other hand, guilt involves self-criticism for a specific action instead of the entire self, and so a distinction between the self and the action is rather clear. Feelings of guilt remain focused on a specific behaviour and the harm it may cause others. So, guilt does not affect one’s core identity, and the self remains basically intact. When experiencing guilt, a person may think, “I did a bad action”. Consequently, he/she feels a sense of remorse and regret over the wrongdoing, which may prompt reparative actions, like confessing, apologizing, or somehow repairing the misdeed. Usually, guilt experience is linked to the concern with one’s effect on others, and to the empathy by taking their perspective. Therefore, guilt is an adaptive and constructive moral affect, since it promotes behaviours that benefit interpersonal relationships (Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, 1989).

However, shame and guilt not only consist in transient emotional experiences, but also may be connected with a rather lasting affective predisposition. In this case scholars usually speak about guilt- and shame-proneness (Tangney et al., 1992). A shame-prone person, regardless of the circumstances, has the propensity to make internal, global and stable attributions. He/she is more likely to self-blame for behavioural errors, to engage in high rates of self-attribution for interpersonal transgressions, and to have a negative self-conception with a decreasing self-esteem. Moreover, shame-proneness seems to be significantly related to the experience of depression, fear of negative evaluation, social anxiety and social avoidance with an increase of public and private self-consciousness. Furthermore, shame-prone individuals are more likely to externalize blame, since, by blaming others and stressing an external locus of control, they think of assuaging the painful sensation of shame.

Conversely, a guilt-prone person usually makes internal, specific and unstable attributions when transgressions occur (Tangney et al., 1992). Generally, self-awareness of moral standards and ideals of the self, and negative self-evaluation, self-criticism are an important aspect in the description of guilt-proneness (Bybee, Merisca, & Velasco, 1998). In some cases guilt-prone individuals feel unable to repair, apologize, or amend for what they have done wrong (Bybee & Quiles, 1998). Obsessive rumination, seeking symbolic restitution, and magically undoing the wrong, may follow.

The above considerations about shame and guilt, shame- and guilt-proneness, however, are basically related to the Western cultural frame. These affects, like the others, are culturally scripted, since cultural beliefs and values shape the emotional experience focusing some events instead of others (Mesquita & Frijda, 1992). Focal events represent socially defined and shared concerns and are expected to be highly available. When they do occur the individual can hardly escape being emotionally affected (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000).

Therefore, by changing the cultural system it will modify the emotional profile of guilt and shame. Particularly, Wallbott and Scherer (1995) found that more “open” cultures, less stiffly bound by rules (i.e., with low values in distance from power and incertitude avoidance, and with high values in individualism) showed a predominance of guilt experiences, rather similar to the shame ones. Conversely, more “closed” cultures, characterized by high values in collectivism and high values in distance from power and incertitude avoidance, exhibited a predominance of shame experiences, quite different from the guilt ones.

As it is well known, Benedict (1946) and Mead (1937) have proposed a basic distinction between the “guilt culture” (Western) and the “shame culture” (Eastern) bound to a cultural ecology of secular and religious beliefs, patterned social relationships, and historical traditions. This clear-cut distinction was harshly criticized because of its sharpness and radicalism (Doi, 1973; Piers & Singer, 1971). Therefore, it is worth deepening this subject, since recent studies have highlighted the prevalence of guilt and shame in the different cultures. For instance, Menon and Shweder (1994), examining the myth of the Kali goddess depicted in the Orissa tradition as biting her own tongue, found that in India shame (*lajja*) assumes the shape of an antidote to anger.

In the present paper, we therefore wanted to examine whether North-Indian and North-Italian people differ in guilt and shame experience, because we expected that these samples embodied the concepts of guilt and shame cultures respectively. First, we investigated the emotional experiences of guilt and shame in terms of subjective feelings, physiological symptoms, as well as expressive behaviours. Second, we investigated whether Indian and Italian people could be differentiated in shame- and guilt-proneness. The current study was exploratory in nature.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

One hundred and thirty-two Indian undergraduates (66 women, 66 men) enrolled in different faculties (Economics, Law, Arts, Sciences, etc.) of various Universities of New Delhi (Jawaharlal Nehru University, S. Stephen College, Delhi University) volunteered to participate in this study. The choice of different faculties was due to the opportunity to recruit undergraduates with different professional interests. The mean age of the Indian participants was 21.81 years ($SD = 3.47$). One hundred and thirty-four Italian undergraduates (75 women, 59 men) enrolled in different faculties (Economics, Law, Arts, Sciences, etc.) of the State University and the Catholic University of Milan volunteered to participate in this study. The mean age of the Italian participants was 22.12 years ($SD = 2.08$). Although it is difficult to ensure equivalence across samples, no significant between-group differences were found for socio-economic status and educational level. Participants

in both cultures were born and raised in their home countries and had no overseas living experiences.

2.2. Procedure

Participants were tested in small groups (about 15 students), in class. At the beginning of each session, participants were advised that the investigation was a “psychological study to learn more about emotions and perceptions between Indian and Italian young adults”. The undergraduates received an envelope in which they found a form to fill in with personal information and two questionnaires: the *Emotional Experience Questionnaire* (EEQ, Scherer, 1988) and the *Test of Self-Conscious Affects* (TOSCA, Tangney et al., 1989), both accompanied by written instructions. The order of the two questionnaires was counterbalanced.

2.3. Psychometric measures

To verify the emotional experiences of guilt and shame, participants were given the EEQ. This instrument, validated by an international survey on emotion antecedents and reaction carried out in 37 different countries (Scherer & Wallbott, 1994), consists of a one-page general instruction and two-page sections (one for guilt and one for shame). The instructions asked the respondent to recall a situation in which he or she had recently experienced a strong emotion of guilt (or shame) and for which they vividly remembered the circumstances and their reactions. The two-page questionnaire sections for guilt or shame consisted of four parts: (a) situation description; (b) subjective feeling state (like the duration, the intensity, changes in the relationships with other people); (c) physiological symptoms and expressive verbal and non-verbal reactions; (d) appraisal of the emotional experience.

EEQ was presented in the English version for North-Indian undergraduates and in the Italian version for the North-Italian ones (Scherer, 1988). The choice of English for Indian people was due to the observation that English, as second official language, is more likely shared than Hindi, the first national language, which is more often corrupted by local dialects. The data of each participant were transferred from the questionnaires to data-coding sheets. The following scales were thus formed.

2.3.1. Physiological symptoms

Gellhorn and Loofburrow's (1963) distinction between ergotropic and trophotropic systems was used. (a) *Ergotropic symptoms*: change in breathing, heart beating faster, muscles tensing/trembling, and perspiring/moist hands; (b) *Trophotropic symptoms*: lump in throat, stomach troubles, and crying/sobbing; (c) *Felt temperature*: feeling cold/shivering, feeling warm/pleasant, and feeling hot/cheeks burning (0 being assigned when no temperature symptom was mentioned).

2.3.2. Expressive behaviour

Four composite variables were formed: (a) *Movement behaviour*: withdrawing (−1) versus moving toward (1) people and things (0 being assigned when no movement category was mentioned); (b) *Non-verbal behaviour*: laughing/smiling, crying/sobbing, other facial expression change, screaming/yelling, other voice changes, and changes in gesturing; (c) *Paralinguistic behaviour*:

speech melody change, speech disturbances, and speech tempo change; (d) *Verbal behaviour*, for which respondents could check the categories silence, short utterance, one or two sentences, and lengthy utterance, an interval scale variable with scores from 0 (silence) to 3 (lengthy utterance) was constructed (Scherer & Wallbott, 1994).

To ascertain guilt- and shame-proneness participants were given the TOSCA. This instrument consists of a series of brief scenarios (10 negative and 5 positive), measuring shame-proneness and guilt-proneness, externalisation, detachment/unconcern, alpha pride and beta pride. The TOSCA proposes 15 hypothetical situations that the respondent can encounter in the day-to-day life. These scenarios are followed by several common reactions: respondents have to imagine themselves in these situations and then they have to indicate how likely they would be to react in each of the ways described on a five-point scale (from “not likely” to “very likely”). TOSCA allows the assessment of guilt and shame dispositions that is to ascertain individual differences in the degree to which people are prone to experience shame and guilt across a range of situations involving failures or transgressions (Woien et al., 2003). Translation of the TOSCA into Italian was done according to the guidelines specified by the International Test Commission (Hambleton, 1994), using the back-translation procedure. A committee of three bilingual research assistants decided on the final Italian version of the test (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997).

2.4. Analysis

Mixed design ANOVAs (2 countries \times 2 emotions \times 2 genders) were computed for each questionnaire item. For items that included the answer alternative “not applicable” (0), the ANOVAs were run excluding cases where this alternative had been mentioned. When we proceeded to analyse the items that could not be considered as in an interval or at least as in an ordinal scale (i.e., agent responsible, coping attempts) each answer alternative was considered as a separate item and Chi-square analyses were run.

3. Results

3.1. Emotional experiences of guilt and shame (EEQ results)

Table 1 present the means and SD by country for the emotional parameters. Here only significant results will be mentioned. First, it is worth analysing the data concerning the similarity and the distinction between guilt and shame experiences. As regards the *occurrence*, guilt experiences were significantly more recent than shame ones $F(1, 215) = 7.61, p < .01$. With respect to the duration guilt was experienced also for a longer period than shame $F(1, 215) = 23.51, p < .001$. Looking at *physiological symptoms* and expressive behaviour, shame resulted hotter than guilt $F(1, 214) = 28.02, p < .001$ and implied more avoidance attitude, leading to withdrawal from others/things, $F(1, 213) = 5.33, p < .03$.

Concerning *verbal reactions*, guilt and shame resulted in a predominant mention of reactions as “silence” (30% of answers). As regards the control attempts, shame was reported to be more controlled than guilt $F(1, 203) = 6.95, p < .01$, while guilt was perceived as more expected than shame in terms of *novelty* $F(1, 200) = 5.73, p < .02$. For both guilt and shame the self was generally

Table 1
Mean and standard deviation for Indian and Italian participants on emotional parameters

	Guilt						Shame					
	Italian		Indian		Total		Italian		Indian		Total	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
When	2.92	1.06	2.98	1.14	2.94	1.09	3.12	1.01	3.27	1	3.18	1.01
Duration	3.27	1.06	3.37	.99	3.31	1.03	2.38	1.21	3.35	1	2.78	1.22
Intensity	2.81	.82	2.98	.97	2.88	.89	2.79	1.02	2.85	.94	2.81	.98
Ergotropic arousal	1.24	1.20	.88	1.17	1.09	1.20	1.49	1.17	.93	1.08	1.26	1.16
Trophotropic arousal	.92	.97	.53	.70	.76	.89	.53	.74	.51	.72	.52	.73
Felt temperature	.005	.42	.13	.56	.008	.48	.52	.64	.22	.57	.39	.63
Movement	-.14	.55	-.15	.47	-.15	.51	-.25	.53	-.25	.55	-.25	.54
Non-verbal behaviour	1.04	.84	.97	.91	1.01	.87	1.18	.90	.92	.76	1.07	.85
Paralinguistic behaviour	.44	.63	.35	.67	.40	.65	.50	.70	.38	.61	.45	.66
Verbal behaviour	.47	.53	.33	.49	.41	.52	.49	.58	.40	.49	.45	.54
Control	1.97	.76	2.31	.69	2.11	.75	2.13	.73	2.18	.61	2.27	.70
Novelty	1.73	.71	1.50	.73	1.63	.73	1.55	.69	1.34	.56	1.46	.65
Pleasantness	2.87	.43	2.69	.64	2.79	.53	2.67	.61	2.73	.54	2.69	.58
Significance	2.10	.76	2.07	.77	2.08	.77	2.26	.66	2.11	.80	2.18	.74
Evaluation	1.97	.77	2.08	.71	2.02	.74	1.89	.82	1.98	.79	1.93	.81
External standard	2.14	.67	2.09	.81	2.12	.72	1.80	.70	2.05	.67	1.90	.70
Internal standard	1.53	.63	1.86	.87	1.65	.75	1.54	.59	1.69	.83	1.60	.69
Social importance	1.81	.62	1.87	.77	1.84	.68	1.80	.53	1.86	.71	1.82	.60

considered as the most important factor *responsible* for the event (see Table 2), even if for the shame situation the agent evaluation was more often attributed to friends (8.6%), colleagues or acquaintances (8%) and chance (5.6%).

As to *coping* ability (see Table 3), in the guilt experience most respondents (32.5%) believed that they could positively influence the event and change the consequences, while in the shame

Table 2
Percentage frequency of responsibility attribution

	Guilt			Shame		
	Italian	Indian	Total	Italian	Indian	Total
Yourself	81.7	62.5	72.8	56.7	52.7	54.9
Close relatives	3.2	2.5	2.9	3.4	4.2	3.7
Close friends	3.2	6.2	4.6	11.1	5.6	8.6
Acquaintances	1.1	3.7	2.4	6.7	9.7	8.0
Strangers	4.3	5	4.6	5.5	0	3.1
Authority figures	1.1	2.5	1.7	2.2	5.6	3.7
Natural forces	0	5	2.4	5.5	8.3	6.8
Supernatural forces	1.1	2.5	1.7	0	0	0
Fate	3.2	2.5	2.9	5.5	5.6	5.6
Chance	1.1	7.6	4.0	3.4	8.3	5.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 3
Percentage frequency of coping evaluation

	Guilt			Shame		
	Italian	Indian	Total	Italian	Indian	Total
No action	12.6	7.3	10.2	16	10.6	13.6
Influence the event	26	40.4	32.5	15.1	25.6	19.7
Escape	18.1	11.9	15.3	8.4	13.8	10.8
Think something else	18.9	11.9	15.7	34.4	20.2	28.2
See yourself as powerless	24.4	28.5	26.3	26.1	29.8	27.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

situation they pretended that nothing important had happened and tried to think of something else (28.2%), or saw themselves as powerless and dominated by the event and its consequences (27.7%). For the issue of *morality*, guilt was considered as more immoral ($F(1,145) = 4.09$, $p < .05$).

Second, the results of the present study highlighted a range of differences between Indian and Italian participants in shame and guilt experiences. About the *duration*, Indian participants declared that the shame experiences lasted longer than the Italian ones $F(1,220) = 41.99$, $p < .001$, while Italian participants declared that shame experience situations were shorter than guilt ones $F(1,215) = 21.22$, $p < .001$. The data related to *intensity* showed that Indian participants felt more intense shame experiences than did Italian ones $F(1,220) = 6.04$, $p < .02$. With respect to *physiological symptoms* we found that ergotropic arousal was stronger for the Italian sample both in guilt and shame experiences $F(1,241) = 4.72$, $p < .03$ and $F(1,220) = 13.61$, $p < .001$ respectively. Referring to Indian participants, trophotropic arousal was more pronounced for the Italian ones in the guilt situation with a higher number of symptoms $F(1,241) = 10.31$, $p < .002$. Moreover, Italian respondents reacted to the guilt experience with more avoidance behaviour $F(1,213) = 4.74$, $p < .03$. For the Italians the shame experience was “hotter” than for Indians $F(1,220) = 10.61$, $p < .001$. In terms of non-verbal expression, Italians participants produced somewhat greater non-verbal behaviour in shame experiences $F(1,220) = 4.39$, $p < .04$. About *pleasantness*, for the Italian participants guilt was the emotion evaluated as more unpleasant $F(1,230) = 6.24$, $p < .02$.

Indian participants declared that they made stronger attempts to *control* both shame $F(1,216) = 15.01$, $p < .001$ and guilt $F(1,230) = 7.68$, $p < .01$, and they evaluated these emotions as more expected $F(1,211) = 7.58$, $p < .01$ and $F(1,230) = 4.20$, $p < .05$ for shame and guilt respectively. With regard to the attribution of an agent or cause to the emotional experience, in the guilt situation Indian respondents more often attributed the responsibility to natural forces ($\chi^2[1, N = 246] = 13.12$, $p < .001$). Both in guilt and shame situations, moreover, they more often attributed the responsibility to chance ($\chi^2[1, N = 248] = 6.76$, $p < .01$ and $\chi^2[1, N = 224] = 7.47$, $p < .01$ respectively). However, in guilt experiences Italian participants considered the self as more responsible than did the Indian ones ($\chi^2[1, N = 245] = 13.48$, $p < .001$), while in shame situations they more often attributed the responsibility for the event to strangers ($\chi^2[1, N = 224] = 8.84$, $p < .01$).

In terms of *coping*, Italian respondents reported more often than Indian ones that they pretended that nothing important had happened and tried to think of something else, both in guilt

and shame situations ($\chi^2[1, N = 245] = 4.35, p < .04$ and $\chi^2[1, N = 224] = 8.03, p < .01$ respectively). For the issue of *morality*, shame was considered by Indian participants as being more immoral than did Italian ones $F(1, 174) = 7.33, p < .01$.

3.2. *Guilt-proneness and shame-proneness (TOSCA results)*

The data collected by TOSCA suggested that for both Indian and Italian participants guilt-proneness ($M = 56.67, SD = 7.34$) was greater than shame-proneness ($M = 37.20, SD = 8.80$). This difference was significant, $F(1, 255) = 1212.90, p < .001$. Moreover, Indian respondents showed systematically higher values than Italian ones both for guilt-proneness (Italian: $M = 55.37, SD = 6.44$; Indian: $M = 58.06, SD = 8.00$) and shame-proneness (Italian: $M = 35.61, SD = 9.16$; Indian: $M = 38.90, SD = 8.13$). Also these differences were significant $F(1, 255) = 11.28, p < .001$ and $F(1, 255) = 12.06, p < .001$ for guilt- and shame-proneness respectively.

4. Discussion

The results of this study support the hypothesis that shame and guilt are distinct affective experiences, independent of the cultural frame. First, both for Indian and Italian participants the guilt episodes were more recent than shame ones. Second, shame, even if more remote and less frequent than guilt, was prominent for the respondents, and was felt as a more painful experience, so that it remains impressed for a longer time in the memory. Such a condition seems to be linked to the rumination process that distinguishes the shame experience (Gilbert, Pehl, & Allan, 1994). Third, shame was felt as a “hotter” emotion that produces more avoidance attitude and is distinguished by more intense control attempts. Fourth, guilt appeared as more predictable than shame. Even if in both emotions the attribution of main responsibility for the wrongdoing was the self, nevertheless in the shame situation there was a major attribution of responsibility to external factors that being presumably less controllable, and also more unforeseeable. Fifth, guilt experience was associated with more positive coping, supported by the belief in influencing the event stream and in changing the consequences of one’s wrongdoing, while in the shame experience subjects felt helpless and powerless, or preferred to resort to a denying mechanism, by pretending nothing had happened.

Beside the differences about the distinction between shame and guilt, this study highlighted other differences concerning the cultural frame. Indian and Italian undergraduates showed different patterns of response with respect to guilt and shame experiences. Particularly, for the Indian participants shame was the more lasting and intense experience, whereas for the Italian ones guilt was more enduring. Italian respondents showed also a greater trophotropic arousal in the guilt situation than Indian ones, with a “freezing” effect and a general withdrawal from others. Consequently, Italian participants felt guilt as a more unpleasant affective experience, even if such a feeling did not imply a particular involvement in attempting to make amends. According to them guilt-generating behaviours were evaluated as more immoral, while for Indian respondents shame-generating behaviours were considered as more immoral.

Furthermore, agency was a crucial topic differentiating the country. Indian participants attributed the responsibility of the event to natural forces and to chance more often than Italian ones.

In Indian society resignation is a prevailing attitude, supported by the Hindu religion in which the principle of “karma” holds a central position. According to this principle “everyone gets from destiny what he/she deserves” (Madan, 1997). Conversely, Italian participants, especially in the guilt experience, attributed a greater responsibility to themselves.

This phenomenon seems to give some support to the independence/interdependence model (Kitayama et al., 2000). While in the independence condition stronger attention is reserved to the individual by him/herself, in the interdependence condition greater importance is given to togetherness and group harmony. In this framework, *lajja* (the Hindi word for “shame”) refers to a focused attention for the social order. Having a sense of *lajja* means to be civilised and to conduct oneself in a becoming manner (Menon & Shweder, 1994).

As to bodily reactions Italian respondents reported a greater number of symptoms indicating a higher ergotropic arousal than Indian ones, since they are used to reacting more openly and strongly to emotional situations (Anolli, 2002). Conversely, Indian participants declared that they controlled their emotional reactions more strictly both in guilt and shame experiences, so as not to distress the social harmony.

5. Conclusion

We may confirm that both emotion specificity and culture explain sizable amounts of variance in the emotion reports. Moreover, this study allows for a greater distinction between guilt and shame experiences on one hand, and guilt- and shame-proneness on the other hand. Generally, Indian participants showed a greater proneness both to guilt and shame compared to Italian ones. At first sight such a result seems to contradict the hypothesis that in Eastern countries there would be a prevalence of shame, whereas in Western ones there would be a predominance of guilt. However, this phenomenon is not surprising if we think that in India the social rules, the obedience to authority, the principle of saving one’s face, as well as the protection of group harmony are basic and strongly influence shame and guilt. These self-conscious emotions are strictly linked to the social context and may serve to highlight and to preserve social standards. The tendency to hold the social order is strongly deep-rooted in India, where the division into castes lasted for ages. Such a distinction, which originated also from religious and philosophical principles, implied a range of norms to manage the social life. In the crystallized world of castes individuality lost its importance (Krishnan, 1997).

We also obtained partially different results from data regarding guilt and shame experiences and from those concerning guilt- and shame-proneness. If we consider emotional experiences, investigated by the EEQ, the hypothesis of a distinction between the guilt and shame cultural framework (Benedict, 1946; Mead, 1937) seems to be supported. Conversely, if we address our attention to proneness to guilt and shame, investigated by TOSCA, we find that a clear-cut distinction between guilt and shame cultures does not fit these results. Indian people seem to be more sensitive and prone both to guilt and shame. We may suppose that they show an increased sensitivity to both shame and guilt to keep togetherness and harmony, to know one’s rightful place in society, to be conscious of one’s duties and responsibilities, as well as to persevere in the performance of social role obligations. Likely Indian culture is more sensitive to self-conscious emotions such as guilt and shame more for other-related reasons (that is, not to offend others) than

self-related reasons (that is, to save his/her own face). But further studies are required to examine this issue more carefully.

6. Limitations

It is worthwhile to point out some limitations of this study. First, the participants were only undergraduates and consequently generalization beyond university students must be made cautiously. Second, the questionnaire approach was used. Self-reports, as is well known, could be biased. Even if respondents are willing to answer as faithfully as possible, they might not completely recall the events, or they may give defensive or interpretative answers due to self-esteem concern or social desirability effects. The anonymity of the questionnaire, however, particularly in group administration, should reduce these potential biases. Third, the verbal description of the experiences might change the salience of some aspects; for instance, in cases where no handy verbal labels are available. However, the questionnaire approach allows the investigation of some aspects of the emotional experience, like cognitive processes, that could not be examined through different methodological approaches such as laboratory-based induction of shame and guilt experiences.

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