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# Shame as a Culture-Specific Emotion Concept

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## Abstract

On the assumption that shame is a universal emotion, cross-cultural research on shame relies on translations assumed to be equivalent in meaning. Our studies here questioned that assumption. In three studies ( $N$ s, 108, 120, 117), *shame* was compared to its translations in Spanish (*vergüenza*) and in Malayalam (*nanakedu*). American English speakers used *shame* for the emotional reaction to moral failures and its use correlated positively with *guilt*, whereas *vergüenza* and *nanakedu* were used less for moral stories and their use correlated less with the guilt words. In comparison with Spanish and Malayalam speakers' ratings of their translations, American English speakers rated *shame* and *guilt* to be more similar to each other.

## Keywords

translation – moral – nanakedu – vergüenza – guilt

When emotion scientists illustrate culture-specific emotion concepts, the examples are most often *amae* from Japanese, *fago* from Ifaluk, or *shadenfreude*

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from German. Here we suggest that *shame* from American English can be added to the list.

Shame — or more precisely, the emotion referred to by the term — has been theorized to be an everyday pancultural human emotional response to certain types of failure with important consequences. A substantial scientific literature has emerged on shame: Shame is said to be one of the primary moral emotions (Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Shame is said to play a role in one's personal identity (Scheff, 1988), to protect one's self from devaluation by others (Sznycer et al., 2016), and to promote social cohesion by appeasing a potential transgressor (Keltner & Harker, 1998). Shame is said to be linked to an array of pathologies, including depression, anxiety, and traumatic stress reaction (Cunha, Matos, Faria, & Zagalo, 2012; Pinto-Gouveia & Matos, 2011; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). However, studies on shame rely on the English term *shame* or on its translations in other languages. The question that motivated this article is whether the English word *shame* and its translations are equivalent in meaning.

In cross-cultural research on shame, the assumption that the shame-related words are translation equivalents leads to specific interpretations of findings. Cultural differences are interpreted as differences in the intensity of shame or in the causes or consequences of shame, probably originating from other cultural factors, but shame itself is assumed to be the same reaction (Anolli & Pascucci, 2005; Breugelmans & Poortinga, 2006; El-Jamil, 2003; Fischer, Manstead, & Rodriguez Mosquera, 1999; Kitayama, Markus, & Matsumoto, 1995; Verduyn, Mechelen, Tuerlinckx, Scherer, 2013; Zhong et al., 2008).

By contrast, other studies hint that the English term *shame* may not be equivalent to the term's translation in other languages: The Japanese term *hazukashii* can be translated into English as both *shame* and *embarrassment* (Rusch, 2004). The Russian term *стыд* can be translated into English as *shame*, *guilt*, and *embarrassment* (Ogarkova, Soriano, & Lehr, 2012). One study identified 113 shame-related terms in Chinese (Li, Wang, & Fischer, 2004), with no evidence that any one is shame's equivalent. Similarly, other studies showed the non-equivalency of English term *shame* to its translations in various other languages (Al Jallad, 2002; Dineen, 1990; Geertz, 1961, 1974; Keeler, 1983; Levy, 1984; Menon & Shweder, 1994, 2003; Myers, 1979; Parish 1991; Scheff, 2014).

Despite a plethora of studies suggesting that the shame-related words in different languages are not equivalent in meaning, the specific sense in which their meanings differ are rarely examined. One previous study found that American *shame* is more guilt-like compared to Bengkulu *malu* (Fessler, 2004): When reporting naturally occurring shame events, participants' shame

accounts was associated with guilt-like accounts in California (America) but not in Bengkulu (Indonesia). In a task, where participants generated synonym for shame, there was a closer association between shame and guilt in California than in Bengkulu. According to Fessler, this pattern of overlap between shame and guilt in individualistic cultures may be prominent worldwide.

In this article, we examine whether the American English term *shame* differs from its Spanish (*vergüenza*) or Malayalam translation (*nanakedu*) in their moral sense. Studies using the translations of *shame* in Spanish and Malayalam — two languages being examined here — also indicate that these terms may lack a moral sense that *shame* has: Features such as moral transgression and guilty feeling are the most typical features within *shame* in American English but least typical within *vergüenza*, its Spanish translation (Hurtado-Mendoza, Fernández-Dols, Parrott, & Carrera, 2010). American *shame* was more applicable to moral violations than its Malayalam translation *nanakedu* (Kollareth & Russell, 2017).

Shame and guilt have been assumed to be such highly similar moral emotions that the challenge has been to distinguish them (Nelissen, Breugelmans, & Zeelenberg, 2013; Teroni & Deonna, 2008). Based on previous research, here we consider the English term *guilt* or their translations as typical reaction to moral failure. At least in the three languages being examined here *guilt* or its translation had a clear moral sense: *Guilt* is caused by breaching a moral standard (Lazarus, 1991; Nathanson, 1987, 1997). *Culpa* in Spanish is a typical reaction to moral violation that affects another person (Exterbarria & Perez, 2002). *Guilt* and its Malayalam translation, *kuttabodham*, were highly similar in their applicability to various moral violations (Kollareth & Russell, 2017).

In three studies, we compared *shame* in American English to its Spanish and to its Malayalam translation. In Study 1, participants from each of these three language groups used the words *shame* and *guilt* or their translations for non-moral and moral stories. Study 2 replicated the findings in Study 1 with a different set of stories. In Study 3, participants simply judged the similarity-dissimilarity of *shame* or its translation to their experience of *guilt* and other emotions.

## 1 Study 1: Emotional Reactions to Non-Moral and Moral Failures

Native speakers of three languages — American English, Spanish, and Malayalam — rated the emotional reactions that they thought a protagonist would feel to non-moral and moral failures. Six such failures were described in stories: three non-moral and three moral. The emotion response scale consisted of three emotion words — *guilt*, *shame*, and *sadness*.

## 1.1 Method

### 1.1.1 Participants

Participants ( $N = 108$ ), all undergraduate students, were native speakers of three language groups: 36 American English speakers from Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts (28 women, eight men,  $M_{age} = 19.2$  years, age range: 18–21 years), 36 Spanish speakers from Autonomía University of Madrid in Madrid (28 women, eight men,  $M_{age} = 21.0$  years, age range: 19–25 years), and 36 Malayalam speakers from St. Xavier's College in Thiruvananthapuram, India (16 women, 20 men,  $M_{age} = 19.1$  years, age range: 18–21 years). American English speakers received course credit for their participation, and Spanish and Malayalam speakers voluntarily participated.

### 1.1.2 Stories

Six stories (Appendix A) described non-moral and moral violations by a protagonist, named Sam (which is a commonly used name for English and Spanish speakers) or Surya (for Malayalam speakers). In a pre-test, 10 raters judged the immorality of each of the 6 stories on a scale in which 0 = *not at all immoral* and 7 = *extremely immoral*. Non-moral failures were barely immoral: English ( $M = 1.18$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ), Spanish, ( $M = 1.11$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ), Malayalam ( $M = 1.42$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ), but immoral failures were clearly immoral: English ( $M = 4.77$ ,  $SD = 0.46$ ), Spanish, ( $M = 5.11$ ,  $SD = 0.38$ ), Malayalam ( $M = 5.62$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ).

### 1.1.3 Translation

*Guilt*, *shame*, and *sadness* were translated as *culpa*, *verguenza*, and *tristeza* in Spanish (Hurtado-de-Mendoza et al., 2010; Hurtado-de-Mendoza, Molina, Fernández-Dols, 2013; Etxebarria, 2000; Etxebarria, Isai, & Perez, 2002; Etxebarria & Perez, 2003). These words were translated as *kuttabodham*, *nanakkedu*, and *sangkadam* in Malayalam. Prior studies have not examined these emotion words in Malayalam and so we relied on the translation-back-translation method to arrive at the best translations. A group of bilingual speakers translated these English words into Malayalam. Another group of bilingual speakers, who had not read the original English words, back-translated the Malayalam words into English. The best translations largely agreed with the original English terms (80% to 100%).

The stories and instructions were also translated into Spanish and Malayalam using the translation-back-translation method. A bilingual speaker in Spanish and Malayalam translated the English questionnaire into Spanish and Malayalam respectively. Another bilingual, who had not read the original English version, back-translated the translation. Back translation largely agreed with the original English version. Discussions between the translator and the back-translator resolved the few inconsistencies.

#### 1.1.4 Procedure

Participants received the six stories in one of two orders: For half of the participants, the order was the same but had been chosen randomly; for the other half, the order was the reverse. Participants were asked to read each story and indicate the emotional reaction of the protagonist — Sam/Surya, using the emotion response scale. After responding to each of the six stories, participants answered the demographic questions.

### 1.2 Results and Discussion

1.2.1 Translations for *Shame* and *Guilt* in Non-moral and Moral Failures  
*Shame* in American English was rated high for the emotional reaction to moral violations, but its translations — *vergüenza* in Spanish and *nanakedu* in Malayalam — were not. In an analysis of variance with language (3 levels) as between-subject variable, and story-type (2 levels: moral vs non-moral) and emotion word (2 levels) as within-subject variable, each of the main and interaction effects was significant,  $ps < .001$ . A follow-up analysis of the significant three-way interaction showed that language x story-type interaction was significant for *shame/vergüenza/nanakedu*,  $F(2, 105) = 29.70$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not *guilt/culpa/kuttabodham*,  $F(2, 105) = 0.71$ ,  $p = .493$ . Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the intensity rating for the various words in non-moral and moral stories.

TABLE 1 Mean (standard deviation) intensity rating for shame and guilt words for non-moral and moral stories, study 1

Language (word)	Non-moral	Moral
Guilt words		
American English ( <i>guilt</i> )	2.06 <sub>a</sub> (1.68)	5.75 <sub>b</sub> (1.04)
Spanish ( <i>Culpa</i> )	1.92 <sub>a</sub> (1.42)	5.02 <sub>b</sub> (1.58)
Malayalam ( <i>Kuttabodham</i> )	0.98 <sub>a</sub> (1.06)	4.52 <sub>b</sub> (1.48)
Shame words		
American English ( <i>shame</i> )	5.32 <sub>a</sub> (1.19)	4.92 <sub>a</sub> (1.11)
Spanish ( <i>Vergüenza</i> )	5.52 <sub>a</sub> (1.23)	2.46 <sub>b</sub> (1.24)
Malayalam ( <i>Nanakedu</i> )	4.12 <sub>a</sub> (1.58)	1.19 <sub>b</sub> (1.36)

Note. Means on an 8-point scale (0-not at all to 7-extremely). The mean values are the average collapsed across stories: across three non-moral stories and across three moral stories. Different subscripts within a row indicate a significant difference based on paired sample t-tests.

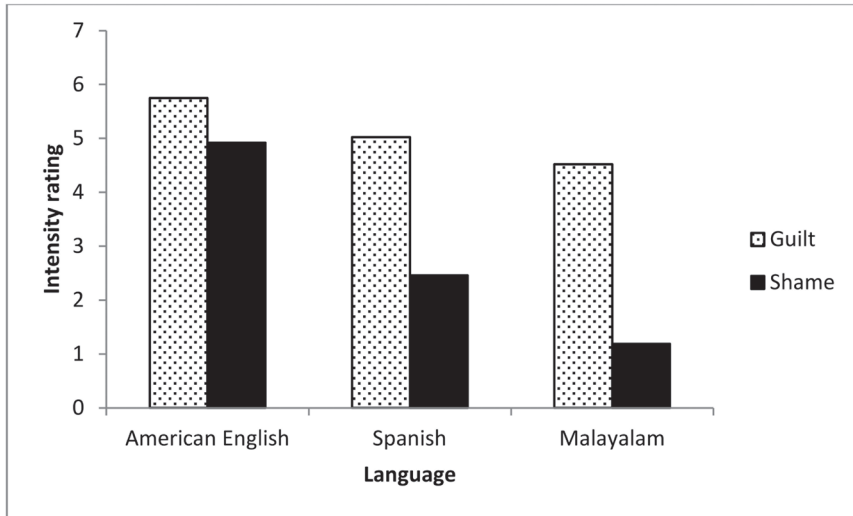


FIGURE 1 Intensity rating for *guilt* and *shame* for moral stories for each language separately, Study 1.

Across languages, guilt words were used for moral stories. Paired sample-*t* tests showed that *guilt/culpa/kuttabodham* rating for moral stories was significantly greater than for non-moral stories,  $ps < .001$ .

By contrast, there was a language difference for the use of shame words. Paired sample-*t* tests showed that *vergüenza* or *nanakedu* (Spanish and Malayalam translation of *shame*) ratings for non-moral stories was significantly greater than for moral stories,  $ps < .001$ . However, in American English, *shame* rating did not significantly differ between moral and non-moral stories,  $p = .157$ . Figure 1 illustrates the language difference for the use of shame words for moral stories.

### 1.2.2 Correlational Analysis

Even if means differ, it might be argued that intensity accounts for means but that individuals use the words proportionately. But individual differences in use of guilt and shame words reinforce the conclusion that *shame* and its translations are not used proportionately. Across the six stories, the average correlation between shame and guilt words for English was .44, but .32 in Spanish, and -.17 in Malayalam. Thus, the more American English speakers found *guilt* appropriate, they tended to find *shame* appropriate. Spanish speakers a little less so, and Malayalam speakers not at all.

To sum up, guilt words — *guilt/culpa/kuttabodham* — were used similarly across the stories, were highly relevant to the emotional reaction to moral

violations, and can be considered translations of one another. By contrast, shame words — *shame/vergüenza/nanakedu* — were used differently from one another. For American English speakers, *shame* was used for moral stories and its use correlated positively with *guilt*. But *vergüenza* (Spanish) and *nanakedu* (Malayalam) were used less for moral stories and their use correlated less with the guilt words. The three shame words are not translations of one another.

## 2 Study 2: Matching Emotion Words to Moral Situations

Study 1 relied on just 3 moral failures in its demonstration of a language difference. In Study 2, we sought to replicate in a new and larger set of stories the finding that American English word *shame* was used for emotional reaction to moral violations and its use correlated with *guilt*, more so than did its alleged translations, *vergüenza* and *nanakedu*.

A larger set of stories allowed us to examine failures of both proscriptive and prescriptive morality. In Study 1, our moral stories presented violations of proscriptive morality (moral rules that specify what we should *not* do, such as cheating and stealing). No story was a violation of prescriptive morality (moral rules that specify what we *should* do, such as help others). Emotional reaction to these two types of rules might differ (Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013; Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp, 2009).

Native speakers of three languages — American English, Spanish, and Malayalam — rated the emotional reactions that they thought a protagonist would feel in prescriptive and proscriptive moral violations described in stories. There were eleven stories: five prescriptive and six proscriptive. Participants read eleven stories and rated the intensity of each of three emotions (shame, guilt, sadness) that they thought the protagonist of a story would feel.

### 2.1 Method

The method is the same as in Study 1 except as noted.

#### 2.1.1 Participants

Participants ( $N = 120$ ), were different from those in Study 1, but were recruited from the same language groups and institutions: 40 American English speakers (37 women, three men,  $M_{age} = 18.9$  years, age range: 17–22 years), 40 Spanish speakers (33 women, seven men,  $M_{age} = 20.7$  years, age range: 18–23 years), and 40 Malayalam speakers (35 women, five men,  $M_{age} = 19.3$  years, age range: 18–23 years).

### 2.1.2 Stories

Eleven stories (Appendix B) described prescriptive and proscriptive moral violations by a protagonist, named Sam/Surya. In a pre-test, 10 raters were asked to judge each story on a scale in which 0 = *not at all immoral* to 7 = *extremely immoral*. Both prescriptive and proscriptive stories were more immoral than had been the non-moral failures of Study 1. For American English: prescriptive ( $M = 2.11, SD = 1.41$ ) and proscriptive ( $M = 3.95, SD = 1.62$ ), Spanish: prescriptive ( $M = 2.40, SD = 1.23$ ) and proscriptive ( $M = 4.33, SD = 1.34$ ), and Malayalam: prescriptive ( $M = 4.26, SD = 1.43$ ) and proscriptive ( $M = 4.83, SD = 0.61$ ).

## 2.2 Results and Discussion

### 2.2.1 Translations for *Shame* and *Guilt* in Moral Situations

Parallel to the findings of Study 1, the guilt words in the three languages were all used to describe the emotional reaction to moral failures. American English *shame* was also used for moral failures, but Spanish and Malayalam translations less so. In an analysis of variance with language (3 levels) as between-subject variable and emotion word (2 levels) as within-subject variable, the main effects for language and emotion word, and language x emotion word interaction were significant,  $ps < .001$ . Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of the intensity rating for shame words and guilt words for each language.

Replicating the findings in Study 1, across languages guilt words were modally used for moral stories. Within each language, paired sample-t tests showed that rating for guilt words were significantly greater than rating for shame words,  $ps < .001$ . Again, similar to Study 1, American English speakers used *shame* for moral stories more than Spanish speakers used *vergüenza* or Malayalam speakers used *nanakedu*. One-way analysis of variance on the

TABLE 2 Mean (standard deviation) intensity rating for shame and guilt words for each language separately, study 2

Language	Guilt	Shame
American English	4.76 <sub>a</sub> (1.13)	4.41 <sub>b</sub> (1.18)
Spanish	4.61 <sub>a</sub> (0.92)	2.79 <sub>b</sub> (1.04)
Malayalam	4.01 <sub>a</sub> (1.48)	2.05 <sub>b</sub> (1.05)

Note. Means on an 8-point scale (0-not at all to 7-extremely). The mean values are the average collapsed across the 11 stories. Different subscripts within a row indicate a significant difference based on paired sample t-tests.



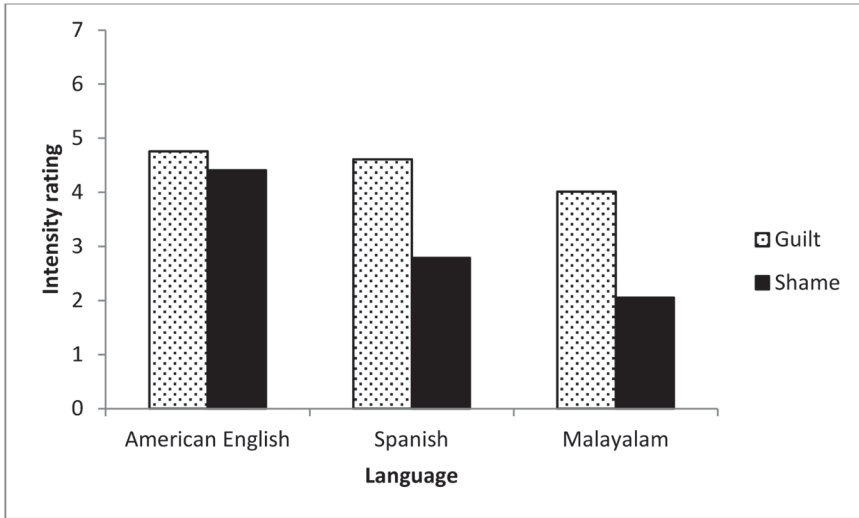


FIGURE 2 Intensity rating for *guilt* and *shame* for each language separately, Study 2.

difference score between the words for shame and guilt (intensity rating for the words for guilt minus intensity rating for the words for shame) with language (3 levels) as independent variable showed a significant main effect for language,  $F(2, 107) = 29.07, p < .001$ . Follow-up independent sample-t tests with Bonferroni correction showed the difference score for Spanish (1.72) and Malayalam (1.96) were significantly greater than for American English (0.34),  $ps < .001$ ; and for Spanish and Malayalam, not significantly different,  $p = .950$ . Figure 2 illustrates the language difference for the use of shame words for moral stories.

For both prescriptive and proscriptive moral stories, American English speakers used *shame* more than Spanish speakers used *vergüenza* or Malayalam speakers used *nanakedu*. One-way analysis of variance on the difference score between the words for shame and guilt separately for prescriptive and proscriptive moral stories showed that for both types of stories, there was significant main effect for language,  $F_s(2, 107) > 4.56, ps < .012$ . Follow-up independent sample-t tests with Bonferroni correction showed that for both types of stories, the difference score for Spanish or Malayalam was significantly greater than for American English, and for Spanish and Malayalam, not significantly different: prescriptive stories — Spanish (2.65) or Malayalam (3.00) compared to American English (0.47),  $ps < .001$ ; and between Spanish and Malayalam,  $p = .646$ , and proscriptive stories — Spanish (1.02) or Malayalam (1.09) compared to American English (0.24),  $ps < .044$ ; and between Spanish and Malayalam,  $p = 1$ .

### 2.2.2 Correlation Between *Shame* and *Guilt*

Replicating the finding in Study 1, individual differences in use of guilt and shame words reinforce the conclusion that the shame words are not used equivalently. Across the 11 stories, the average correlation between shame and guilt words for American English was .60, but .16 in Spanish, and -.11 in Malayalam. Thus, the more American English speakers found *guilt* appropriate, they tended to find *shame* appropriate. Spanish speakers less so, and Malayalam speakers not at all.

To sum up, guilt words — *guilt/culpa/kuttabodham* — were used modally for the moral stories, and can be considered translations of one another. By contrast, shame words — *shame/vergüenza/nanakedu* — were used differently from one another. For American English speakers, *shame* was used for moral stories (for violations of both prescriptive and proscriptive morality) and its use correlated positively with *guilt*. But *vergüenza* (Spanish) and *nanakedu* (Malayalam) were used less for moral stories and their use correlated less with the guilt words. The three shame words are not translations of one another.

## 3 Study 3: Similarity of Shame to Guilt

It might be argued that Studies 1 and 2 relied on specific scenarios, which might elicit different emotional reactions in different cultures. We therefore sought a more abstract test of our hypothesis that American English *shame* overlaps with *guilt* more than does shame's counterparts in Spanish and Malayalam. In Study 3, we asked participants from each of the three languages to indicate the (dis)similarity of shame feelings to other feelings, including guilt.

### 3.1 Method

The method is the same as in Studies 1 and 2, except as noted.

#### 3.1.1 Participants

Participants ( $N = 117$ ) were different from those in Studies 1 and 2, but were recruited from the same language groups and institutions: 39 American English speakers (28 women, 11 men,  $M_{age} = 19.1$  years, age range: 18–22 years), 39 Spanish speakers (31 women, eight men,  $M_{age} = 20.8$  years, age range: 18–25 years), and 39 Malayalam speakers (25 women, 14 men,  $M_{age} = 18.6$  years, age range: 18–21 years).

#### 3.1.2 Dissimilarity Rating Scale

The response format had two target emotions (shame and sadness) and 5 comparison emotion labels: *guilt*, *sadness*, *happiness*, *anger*, and *fear*. Alongside

each label, there was a 7-point scale (ranging from 1-*very similar* to 7-*not at all similar*). Sadness was included to provide a comparison. Appendix C shows the questionnaire.

### 3.1.3 Procedure

Participants were asked to think of experiencing shame and to rate the dissimilarity of shame experience to that of other emotions, with the 1–7 rating scale. The same procedure was followed for sadness.

## 3.2 Results and Discussion

Table 3 shows the mean rated dissimilarity of the target labels (*sadness* and *shame* and their translations) to other emotion concepts. For *sadness* or its translations, dissimilarity rating for each of the emotion concepts did not — with one exception — significantly differ among languages,  $ps > .061$ ; the exception was between *anger* and its translation in Malayalam — *deshyam*,  $p = .017$ .

TABLE 3 *Dissimilarity of sadness or shame and their translation to other emotion concepts, study 3*

Sadness					
	Happiness	Fear	Anger	Guilt	Depression
American English	6.33 <sub>a</sub> (1.46)	4.14 <sub>a</sub> (1.62)	4.13 <sub>a</sub> (1.66)	3.54 <sub>a</sub> (1.62)	2.10 <sub>a</sub> (1.35)
Spanish	6.33 <sub>a</sub> (1.32)	3.87 <sub>a</sub> (1.72)	3.82 <sub>ab</sub> (1.41)	3.33 <sub>a</sub> (1.22)	2.67 <sub>a</sub> (1.54)
Malayalam	6.38 <sub>a</sub> (1.53)	4.67 <sub>a</sub> (1.84)	3.13 <sub>b</sub> (1.72)	2.67 <sub>a</sub> (1.94)	2.28 <sub>a</sub> (1.70)
Shame					
	Happiness	Fear	Anger	Sadness	Guilt
American English	6.85 <sub>a</sub> (0.37)	4.00 <sub>a</sub> (1.67)	3.92 <sub>a</sub> (1.44)	2.23 <sub>a</sub> (0.96)	1.72 <sub>a</sub> (0.94)
Spanish	5.56 <sub>b</sub> (1.79)	4.00 <sub>a</sub> (1.91)	4.67 <sub>a</sub> (1.69)	4.41 <sub>b</sub> (1.80)	3.26 <sub>b</sub> (1.45)
Malayalam	6.85 <sub>a</sub> (0.43)	4.38 <sub>a</sub> (2.39)	4.00 <sub>a</sub> (2.19)	3.28 <sub>c</sub> (1.38)	3.33 <sub>b</sub> (2.03)

*Note.* Ratings were made on a 7-point dissimilarity scale (ranging from 1-*very similar* to 7-*not at all similar*). The higher the mean score, the more the dissimilarity between the target emotion and other emotions. (Thus, the lower the mean score, the more similar was the target emotion to other emotions.) In a column, for each target emotion, different subscripts indicate a significant difference based on independent sample t-tests with Bonferroni correction.

By contrast, for *shame* and its translations, dissimilarity ratings significantly differed among languages for three comparison emotions: *happiness*, *sadness*, and *guilt* and their translations. For *guilt* dissimilarity rating was significantly lower than for *culpa* (Spanish) or *kuttabodham* (Malayalam)  $p < .001$ , and not significantly different between *culpa* and *kuttabodham*,  $p = 1$ . American English *shame* is less like *happy*, more like *sad*, and more like *guilt* than its counterpart in Spanish. American English *shame* is more like *sad* and more like *guilt* than its counterpart in Malayalam.

#### 4 General Discussion and Conclusion

Shame is hypothesized to play a role in one's personal identity, to protect one's self from devaluation by others, and to promote social cohesion by appeasing a potential transgressor. It is also considered one of the primary moral emotions and linked to an array of pathologies, including depression, anxiety, and traumatic stress reaction. However, most findings on shame are based on studies on English-speaking western participants. Are these findings on shame experience applicable to other linguistic and cultural groups? Our studies expose a problem for such generalizability. In three studies, we found that meaning of American English word *shame* is not equivalent to its best translations in Spanish or Malayalam: American English *shame* has more moral sense than *vergüenza* (Spanish) or *nanakedu* (Malayalam).

Three studies together showed the moral sense of *shame* compared to *vergüenza* or *nanakedu*: American English speakers used *shame* for moral stories and its use correlated positively with *guilt*. But *Vergüenza* (Spanish) and *nanakedu* (Malayalam) were used less for moral stories and their use correlated less with the guilt words (Studies 1 and 2). American English speakers reported their *shame* and *guilt* experience to be more similar than dissimilar, whereas Spanish or Malayalam speakers found greater dissimilarity between *vergüenza* and *culpa* or between *nanakedu* and *kuttabodham*, respectively (Study 3).

Our results confirm and extend previous findings. Fessler (2004) found that American *shame* is more like *guilt* compared to Bengkulu *malu*. This finding is consistent with our own finding that American *shame* has more a moral sense than Spanish *vergüenza* and Malayalam *nanakedu*. Another study, using a different method showed that American English word *shame* has more moral sense than its Spanish translation, *vergüenza*: Features such as moral transgression and guilty feeling are the most typical features within *shame* in English but least typical within *vergüenza*, its Spanish translation (Hurtado-de-Mendoza et al., 2010). Present studies suggest that this difference between

American English and Spanish for shame words can be extended to other languages such as Malayalam. Consistently another study found that American *shame* is more like *guilt* compared to Bengkulu *malu* (Fessler, 2004).

Our finding is also consistent with and explains cultural differences in shame experience found in other studies: In a task where participants had to group emotion labels, Americans grouped shame with a negative emotion whereas Indians with a positive emotion (Menon & Shweder, 1994; Rozin, 2003). Shame was more connected with anger in American than in Japanese children (Bear, Uribe-Zarain, Manning, & Shiomi, 2009).

Historical linguistics of English word *shame* also supports the word's moral sense in its present day usage. Over the years, there was an increasing use of *shame* in moral contexts: In Old English before 950 CE, *shame* was related to lower social status such as being poor or less skilled, but between 1050–1150 CE, it became more connected to moral standards (Diaz-Vera, 2014). *Shame* became more explicitly related to *guilt* by the 17th century (Hurtado-de-Mendoza et al., 2013). *Shame* in its present day usage has historically become closer to *guilt* (Scheff, 2003).

Our studies were limited in many ways: We used only a few stories in our studies: three moral and three non-moral stories in Study 1, and five prescriptive and six proscriptive stories in Study 2. Replicating the present findings with more stories representing various moral violations would be important to understand whether shame has a general moral sense or its related to specific types of moral violations. An alternative way of examining our hypothesis could use facial expressions of shame instead of shame words. However, there is little consensus on specific facial expressions for shame (Haidt & Keltner, 1999; Widen, Christy, Hewett, & Russell, 2011). We provided only three emotion labels for participants to choose from — *shame*, *guilt*, and *sadness*. Perhaps, including more emotion labels such as *embarrassment* might lead to a different pattern of emotion rating. It would be important to replicate these findings also in other languages.

There are conceptual and practical implications for our findings. At a conceptual level, the difference in the meaning of shame words across languages point to a prototypical account of emotion concepts over a single emotion account. By the single emotion account, an emotion term refers to a discrete emotion with necessary and sufficient features. Because emotions are discrete, people in different languages develop terms to refer to a single experience. Thus these terms become equivalent in meaning. Alternatively, an account consistent with the present findings, an emotion term refers not to a homogeneous set of emotional states, but a heterogeneous set with membership that varies in degree. Because term refers to a fluid set, the set of emotions referred

to by an emotion term might differ from its translations in other languages (Russell, 1991; Wierzbicka, 1999).

The findings also have practical implications for cross-cultural emotion research and for applying research in the English speaking world to the other parts. Use of the best translations of *shame* in cross-cultural research would mean the comparison is not between equivalent concepts. Similarly other findings showed the problem for using the best translations in cross-cultural work (Hurtado-de-Mendoza et al., 2010; Choi & Han, 2008; Kayyal & Russell, 2013). In addition, the theories of shame developed in the English speaking world may have little applicability to another linguistic group.

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### Appendix A (Study 1)

#### Non-moral failures:

1. Sam participated in a violin recital. In the audience were his parents and teachers. Sam performed and totally messed-up.
2. Sam attended a party where everyone was dressed formally except him. Sam had thought that it was an informal party and went in casual dress.
3. Sam, while attending a formal meeting in the company, belched and everyone could hear him.

#### Moral failures:

1. Sam was doing real estate business and in one the deals he intentionally cheated the client.
2. Sam's best friend approaches him asking for money for an emergency. Though Sam had money, he refused to give the money.
3. One day Sam was shopping in mall, and he stole some jewellery.

### Appendix B (Study 2)

Prescriptive Morality: Moral rules that specify what we *should* do

1. Sam's New Year's resolution was to exercise regularly, even if for only half an hour a day. It has been weeks since Sam went to the gym. Sam knows that he failed to keep up with his plan.
2. A homeless woman, requesting food money, approaches Sam as he is walking down the street. Sam pays little attention to the request and walks away.
3. Sam failed the final exam. The professor had always been willing to help and the lectures were great. Sam knows that his poor grade is completely due to his lack of effort.
4. Sam knows that it is student duty to keep up with the readings and to study hard. He has some time left until the exam, but he knows that he is seriously behind in everything and that he needs to keep up with the class material.

5. Sam's best friend moved to a faraway place. Sam told him that he was going to call once a month, but it's been 9 months since Sam last called him.

Proscriptive Morality: Moral rules that specify what we should *not* do

6. An acquaintance approaches Sam with a request to donate blood for a patient who is critically ill. Though Sam's blood matches with the patient's he makes excuses and does not donate his blood.
7. Sam goes to a department dinner, finding his favorite pizza, Sam helps himself generously. Later he finds out that the pizza is not sufficient and some who joined the dinner towards the end have nothing to eat.
8. In Sam's dorm, for a couple of weeks, some people are missing money. Sam is convinced that the culprit is a worker in the dorm because he has seen the worker at odd times. Sam shares his suspicion with friends. But later the person identified as the thief is another student living in the dorm.
9. Sam's sister believes that someday she will become a famous model. Sam mocked her sister and said that she was never going to make it.
10. For fun Sam starts a political debate with one of his friends. After a while the argument becomes heated, Sam loses his temper and uses abusive language to put his friend down.
11. Sam knew that he was not prepared for the final exam. So, he decided to copy down the answers of the person sitting next to him.

### Appendix C (Study 3)

Responses indicated on a 7-point scale (1 = *very similar*, 7 = *not at all similar*)

"When you experience **shame**, how similar is this emotional experience to the following emotions."

Sadness

Happiness

Guilt

Anger

Fear

"When you experience **sadness**, how similar is this emotional experience to the following emotions."

Sadness compared to the following emotion

Happiness

Anger

Fear

Depression

Guilt