

Shy (Modest, Shame) Feelings and Experiences in Committing Immoral Acts among Malay and Chinese Adolescents

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Abstract

Every race and religion, especially the Malays and Chinese, have been found to make shyness a part of their characteristics as a deterrent from doing wrong and immoral behaviour in their society. However, the statistics of moral problems, including criminal acts among adolescents, which are increasing and terrifying every year, indirectly show that the nature of shame in committing immoral acts in society has been eroded. Thus, this study aims to explore the shame experienced by Malay and Chinese youth in committing immoral acts. This study uses the survey method. According to the mapping done on Malaysian adolescents, this study focuses on Malay and Chinese adolescents from the four districts with the highest percentage of adolescent involvement in deviant behaviour in Selangor. The districts are Petaling, Ulu Langat, Kelang, and Gombak. The study results showed that the adolescents in the above district still feel and experience shame and shyness and the degree of shame in doing a bad, wrong, and immoral act is still high.

Keywords: Shy, Shame, Modest, Immoral Acts, Malay and Chinese Adolescent

Introduction

Shyness and modesty are traits held in high esteem in the traditions of the Muslim and Malay communities. Therefore, it has been placed as one of the 26 foundations of personal strength and social personality traits of Malays (Musa, 2012). In *Tunjuk Ajar Melayu*, which contains the noble values of Islam as well as local culture and social norms that are in accordance with Islam, the Malay community is commanded to be ashamed of doing bad things and evil and is forbidden and cannot be ashamed in good things (Effendy, 2004). These commands and prohibitions encourage the community to have a noble and praiseworthy character. There is a close connection between the concept of shame and morality in Islam and the Malay mind and heart. The primary connection is that both involve the internal and psychological elements of the human self that emit behaviour according to the mold and inclination of the soul. Hence shame is part of morality. It is also an essential framework for building noble morals.

In the moral framework of Malay society, shyness is positioned as decency and moral life, dignity and respect for oneself and the nation, and most importantly, as a self-restraint mechanism from immoral behaviour.

Confucius expressed the concept of shame in the culture of Chinese society as a kind of human emotion and capacity that encourages a person to examine himself to change in a good moral and social direction (Zhang, 2015). In accordance with Confucian teachings that aim to improve morals and maintain human morals, shame in Confucianism can be associated with morality due to failure to carry out responsibilities. According to Bedford & Hwang (2003), maintaining one's position or identity in the social hierarchy is a responsibility related to moral beliefs for Chinese people. Mencius said: "A person without shame and displeasure is not human". Shame provides stimulation to have a sense of morality (Wei-Ming, 2005). Shame in Chinese culture can be divided into: 'public shame' and 'private shame'. *Xiu kui* is a feeling like having a 'stain on the heart (internal and private)', while *xiu chi* is a feeling like having a 'stain on the face'. Shame and guilt in Chinese culture are two different things. There are three types of guilt, namely *nei Jiu*, *zui e gan*, and *fan zui gan*. *Nei Jiu* is the feeling that one has failed in fulfilling one's responsibilities. Individuals feel guilty but not ashamed.

In Chinese society, shame is a stimulus for individuals and members of society to have a sense of morality, protect the individuality and dignity of individuals and families, and protect social harmony (social control).

Today's society tends to look at the negative side of shyness and shame. This perception is considered one of the factors that cause society, especially the Malays, to be passive, quiet, humble, unassertive, and lacking self-confidence. In this case, the potential of someone categorized as shy cannot be polished and developed optimally. However, looking at the reality in today's society, the erosion of shame is one of the factors in the society, especially the young generation who behave freely and unashamedly commit various forms of severe immoral acts. These behaviours erode the nation's values and identity.

The shames trait that supposes to be nurtured as a self-identity in society is gradually replaced by the shameless nature. These phenomena can be detected through the statistical display of cases of moral collapse, especially among teenagers, which are increasing and terrifying every year. Also reported is a shocking finding where 85% of 300 Malay teenagers involved in sexual misconduct and free sex are not sorry, ashamed, or afraid of committing such immoral acts (Harian Metro, 2015).

The 2016 statistical data from the Department of Social Welfare shows that the perpetrators of immoral acts and data on the number of cases of young offenders of the Malay ethnicity are much higher than the Chinese. The ethnicity statistic breakdown of the residents of Taman Seri Puteri with 154 Malays compared to 6 Chinese, Tunas Bakti School with 390 Malays compared to 16 Chinese, and Asrama Akhlak with 157 Malays compared to 5 Chinese. These residents manage troubled teenagers (Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, 2016). Comparing the perpetrators of immoral acts in terms of ethnicity shows a very significant difference. That raises questions about feelings and experiences of shame related to immoral acts between the two ethnic groups who both praise noble values and sound ethical practices in life. Thus,

this study aims to explore the shame experienced by Malay and Chinese youth in committing immoral acts.

There are several studies that relate shyness, shame to psychological aspects. However, the researcher found limited studies relating shyness and shame with immoral acts. Among the studies that relate shyness, shame to psychological aspects are research done by Mohamad & Hamzah (2005) *Kajian Korelasi Emosi Malu Dengan Pencapaian Akademik di Kalangan Mahasiswa Melayu*; Mohd Kiram & Mustapha (2013) *Persepsi Pelajar Melayu Terhadap Sifat dan Konsep Malu Orang Melayu*; Mastor (2006) *Personaliti Malu dan Psikologi Membuat Keputusan di Kalangan Pelajar Melayu*; Sawai et al (2017) *Akhlak Percintaan dan Rasa Malu*; Abdul Manan & Yahya (2012) *Jangan Malu: Pendekatan Komunikatif bagi Meningkatkan Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Bahasa Melayu*. The study that involves shame and the Chinese community is the study by Stipek (1998), *Differences between Americans and Chinese in the circumstances evoking pride, shame, and guilt*; Henkin (2004) *Shame and Guilt: Perceptions of American and Chinese College Students*; Zhong et al (2008) *Shame, personality, and social anxiety symptoms in Chinese and American nonclinical samples: a cross-cultural study*; Ming (2014) *Poverty and shame in Chinese literature*.

Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach. The study sampling involved Malay and Chinese adolescents from the four districts with the highest percentage of adolescent involvement in deviant behaviour in Selangor. The districts are Petaling, Ulu Langat, Kelang, and Gombak. Based on 2016 statistics, Selangor is the state with the most youths (including teenagers) involved in deviant behaviour, which is 2678 people. Selangor is also the state with the highest number of young offenders recorded at 455 people.

A total of 400 respondents, Malay (200); Chinese (200) teenagers aged 15-21 years were targeted in this study. The respondents were selected using convenience sampling because the population distribution of teenagers is scattered and unsystematic. Therefore, recreational park areas, shopping centers, residential areas, playgrounds, and youth concentration areas have been visited to get respondents. As a result, 443 completed questionnaires were successfully collected and analyzed. The respondents consisted of 292 (65.9%) Malay teenagers and 151 (34.1%) Chinese teenagers; 226 (51%) male and 217 (49%) female; 294 (66%) Muslims, 124 (28%) Buddhists, 18 (4%) Christians and 7 (2%) Taoists. The distribution of respondents according to districts are Petaling 108 (24%), Hulu Langat 101 (23%), Kelang 126 (29%), and Gombak 108 (24%). The data collected is analyzed and presented descriptively.

The instrument used in this study is the modification instrument taken from The Shame Inventory by Rizvi (2010). The research instrument consists of three parts. Part A, profile. Part B, shame and shy feelings. Part C, shame and shy experience, and part D, classification of immoral personality, speech, and action. However, part D is not covered in this discussion. Part B consists of 5 questions about overall shame and shy feelings that the respondents may experience. In contrast, part C consists of 33 situations and behaviours related to the experience of shame and shyness among respondents. In part B, item responses are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (never/none/no effect) to 4 (always/ extreme/extreme effect).

In Part C, item responses are also rated on a 4-point scale, ranging from 0 (no shame) to 4 (extreme shame). In this section, there is also an additional option to mark an "X" (not related/does not apply to me).

Findings and Discussion

Shame and shyness traits should be one of the characteristics of self-consciousness of every individual, especially for individuals who hold tied to beliefs and cultural practices regardless of religion and culture. Studies show that a person's high self-consciousness makes them more likely to think about what others think and say about themselves and their actions (Mastor, 2006). According to the study of personality trait theories, it is assumed that human traits are stable and consistent in an individual and influence human behavior (McCrae & Costa, 1995). The statement is proven through a study by Mastor (2006), who found that shame or self-consciousness is related to confidence, satisfaction, consistency, and difficulty in making decisions.

Table 1-5 shows the percentage distribution of the item regarding respondents' shame and shy feelings. Data in table 1 shows that the shyness and shame feelings of the majority of adolescents still exist, within themselves, where 95.5 % (425) still experience shame and shyness. However, only 4.1% (18) of total respondents never experience shame and shyness, with the Chinese adolescent percentage (6.6%) higher than the Malay adolescents (2.7%). Table 2 shows that most of the adolescents, both Malay (57%) and Chinese (56.9%), experience moderate intensity or severity of shame and shy feelings. Those data indicate that the self-consciousness of adolescents in the districts of Petaling, Ulu Langat, Kelang, and Gombak is still high.

Table 1

Overall shame and shy feelings among Malay and Chinese adolescents

	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Often	Always	Total
Malay	2.7% (8)	7.9% (23)	41.3% (141)	32.5% (95)	8.6% (25)	66% (292)
Chinese	6.6% (10)	20% (31)	51% (77)	19.2% (29)	2.6% (4)	34% (151)
Total	4.1% (18)	12.2% (54)	49.2% (218)	28% (124)	6.5% (29)	100% (443)

Table 2

Intensity or severity of shame and shy experience among Malay and Chinese adolescents

	None	Slight	Moderate	Considerable	Extreme	Total
Malay	3.8% (11)	16.4% (48)	56.8% (166)	20.2% (59)	2.7% (8)	66% (292)
Chinese	6% (9)	25.2% (38)	57% (86)	9.3% (14)	2.6% (4)	34% (151)
Total	4.5% (20)	19.4% (86)	56.9% (252)	16.5% (73)	2.7% (12)	100% (443)

In the field of psychology, shyness and shame are associated with positive aspects. These traits are effective in helping a person to avoid conflict or threats to others, providing opportunities to prepare, act according to appropriate situations, and make observations of other people's

behaviour. It can also give an impression (symbolize) ingenuity, humility (politeness), and caution. According to psychological studies, the owner of shyness and shame in the matters mentioned above is less involved in negative social behaviour because he is deeply concerned about what others will think about him (Maswan, 2011). While the shame that is prevented is shame in good things, such as shame in seeking knowledge, shame in admitting one's mistakes and stupidity, shame in being honest, shame in being responsible, shame in doing rough but halal work, and others (Effendy, 2004). Usually, the outbreak of this trait is because the person feels shy and uncomfortable doing it. This kind of shyness is very harmful and can have destructive consequences. It is a negative attitude and can influence society to become weak. Thus, shame in this context, if measured from a psychological point of view, often leads to the negative side of shame itself, which is shy behaviour.

Data in table 3 shows that majority of the respondents have a moderate to considerable positive effect of shame and shy feelings on their quality of life. Breakdown by ethnicity shows that the range of positive effects of shame and shy feelings of Malay adolescents (73.7%) is higher than Chinese adolescents (59.6%) positive effect of shame and shy feelings towards the quality of life.

Table 3

Positive effect of shame and shy feeling on the quality of life among Malay and Chinese adolescents

	No Effect	Slight Effect	Moderate Effect	Considerable Effect	Extreme Effect	Total
Malay	5.1% (15)	14.7% (43)	40.1% (117)	33.6% (98)	6.5% (19)	66% (292)
Chinese	17.2% (26)	19.9% (30)	35.8% (54)	23.8% (36)	3.3% (5)	34% (151)
Total	9.3% (41)	16.5% (73)	38.6% (171)	30.2% (134)	5.4% (24)	100% (443)

On the other hand, data in table 4 demonstrate that majority of the respondents have a moderate to a slight negative effect of shame and shy feelings on their quality of life. Breakdown by ethnicity shows that the range of adverse effects of shame and shy feelings of Chinese adolescents (72.9%) is higher than Malay adolescents' (63.7%) negative effect of shame and shy feelings towards the quality of life. The data in table 3 and table 4 suggest that the respondents had more positive effects than the negative effect of shame and shy feelings toward the quality of life.

Table 4

Negative effect of shame and shy feeling on the quality of life among Malay and Chinese adolescents

	No Effect	Slight Effect	Moderate Effect	Considerable Effect	Extreme Effect	Total
Malay	4.8% (14)	26.7% (78)	37% (108)	25.7% (75)	5.8% (17)	66% (292)
Chinese	13.2% (20)	30.5% (46)	42.4% (64)	12.6% (19)	1.3% (2)	34% (151)

Total	7.7% (34)	28% (124)	38.8% (172)	21.2% (94)	4.3% (19)	100% (443)
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Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952) states that young generations or youths are easily affected by a modern culture characterized by new patterns and designs, new ethos, and outlooks molded by the media. These patterns and designs better esteem material culture than spiritual culture. With the move from traditionalism to modernity, individuals tend to have freedom and self-autonomy more than self-esteem and self-worth within the traditional sense. Since modernization, most adolescents are easily tricked into bad habits and other shameless activities.

Data in table 5 demonstrates the majority of respondents experience a considerable intensity or severity of shame and shyness when doing wrong or immoral acts. It also shows that the Malay experience more intense shame and shyness than the Chinese when doing wrong or immoral acts, where a majority of Malay range considerable (52.1%) and Chinese (31.8%) range moderate. Those data suggested that the self-consciousness of adolescents in Petaling, Ulu Langat, Kelang, and Gombak in not doing wrong or immoral things is still high.

Table 5

Intensity or severity of shame and shyness when doing bad/immoral things among Malay and Chinese adolescents

	None	Slight	Moderate	Considerable	Extreme	Total
Malay	2.1% (6)	8.6% (25)	25.0% (73)	52.1% (152)	12.3% (36)	66% (292)
Chinese	15.2% (23)	19.2% (29)	31.8% (48)	25.2% (38)	8.6% (13)	34% (151)
Total	6.5% (29)	12.2% (54)	27.3% (121)	42.9% (190)	11.1% (49)	100% (443)

Abdullah (1993) has divided shame into several sub-concepts of shame: first, shame. Shame is a feeling of low self-esteem or feeling ashamed of one's shortcomings when compared to others. Second, shame is an act of vileness, humiliation, and disgust thrown at others so that the person who receives it feels humiliated and inferior. It can occur in the form of abusive words, sarcasm, curses, or threats. Third, getting shamed is when an individual is humiliated, or his face has been dropped in public so that he feels humiliated and disgraced. Fourth, shame is an action, deed, behaviour, or attitude shown by an individual that is disgusting, considered vile, and disrespectful from the public eye.

Based on the Modern Chinese Dictionary, the words that divide shame and those related to shame are *xiu* (shame/shyness), *chi* (disgrace), *ru* (humiliation/shame), *can* (sense of shame for one's wrongdoing), *kui* (shame/guilt), *lian/mian/yan* (face), and *jiu* (guilt). Based on these words, 113 shame words can be gathered and divided into six basic categories: fear of losing face, face already lost, guilt, disgrace, shamelessness, and embarrassment. The concept of face refers to integrity, good morals, and society's confidence in the individual's ability to play a social role. Therefore, taking care of the face is very important to the Chinese (Li et al., 2004).

Henceforth, data in tables 6 and 7 further explores the degree of shame and shyness experienced by Malay and Chinese adolescents in committing bad, wrong, and immoral acts. The exploration focuses on two categories of the act: the act thrown by others so that the respondents who receive it feel humiliated and inferior and the immoral acts, behaviour, or attitude done by the respondents that are disgusting, considered vile, and disrespectful from the public eye. The higher the mean, the higher the degree of shame experienced by the respondents.

Table 6

The degree of shame and shyness being said doing a bad or wrong act

Item	Ethnic	Mean
Was said to be lazy to study	Malay	1.95
	Chinese	1.74
Was said to be arrogant	Malay	2.08
	Chinese	1.95
Was said to be stingy with friends	Malay	2.29
	Chinese	1.90
Was said to be showing off on social media	Malay	2.46
	Chinese	2.22
Was said to be Hot-tempered	Malay	2.12
	Chinese	1.86
Was said to be constantly fighting	Malay	2.35
	Chinese	2.04

Data in table 6 shows that Malay adolescents have a considerable and high degree of shame towards showing off on social media (2.46) and are always said to be fighting (2.35). The data shows the same result for Chinese adolescents, who also have a considerable and high degree of shame towards showing off on social media (2.22) and were always said to be fighting (2.04).

Table 7

The degree of shame and shyness towards doing wrong or immoral act

Item	Ethnic	Mean
Breaking the rules or law	Malay	2.60
	Chinese	2.09
Not paying the debt	Malay	2.94
	Chinese	2.56
Hurt someone physically	Malay	2.85
	Chinese	2.43
Hurt an animal	Malay	3.29
	Chinese	2.77
Watched pornographic material	Malay	3.12
	Chinese	2.31
Asked someone to have sex with me	Malay	3.29
	Chinese	2.93
Had promiscuous sex	Malay	3.50
	Chinese	3.12

Being gay or lesbian or bisexual	Malay	3.60
	Chinese	2.89
Had an abortion	Malay	3.57
	Chinese	2.83
Baby dumping	Malay	3.62
	Chinese	2.89

Data in table 7 indicates that Malay adolescents have an extreme and very high degree of shame towards the three immoral acts: baby dumping (3.62), Being gay or lesbian or bisexual (3.60), and having an abortion (3.56). Whereas Chinese adolescents have an extreme and very high degree of shame towards the promiscuous sex act (3.12) and a considerable and high degree of shame in asking someone to have sex with (2.93), baby dumping (2.89) and being gay or lesbian or bisexual (2.89) acts. Therefore, the data suggested that the Malay and Chinese adolescents in Petaling, Ulu Langat, Kelang, and Gombak experience a considerable, extreme, and high degree of shame in committing bad, wrong, and immoral acts. The most shameful acts are baby dumping, being gay or lesbian, or bisexual, having an abortion, and having promiscuous sex.

Conclusion

Shame is a powerful self-conscious emotion that some authorities consider to be the glue holding society together. Possessing a positive trait of shame in Malay and Chinese societies has been emphasized for generations because it acts as a self-defense shield to avoid self-destructive behaviours that can bring shame or disgrace to oneself, the family, or the nation. A survey conducted on adolescents in the areas with the highest number of youths involved in deviant behaviour shows that the majority of teenagers in the study area, namely Petaling, Ulu Langat, Kelang, and Gombak, still have a strong sense of shame and shyness. Studies also show that the more serious the immoral act, the higher the degree and experience of shame. The most shameful acts to them are showing off on social media, always said to be fighting, baby dumping, being gay or lesbian, or bisexual, having an abortion, and having promiscuous sex.

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