

Relationship between Religiosity, Shame and Guilt among Malaysian Muslims Youth

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Abstract

According to prominent theories of social control such as social bonding theory, religion has shown to be an influential factor of social control in building an ethical and moral society. Among the core religious teachings in construction of one's self is the person's shame and guilt emotions. It is believed that when a person is conscious about religion, they are more likely to experience feelings of shame and guilty after engaging in behaviors deemed sinful. This article aims to study the relationships between religiosity and moral emotions (shame and guilt) among Malay youth in Malaysia. A quantitative survey was conducted from June to September 2015 in Klang Valley which was involved 250 respondents (73 males and 177 females). The study set out to examine the relationships between religiosity and moral emotions and to examine whether there are differences in moral emotions (shame and guilt) by gender. Two measures were used to carry out the study. The Muslim Religiosity Personality Inventory(MRPI) was used to measure religiosity, while Muslim Moral Emotion Inventory (MMEI) was used to measure moral emotions. Overall, the study results showed a positive correlation between in God-consciousness and shame and guilt, supporting the study hypothesis.

Keywords: Religiosity, Shame, Guilt, Relationship, Muslim Youth.

1. Introduction

Moral emotion especially shame and guilt has been related to risky behaviour (e.g., risky sexual behavior, substance use, criminal behaviour). Stuewig, Tangney, Kendall, Folk, Meyer

& Dearing (2015) stated that there is a paucity of research on the relationship between shame and guilt and risky behaviors. Guilt has been linked to lower levels of crime and delinquency, fewer problems with alcohol and drugs, and less risky sexual behavior. In contrast, the findings for shame have been less consistent.

The involvement of youth and adolescents in the risk behaviour activities is increasing in Malaysia. Statistic from Ministry of Health reported that about 3,980 or 28.8 percent out of 13,831 youth aged 10 to 19 years old experienced pre-marriage pregnancy (*Utusan Malaysia*, 10 September 2016). Furthermore, Division of Family Health Development, Ministry of Health recorded that 18,000 pregnant teenagers received service at government clinics between 2011 to 2013. About 25 percent of them have not been married and the average 1,500 cases of pregnant teenagers per month or 50 cases daily in Malaysia have been recorded (*Utusan Malaysia*, 10 September 2016).

Moreover, Polis Diraja Malaysia (PDRM) as cited in *Utusan Malaysia* (2016) reported that about 93.5 per cent rape victims of 12,473 cases since 2011 to June 2015 involved teenagers at the aged of 13 to 18 years old (in *Utusan Malaysia*, 2016). PDRM also reported that a total of 432 babies are dumped nationwide in Malaysia since 2011 to June 2015 which contributed predominantly by pre-marriage pregnancy.

The increase number of youth involve in social ills portray the lack of shame and guilt. A society that loses its sense of shame suggests a population that does not feel a sense of guilt in committing immoral and unethical behaviors (Zakaria Stapa, 2003; Collins & Bahar, 2000). This argument is in line with a saying of the Prophet Muhammad SAW narrated by Abu Masood Al-Ansari. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said: "Among the words people obtained from the first prophecy are: 'If you feel no shame, then do as you wish'". This hadith highlighted the importance of having a sense of shame and guilt or otherwise the person who does not feel shame will do whatever he wants, following his desire which might resulted in the increase of social ills. Despite the abundant reports on the social ills among youth in Malaysia, little is known about the role of feelings (i.e moral emotions of shame and guilt) that can stimulate moral maturity so that individuals will behave according to moral standards desired by society.

Religion is an important factor that drives human life. It has significant influence on human's attitudes, feeling and values at both personal and social levels. Guided by the social bonding theory, religion is believed to act as a significant element of social control to build an ethical member of society. According to this theory, it is believed that a religious person tends to have feelings of shame and guilty after engaging in immoral conduct. In line with this theory, Islamic teaching also guides its members to have feelings of shame and guilty when committing evils. As a subject that can be measured quantitatively religiosity can be defined according to its dimension which refers to a particular religion. Thus, a suitable measurement for Muslim must be measured according to Islamic religiosity. However, it is not given appropriate coverage in previous studies. Lefkowitz, Shearer and Boone, (2004) who revealed that religious behavior was the strongest predictor of sexual behavior. Thus, this article aims to analyze the relationships between religiosity and moral emotions, specifically shame and guilt among Malay youth in Klang Valley. It is assumed that those who had high religiosity will have high shame and guilt. Additionally, it also attempts to examine the differences in moral emotions which are shame and guilt according to gender. The study is significant towards the implementation of policies to tackle social problems. Youth need to be educated about the positive value of shame and understand how related emotions can serve as a motivation to safeguard oneself from indulging in social problems.

2. Literature Review

The discussion on the effect of religion toward morality cannot proceed without understanding religion and its role in human life. The notion that religion is a pre-requirement for morality also has been widely taken and rooted deeply in the culture (McKay and Whitehouse, 2014). Religion provides guidelines in determining between right and wrong behavior in self and society. Religion defined as “a covenant faith community with teachings and narratives that enhance the search for the sacred and encourage morality” (Dollahite, 1998).

Whereas, religiosity refers to the state of one’s belief in God. Religiosity shared the exact or nearly the same meaning with faith, belief, piousness, devotion and religiousness. It is characterized by the extent to which an individual is committed to the religion he or she professes and it is teachings (Johnson, Jang, Larson & De Li, 2001). The higher the commitment is, the higher is his religiosity. Sood and Nasu (1995) argue that a person’s religiosity influences his or her behaviour. The content of the religious or spiritual beliefs may directly related to their moral emotions.

2.1 Moral Emotions

Researchers are now begun to seriously looking at the role of moral emotions in determining one’s behavior. Moral emotions are the emotions that respond to moral violations, or that motivate moral behavior (Haidt, 2003). Haidt further defined moral emotions as those “that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent” (p. 276). Tangney, Stuewig and Mashek, (2007) believed that moral emotions represent a key element of our human moral apparatus, influencing the link between moral standards and moral behavior. Moral emotions provide the motivational force-the power and energy, to do good and to avoid doing bad (Kroll & Egan, 2004). These moral emotions are also known as “self-conscious emotions” (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek, 2007) because the individual’s understanding and evaluation of the self are fundamental to these emotions.

Ausubel (1955) concluded that shame is “an unpleasant emotional reaction by an individual to an actual or presumed negative judgment of himself by others” (p. 382) and that guilt is “a special kind of negative evaluation which occurs when an individual acknowledges that his behavior is at variance with a given moral value to which he feels obligated to conform” (p. 378). Shame and guilt develop naturally in the process of internalization -that is, the gradual transformation of one’s (external) social-control mechanisms into one’s own internal rules of behavior (Kon, 1979). Consequently, one of the most important functions of shame and guilt is to regulate (to deter) unethical and antisocial behavior (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007).

2.2 Gender Differences in Moral Emotions

Difference of these moral emotions can be seen in term of the gender of a person. There has always been a stereotype among the public that women are more emotional than men are. Women have a greater tendency to express what is inside of them and relate to what others are feeling while males are associated with control and suppression of emotion (Fischer & Manstead, 2000). A model developed by Rasha Mohsen (2015) to see the effect of gender, guilt and shame on Brigham Young University student’s innovation found that women tend

to experience more guilt and shame than men do. Similar findings were also obtained from Benetti-McQuoid & Bursik (2005) and Hess, Adams, & Kleck (2004).

2.3 Relationship between Religiosity, Shame and Guilt

Shame and guilt are two higher-order emotions which are believed to motivate moral behavior and to play a role in its development and in moral character (e.g. Hoffman 1998, Walker & Pitts 1998). These two moral emotions promote altruistic behavior and inhibiting antisocial behaviors. In this current research, the adaptive shame and guilt are assumed to inhibit youth from engaging in immoral behaviors. These two emotions were said to be related to religiosity. The study of religiosity and its relationship towards shame and guilt emotions becoming more significance in our youth nowadays as exposure with shamelessness and deviant behavior from religion teaching have become a common thing and pervasive. A study of social problems among youth Malaysia conducted by Institute for Youth Research Malaysia in 2010 to 5,016 respondents who were at risk among generation Y, found that, more than half of them (52%) knew someone involved in sexual misconduct outside marriage and a great number of respondents (76%) have friends who watched pornography. Also, a report released by World Health Organization in 2009 stated that 45% of Malaysian youths admitting on consuming alcohol are underage. Figures from the National Antidrug Agency in 2010 showed that a total of 16,737 people or up to 72% of the number of addicts detected from 2006 to 2010 were youths aged from 19 to 39 years.

This research is important because shame and guilt have been recognized by religious scholars as important constructs of moral or religious emotions. This derives from the sayings of Rasulullah SAW who said, "Shame is part of faith". This hadith indicates that, if a person has a weak faith, a sense of shame and guilt in him is also low (Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri, 2007). A few studies to date have attempted to measure shame and guilt within the context of a majority-Muslim country.

Thus, understanding the level of religiosity as well as the moral emotions in our youth is the first step towards grasping the reality of society we are building into. In conclusion, to create a society with strong moral and high values, an emphasis of religious teaching in daily life is crucial. Shamefulness and guilt are strong protective factors as like what has been said by the Prophet Muhammad SAW, "If you feel no shame, then do as you wish". This will then help the professionals and authorities to tackle the problems from its roots.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

A quantitative survey was conducted from June to September 2015 which involved a total of 250 Malay respondents from 5 universities in Klang Valley (greater Kuala Lumpur region). These students were between 18-25 years old of age (M age=22.28, SD=1.80). Descriptive analysis of the respondents reported that there are 73 male respondents which constitute 29.2% from total sample and the rest (177) are the female students which accounts for the majority of the respondents (70.8%).

3.2 Procedures

Prior to the survey date; the researcher administered the questionnaire personally to all the respondents. According to Dyer (1995) the direct administration method can ensure a high

rate of response and the researcher has the opportunity to personally attend to any inquiries that the respondents may have while answering the questionnaires. The researcher is also able to standardize the instructions given thus reduce interviewer bias. In addition, each part of the questionnaire was accompanied by a detailed explanation regarding the nature and purpose of the survey.

Specific instructions were given by the researcher requiring the respondents to answer all the questions as honest as possible. The respondents were required to fill in some demographic information. However, respondents were not required to write their names on any paper. This is to ensure the anonymity of respondents. The researcher specially emphasized that respondents will not be identified in any presentation, discussion, or publication of the survey findings. Most of the questionnaires were collected on the same day as it only took about 20 to 30 minutes to answer. Scores for each scale were summed (negatively worded items were reverse scored). Missing data were addressed by replacing missing values with series means, where needed.

3.3 Instrumentations and Measurements

In this study, Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory (MRPI) which was established by Azimi et al. (2005) was used to measure the religiosity among the respondents. In addition, Muslim Moral Emotion Inventory (MMEI) was also used to obtain information of respondent's shame and guilt emotions.

Muslim Religiosity-Personality Inventory (MRPI) which developed by Azimi et al., (2005) consisted of 46 items and using 6-likert scale measurement. There are two constructs, namely Islamic Worldview and Religious Personality with 19 and 27 items respectively. MRPI survey items developed for the 'Islamic Worldview' construct aimed to ascertain one's level of agreement with statements relating to the Islamic pillars of faith (*Arkan al-Iman*) (i.e. belief in: God, Angels, Messengers and Prophets of God, Books of Revelation, The Day of Judgment, and the Divine Decree), which represent the foundation of the Islamic creed (*aqidah*). This construct used 6-point Likert scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (6) "strongly agree". Example items are, "To fully develop their nations, Muslims cannot completely follow Islamic teachings" (negative item), "Islamic values are applicable only in certain situations, places and times" (negative item), and "All human activities must be done for the sake of Allah." While Religious Personality represents the manifestation of one's religious worldview in righteous works (*amalan saleh*) according to Islamic teaching and commands, and it is measured with 6-point likerts scale ranging from (1) "never" to (6) "almost always". Example items include, "I find time to recite the Qur'an even if I am busy," "I try to understand the meaning of Qur'anic words/verses," "I respect other people's opinions," and "I do not expose the shortcomings of others."

On the other hand, Muslim Moral Emotion Inventory (MMEI) was developed by Rezki Perdani Sawai. This inventory consists of 90 items and is using the 10-likert scale measurement. Shame subscale consists of 50 items and a ten-point scale was used ranging from (0) "Does not describe me at all" to (10) "Definitely describe me," in line with the objective of the scale which was to gauge respondents' perception of shame. The scale was chosen to determine the extent of agreement and range of perception. Example items are, "Dress to cover my *aurat*", "Careful about how I behave so that will not be looked down upon by others", "Saying offensive words" (negative item), "Do not care about how people respond

to me" (negative item), and "All human activities must be done for the sake of Allah." For the second dimension, Guilt, there are 40 items using ten-point scale ranging from (0) Does not describe me at all" to (10) "Definitely describe me," to measure a respondents' perception of guilt that consist of forgiveness, fear of punishment, monitoring from Allah and empathy. Example items include, "Never lose hope in Allah's forgiveness" and "Accept the punishment for what I did wrong".

Based on a pilot study, the reliability and internal consistency for both inventories were high (MRPI; .902, MMEI; .964).

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative method was used to answer the research questions and correlational research design was considered suitable for this study. The study also made use of descriptive statistic to give clear picture of the population. Lastly, to look for the effect of gender on moral emotions, t test was used. Data were analyzed statistically using correlations, means and percentage.

4. Result and discussions

T test was used to analyze the differences in mean scores of moral emotions by gender. It was found that there is a significant different of mean of the shame subscale for the respondents [$t(250) = -8.138, p < .05$]. Female students ($M = 406.0904, SD = 51.47068$) is said to have a higher level of shame compared to their male colleagues ($M = 347.3288, SD = 52.97642$). This is also true for guilt subscale. The results showed significant differences in the mean scores by gender for guilt [$t(250) = -6.883, p < .05$]. Female scored higher on guilt ($M = 343.4181, SD = 39.04725$) than their male counterparts ($M = 301.5616, SD = 53.44337$). Therefore, the first two null hypotheses were rejected.

Table 2:

t-test Results comparing males and females on Shame and Guilt

Variable	Gender	n	Mean	SD	t-crit	df	p
Shame	Male	73	347.3288	52.97642	-8.138	248	.000
	Female	177	406.0904	51.47068			
Guilt	Male	73	301.5616	53.44337	-6.883	248	.000
	Female	177	343.4181	39.04725			

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between religiosity one's possessed with level of shame and guilt. There was a positive correlation between the religiosity and shame [$r(250) = .637, p = 0.05$]. Similar result was observed in the relationship between religiosity and guilt feeling [$r(250) = .720, p = 0.05$]. Below are the tables summarizing the results. Overall, there was a strong, positive correlation between religiosity and moral emotions of shame and guilt. Increases in religious value in individual were correlated with increases in their shame and guilt feeling. Overall, the study results showed a positive correlation between in God-consciousness (religiosity) and shame and guilt, supporting the study hypothesis.

Table 3:

Relationship analysis between religiosity with moral emotions of the respondent

Variable	Variable	df	r	r ²	Significant Level (p)
Religiosity 219.732	Shame 388.932	248	.637	.406	.000*
Religiosity 219.732	Guilt 331.196	248	.720	.518	.000*

Notes: *Significant correlations: p <.05

Gender and religion has been widely discussed as factors influencing the level of shame and guilt in a person. It is important for a researcher to see how these two variables interact to each other. This article aims to investigate the differences of moral emotions between male and female. Result show that there is a significant difference between male and female respondents on the levels of both of the moral emotions. Female respondents are observed to feel more shame and guiltier than their male colleagues. Similar findings were reported by Fischer et al. in 2004. They analyzed a cross-cultural dataset on gender differences in 6 emotions, collected in 37 countries all over the world. The study found that women reporting to experience and express more fear, sadness, guilt and shame than men. It also replicates the results in previous studies (Evans, 1984; Ferguson & Crowley, 1997; Ferguson, Eyre, & Ashbaker, 2000; Lutwak & Ferrari, 1996) that often-found women reported greater feelings of both shame and guilt than men do when scenario-based measures are used.

These responses may be associated with biosocial factors towards the gender differences. Girls, more than boys, are taught to defer to friends, make amends with friends, and put themselves in the service of others. The enhanced ability of girls to be attuned to the effects of their actions on others may lead them to anticipate others' reactions to their behavior (Benetti-McQuoid & Bursik, 2005). Females are believed to be more interpersonally sensitive than males (Zahn-Waxler, Kochanska, Krupnick, & McKnew, 1990) and because of the different parental attitudes towards girls and boys (Woien et al. 2003), they are expected to feel more guilt and shame within themselves. It is also proposed that a possible explanation for females scoring higher in shame and guilt than males is due to gender roles. According to Benetti-McQuoid and Bursik (2005), society places higher expectations upon males to maintain a perception of physical and emotional strength, therefore males report lower levels of these emotions based on these social and gender norms. Due to social norms, it is commonly known that males are also less likely to admit their shame than women (Shepard & Rabinowitz, 2013).

Additionally, as predicted, religiosity level in oneself is correlated with the level of moral emotions in them. This is in line with previous studies. Albertson, O'Connor and Berry (2006) conducted a study involving 246 college students, they found that religious affiliation and religious or spiritual emphasis were significantly related to guilt. Meanwhile, in four studies done by Luyten, Corveleyn & Fontaine (1998), they found that religious subjects tend to feel guiltier. Religious subjects generally reported more feelings of empathy than other subjects, which could be partly due to their higher levels of guilt.

However, these correlational findings do not demonstrate causality. A number of explanations for the stated relationships are possible. It may be that individuals with a high guilt proneness, may tend to involve themselves in religion, whereas individuals with a lower guilt proneness may have less of a sense of need for religion. A general explanation is that religion may tend to promote interpersonal guilt because of moral teachings about a person's responsibilities, particularly to others. Interpersonal guilt is shown to be an important factor in understanding the impact and function of religion (Albertsen, O'Connor, Berry, 2006).

Shecterle (1999) proposed that any given theology of sin and guilt directly affects the experience of guilt and shame within the individual who "participates" in the given theology. The key concept underlying guilt in monotheistic religion is sin - a word derived from the Latin word "*sont*" meaning guilt - but the two are not synonymous (Dein, 2013). Sin is the consequence of violating a religious ordinance, whereas guilt is not a moral violation but the result of one, both as culpability and a feeling of remorse. Feelings of sin and guilt relate to God, and ideas of sin and guilt and punishment constantly pass over into each other (Dein, 2013).

Furthermore, Luyten et al. (1998) also found a positive correlation between religious involvements with the shame scores in the same respondents. Some earlier studies by Gorsuch and McPherson (1989) and Chau et al. (1990) also reported similar results. The more religious a person is, the higher the sense of shame and guilt feeling within them. Although the association was small, it suggests that those who use their religion for social desirability purposes are likely to experience greater shame (Choudhury, 2010).

It should also be noted that the current study was conducted among the Malay youth who studied at five public universities which are located in Klang Valley, amongst the most densely populated and urban areas in Malaysia. The Malay Muslim population comprises approximately 63.1% of 28.1 million of Malaysian population, far less than many other Muslim countries such as those in the Middle East or even the neighboring country, Indonesia (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2010). Thus, the findings of this article can be only presented the urban Malay youth population in the urban settings.

Malaysia is not as homogeneous as many other Muslim countries in terms of religious practice, culture, and social norms. Although Islam is the official religion in Malaysia, the country is also multi-ethnic and multi-religious, with considerable non-Muslim populations of 19.8% of Buddhists, 9.2% Christians, 6.3% of Hindus, and 3.4% of the others (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2010; Mashitah Sulaiman, 2016). These social and cultural characteristics of Malaysia make it difficult to generalize the findings to other Muslim countries that are more culturally homogeneous.

5. Conclusion

Preserving these both moral emotions among youth means encouraging them to engage in a more moral behavior and consequently will improve the social condition of our society. Most of the religions emphasize the importance of shame and guilt in their followers so they can transform into the most virtuous and honorable form of creation of God. Our results suggest that there is a strong connection between the moral emotions and the understanding and practice of religion teachings in oneself. Thus, psychologist and therapist working to improve

moral behavior in their clients may consider focusing on the systemic aspects of their client's religion.

Less study has been conducted to investigate the relationship between religiosity, shame and guilt in Malaysia. Outcomes of this research would contribute to the body of knowledge on youth moral development as a response to the current problem in the Malay Muslim society, particularly in Malaysia. It is also hoped that this research can help policy makers to improve national's youth policy. Suggestions proposed in the research may help to enhance policy pertaining to youth moral development among the Malaysian Malay Muslims.

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