

A Cross-cultural Study of the Experience of Shame and Guilt in Mainland China and Canada



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Importance of studying shame and guilt

- Shame and guilt are self-conscious, universal and painful emotions (Casimir & Schnegg, 2003; Ho, Fu & Ng, 2004)
- They result from violating the moral values, social expectations and social norms (Fischer & Tangney, 1995)
- Shame and guilt can motivate people to self-examination and to adapt to the moral standard of the **SOCIETY** (Fischer & Tangney, 1995; Fung & Chen, 2002; Tangney, 1994)
 - They therefore play an important role in social and moral behaviour



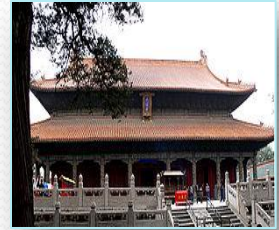
Three dimensions differences of shame and guilt

- **“Public vs. private”** context
 - Shame may be more influenced by audience than guilt (Li, Wang, & Fischer, 2004)
- Focus on blaming **“self vs. action”**
 - Shame focused on blaming self, guilt focused on blaming action (Lewis, 1987)
- Respond with **“withdrawal vs. repairing behaviours”**
 - Shame leads to social withdrawal, guilt leads to corrective behaviours (Tangney & Fischer, 1995)



Shame and guilt in Chinese Culture

- Although shame and guilt are universal emotions, some research suggests that there may be cultural differences in how shame and guilt are experienced and expressed
- Shame is an important emotion in Confucian societies, because it is connected to morality (Babcock & Sabini, 1990).
- Reflecting this importance, shame in Chinese culture is highly elaborated
 - Chinese shame and guilt terms broad and rich
 - English shame and guilt terms narrow and extreme (Bedford, 1994; 2004; Li et al., 2004)



Confucian



*Ren, Yi, Li, Zhi & Xin
Chinese moral norm*

Chinese terms for *shame*

- Have identified 5 terms for shame (Bedford, 2004; Frank, Harvey & Verdun, 2000)
 - *diu lian*: lose face
 - *can kui*: failure to obtain personal ideal
 - *xiu chi*: very deep shame
 - *xiu kui*: personal failure and hurt others
 - *nan wei qing*: embarrassment

丢脸

Lose face

惭愧

Failure to obtain personal ideal

羞耻

Very deep shame

羞愧

Personal failure and hurt others

难为情

Embarrassment

Chinese terms for *guilt*

- Have identified 4 terms for guilt (Bedford, 2004; Frank, Harvey & Verdun, 2000)
 - *nei jiu1*: harm to others
 - *nei jiu2*: trust violation
 - *zui e gan*: moral transgression
 - *fan zui gan*: law/rules transgression

内疚₁

Guilt
Harm to others

内疚₂

Guilt
trust violation

罪恶感

Moral
transgression

犯罪感

Law/rules
transgression



Overview of study

- Examined three dimensions of guilt and shame in Chinese and Euro-Canadian participants
 - Using the full range of Chinese shame (5 types) and guilt (4 types) concepts
- Research Questions
 - Are European-Canadians capable of experiencing the same range of shame and guilt emotions as Chinese participants?
 - Do shame and guilt differ in the same ways in both cultures?

Methods

- **Participants**

- 39 native mainland Chinese (18 women, 18 men, 3 unknown)
 - Aged 20-45 years, $M = 27.08$, $SD = 7.46$
- 34 Euro-Canadian adults in Canada (19 women, 15 men)
 - Aged 19 -44 years, $M = 28.21$, $SD = 9.58$

Materials and Procedure

- A brief demographic questionnaire
- A survey with the definitions of the 5 types of shame and 4 types of guilt (Bedford, 2004; Frank et al., 2000)
- Participants completed materials in their own language
- They read a description of each term
- Asked to write one example for each term based on a time when they felt the emotion described

Scenarios

- 343 stories from Chinese participants
 - 192 shame; 151 guilt
- 289 stories from Euro-Canadian participants
 - 170 shame; 132 guilt stories
- All the scenarios were coded by 2 bilingual coders (Mandarin-English)
 - ***The inter-rater reliability across dimensions:***
 - Chinese shame 0.89; Chinese guilt 0.88; Euro-Canadian shame 0.92; Euro-Canadian guilt 0.90

Coding: *public vs. private*

- Public—transgressor, victim and other people
 - E.g., “...*I did not arrive on time for my sister’s wedding. I was late, and that caused the wedding to start late. I felt very guilty for not upholding my obligation to be on time for such an important event.*”
- Public---transgressor, victim
 - E.g., “*when I do not help out a family member when they ask for help from me at times.*”
- Private
 - E.g., “*I did not meet the expectations of my parents.*”
- Unknown
 - E.g., “*when I lie.*”

Coding: *self* vs. *Action*

- Self
 - *E.g., “I feel very selfish.”*
- Action
 - *E.g., “Caught for spitting on the bus.”*
- Unknown
 - *E.g., “My lies were exposed.”*

Coding: *withdrawal vs. repairing action*

- Withdrawal

- E.g., “*..now I hardly talk to my friend because I feel guilty.*”

- Repairing action

- E.g., “*..I apologized profusely.*”

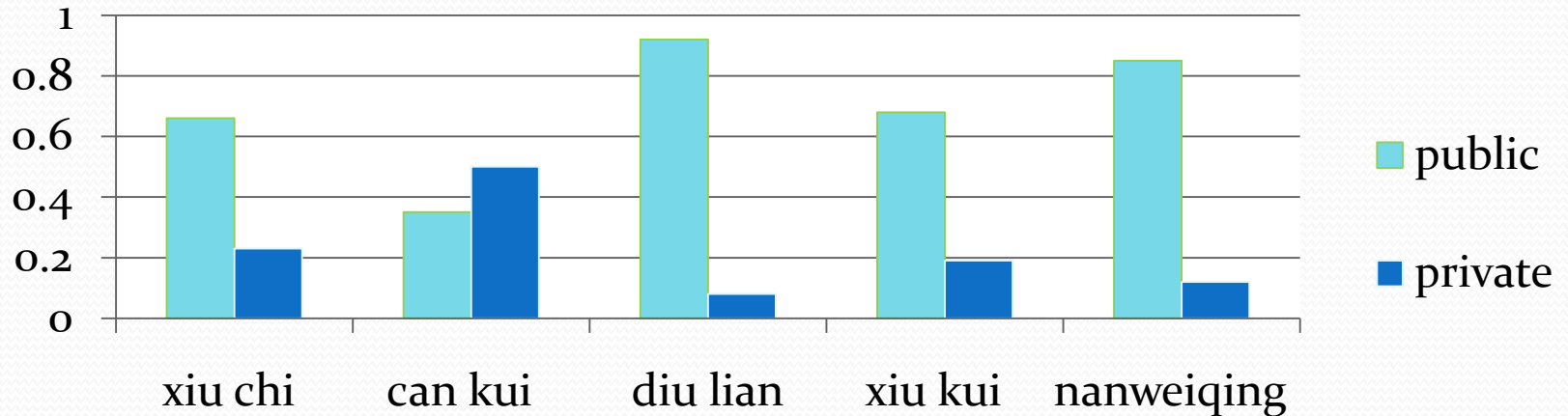
- Unknown

- E.g., “*I said bad words behind somebody’s back, but later he knew what I said.*”

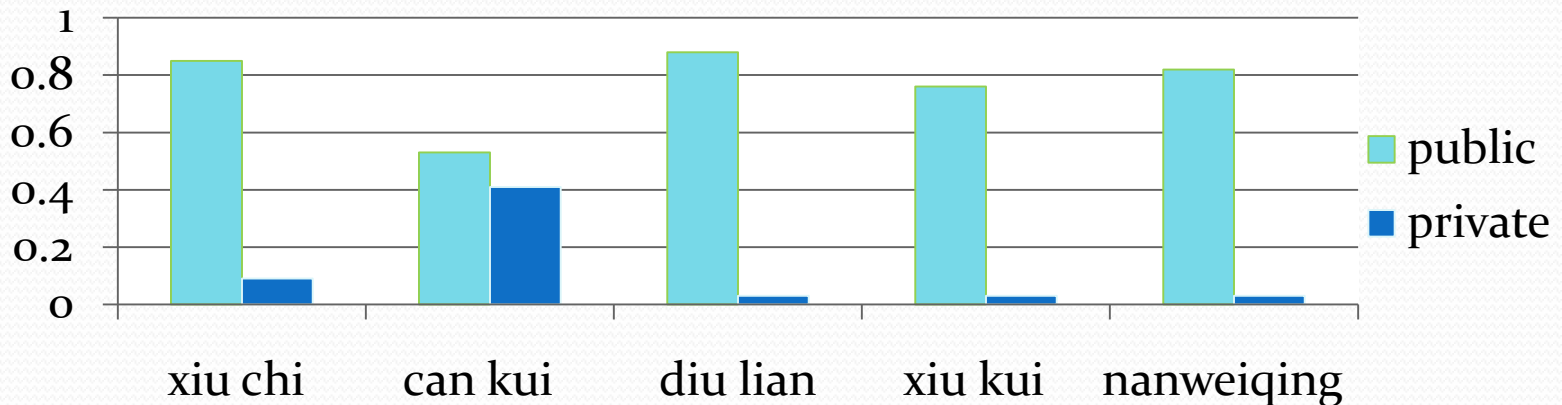
Data Analysis

- *Chi-square statistics* to compare the frequencies within each dimension
 - **Within cultures**
 - Between five types of shame
 - Between four types of guilt
 - Between type of each dimension and overall emotion type (shame vs. guilt)

Within culture: *public* vs. *private* dimension of *shame* in Chinese and Euro-Canadian Participants

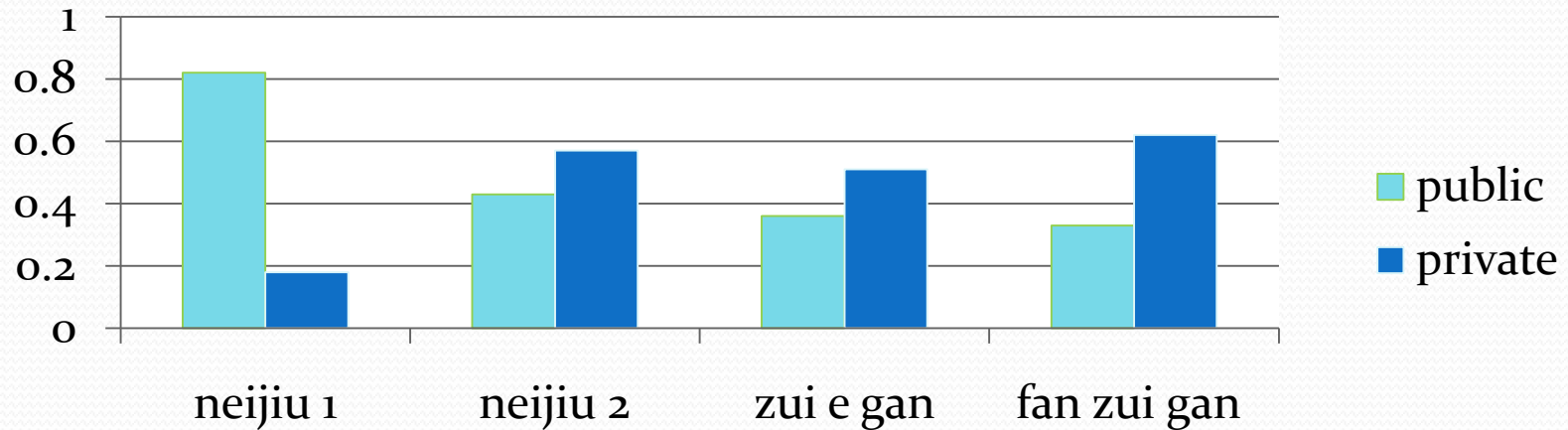


Chinese private: $X^2(4, N=39) = 48.64, p < .05$

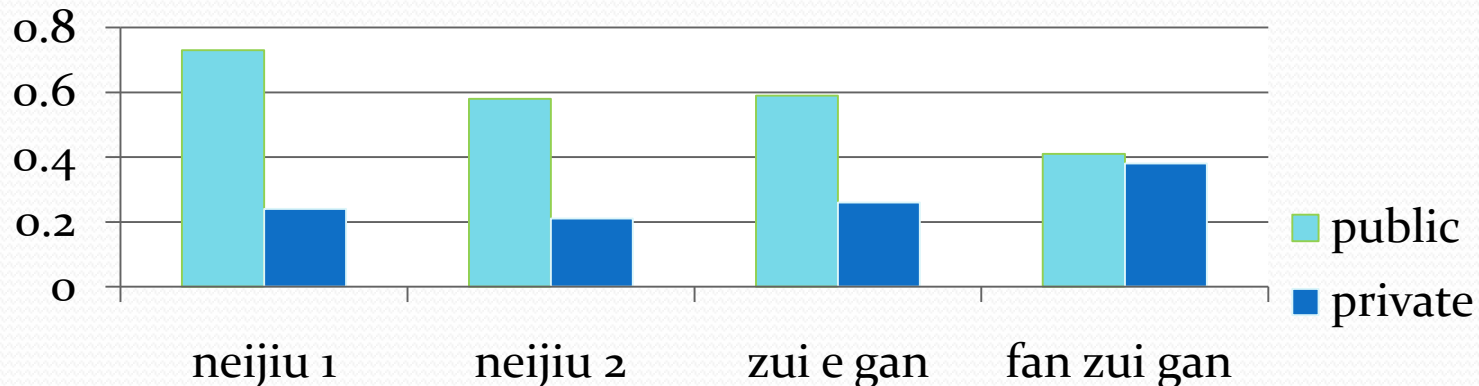


Euro-Canadian private: $X^2(4, N=34) = 92.60, p < .05$

Public vs. *private* dimension of *guilt* in Chinese and Euro-Canadian Participants

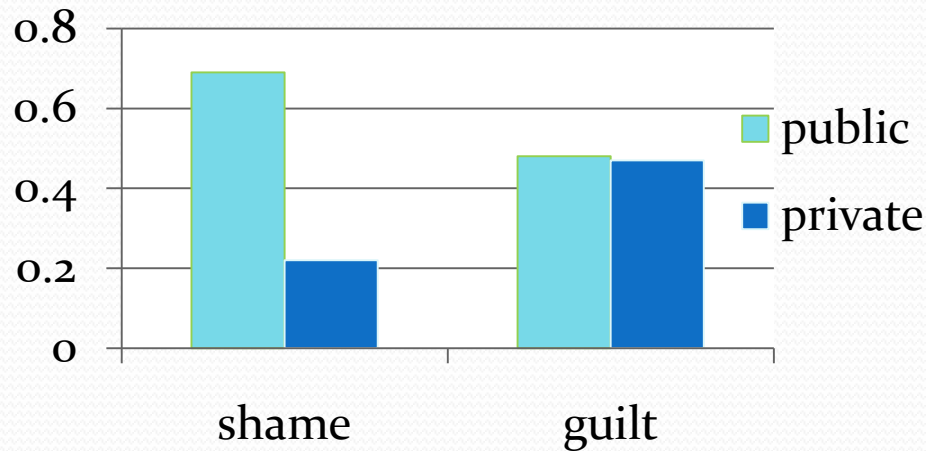


Chinese private: $X^2(3, N=39) = 25.15, p < .05$

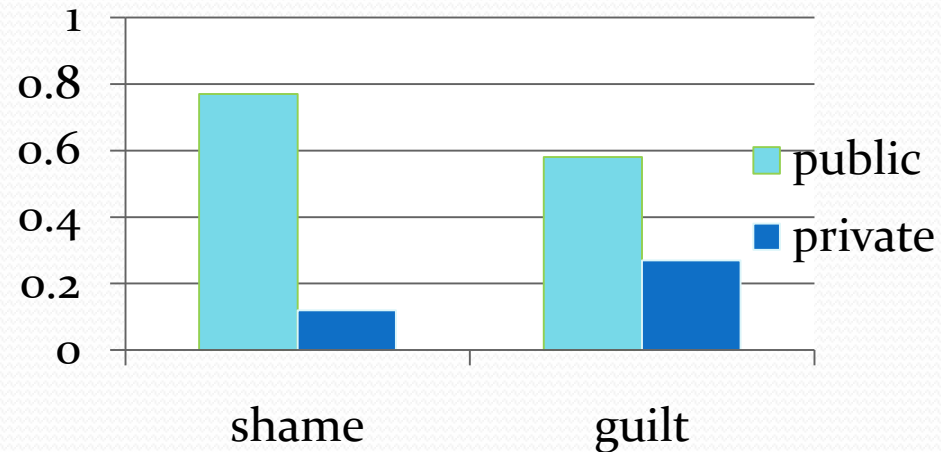


Euro-Canadian private, $X^2(3, N=34) = 14.26, p < .05$

Interaction between context (*public* vs. *private*) and emotions (*shame* vs. *guilt*) in *Chinese* and *Euro-Canadian* Participants

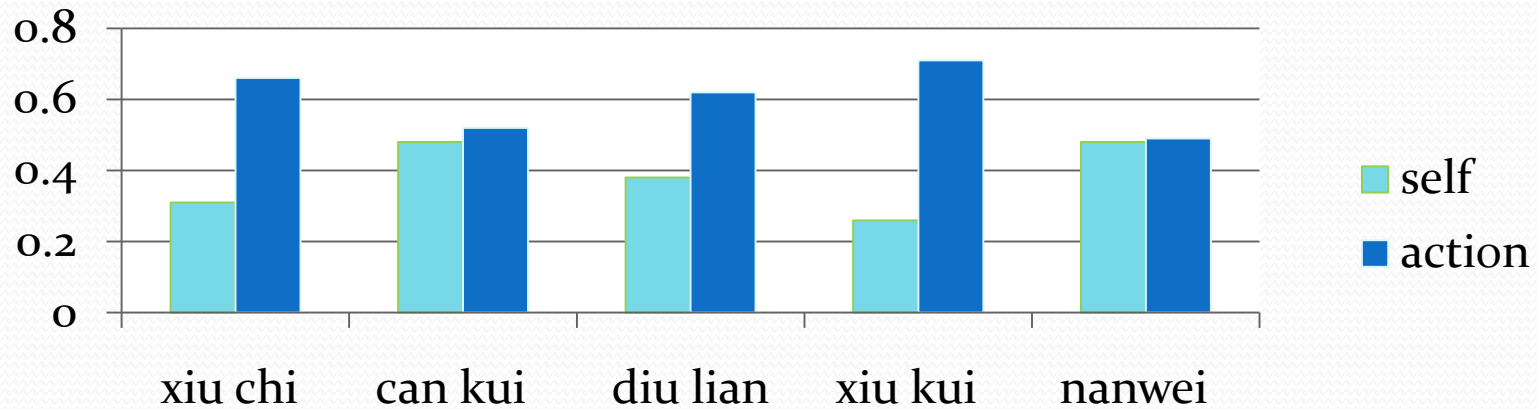


Interaction in Chinese,
 $X^2(1, N=39) = 12.75, p < .05$

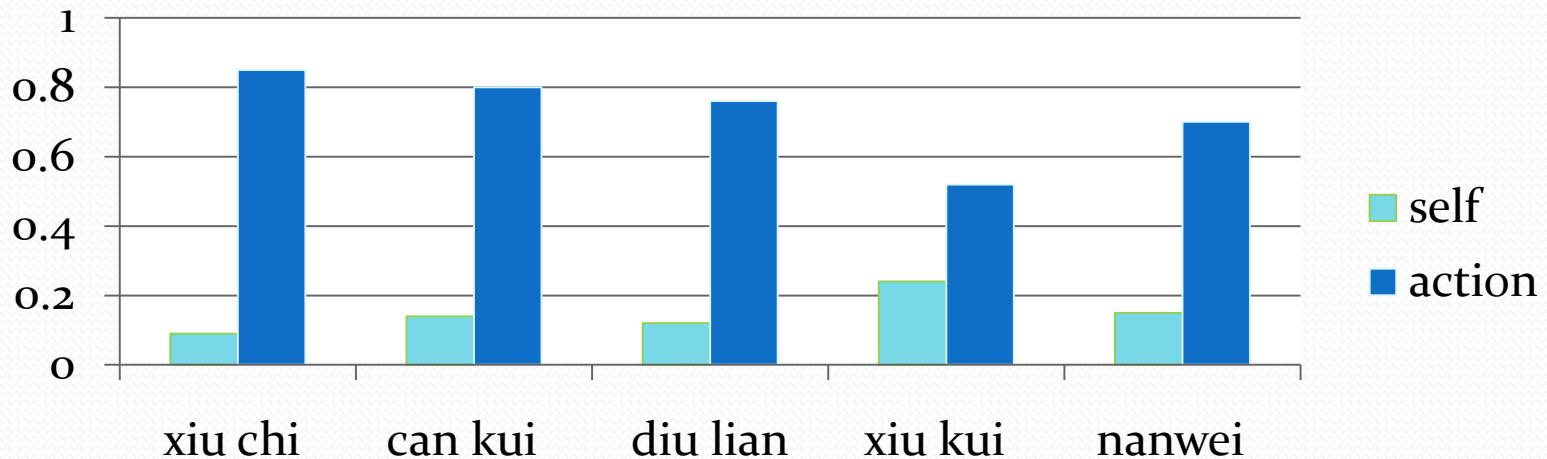


Interaction in Euro-Canadian,
 $X^2(1, N=34) = 7.52, p < .05$

Self vs. *action* dimension of *shame* in Chinese and Euro-Canadian Participants

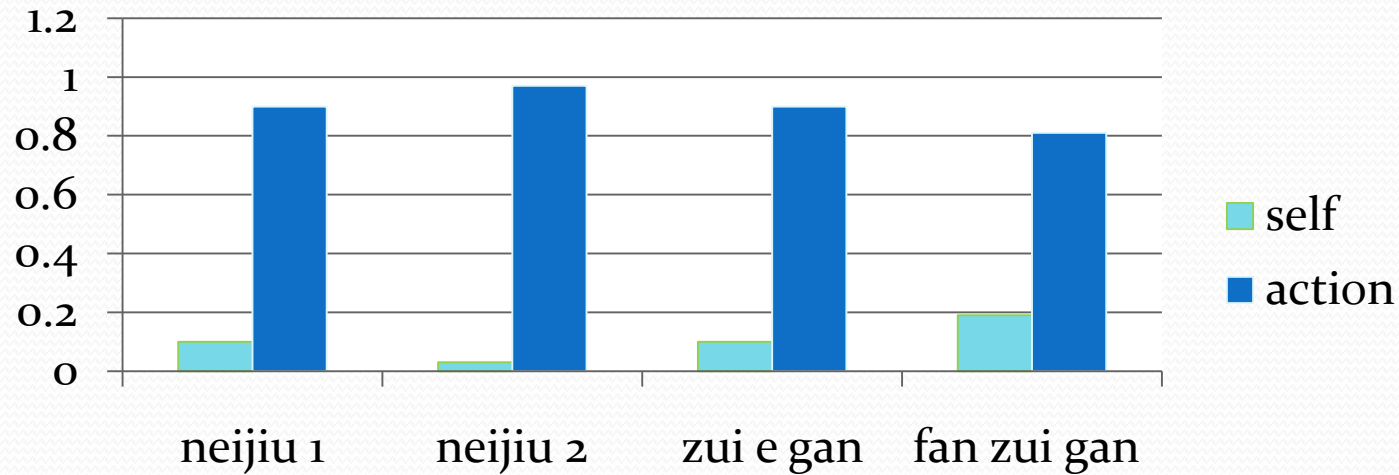


Chinese action: $X^2(4, N=39) = 5.78, ns.$

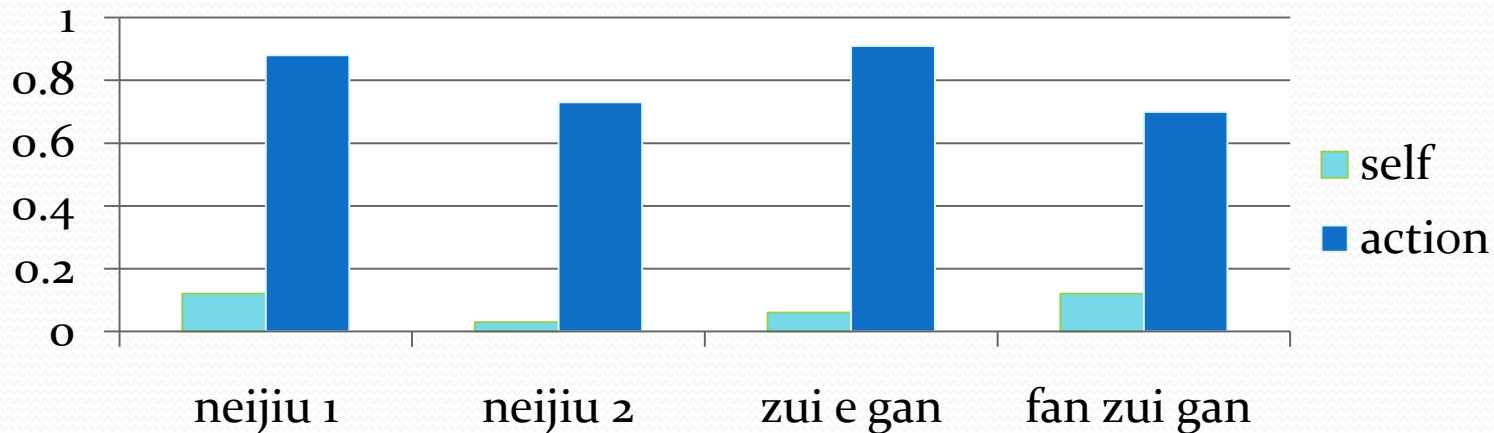


Euro-Canadian action: $X^2(4, N=34) = 8.97, ns.$

Self vs. *action* dimension of *guilt* in *Chinese* and *Euro-Canadian* Participants

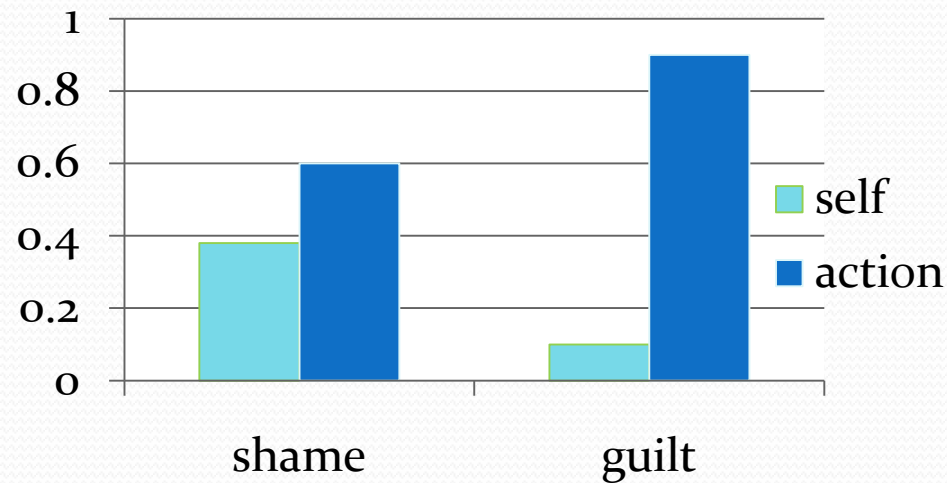


Chinese action, $X^2(3, N=39) = 1.44, ns.$



Euro-Canadian action, $X^2(3, N=34) = 4.09, ns.$

Interaction between focus (*self* vs. *action*) and emotions (*shame* vs. *guilt*) in Chinese and Euro-Canadian Participants

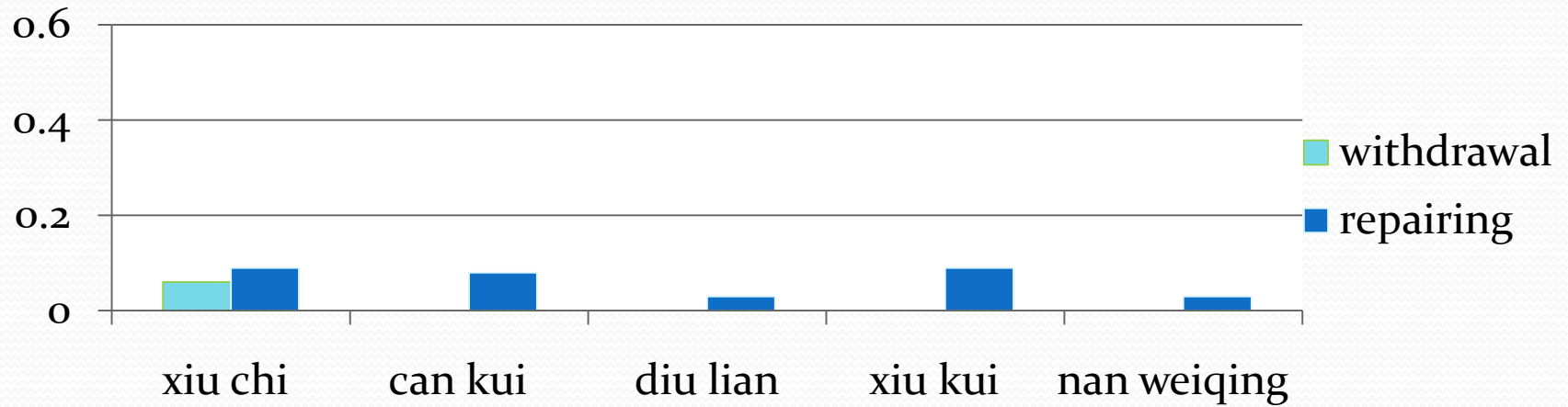


Interaction in Chinese,
 $X^2(1, N=39) = 22.31, p < .05$

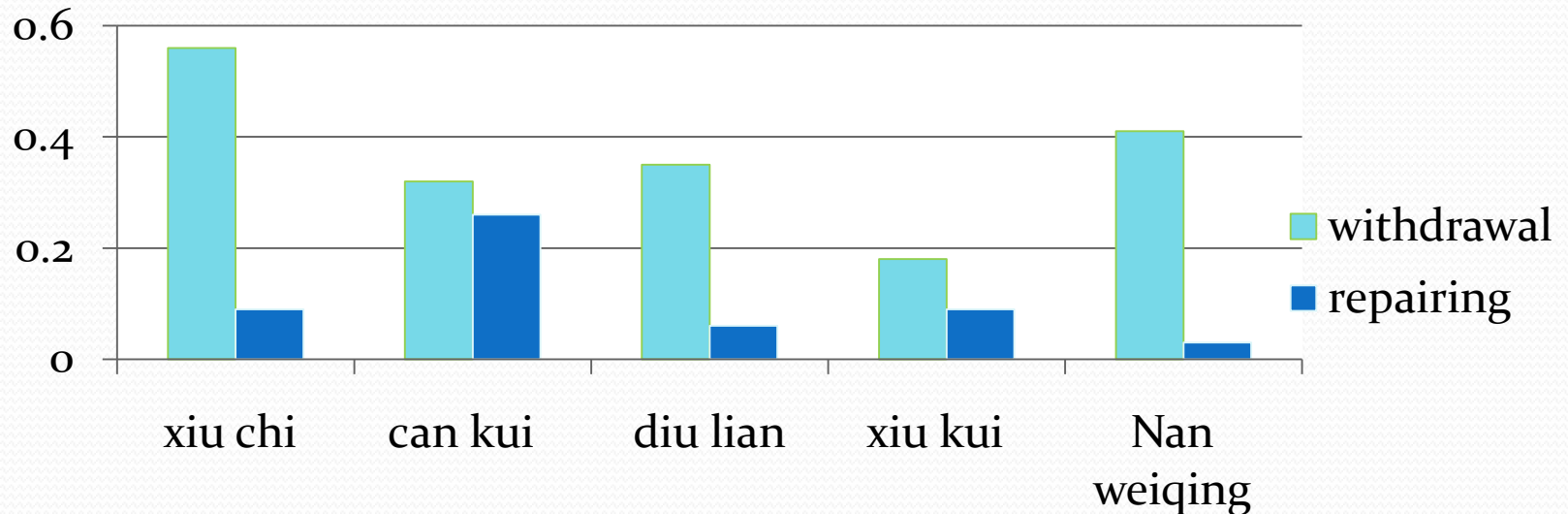


Interaction in Euro-Canadian
 $X^2(1, N=34) = 2.54, ns.$

Withdrawal vs. repairing action responses to *shame* in Chinese and Euro-Canadian Participants

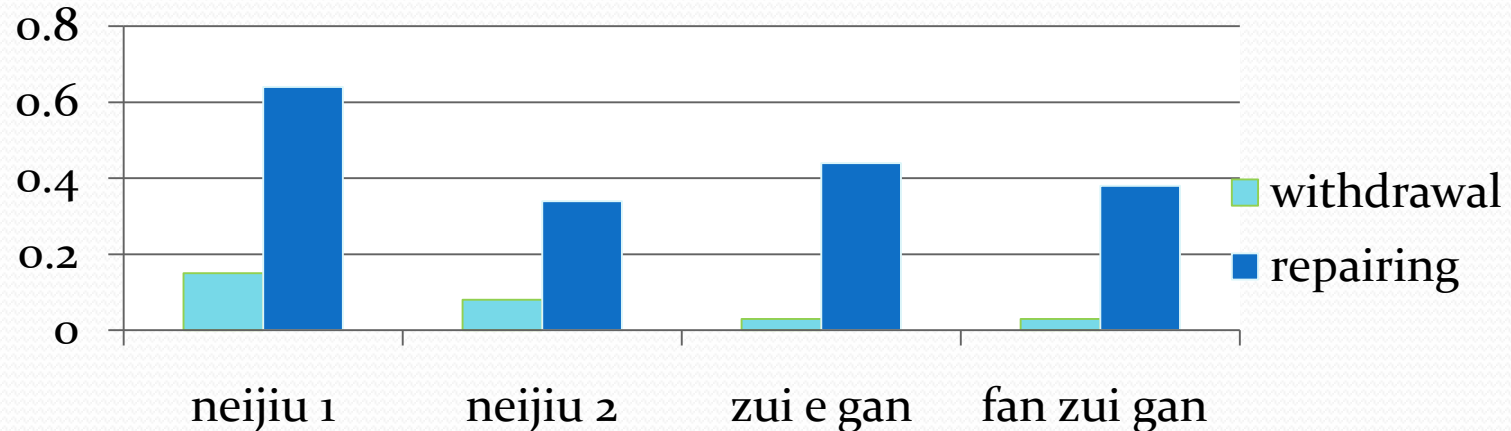
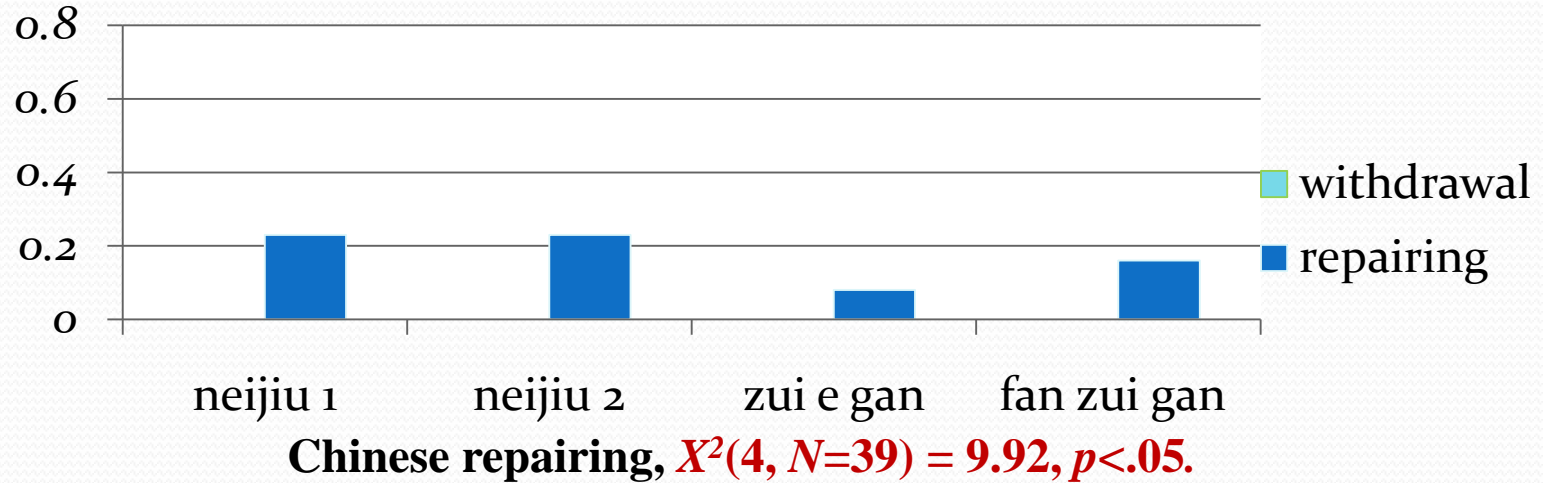


Chinese response, $X^2(4, N=39) = 6.12, ns.$

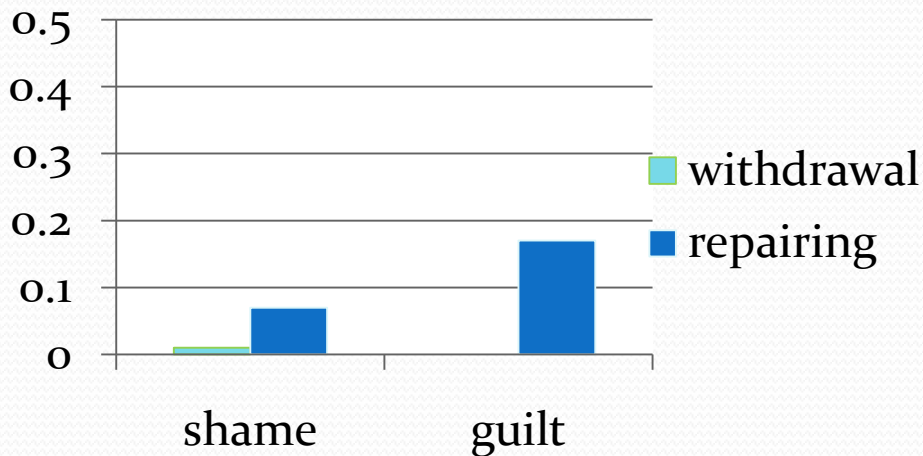


Euro-Canadian response, $X^2(4, N=34) = 30.30, p < .05.$

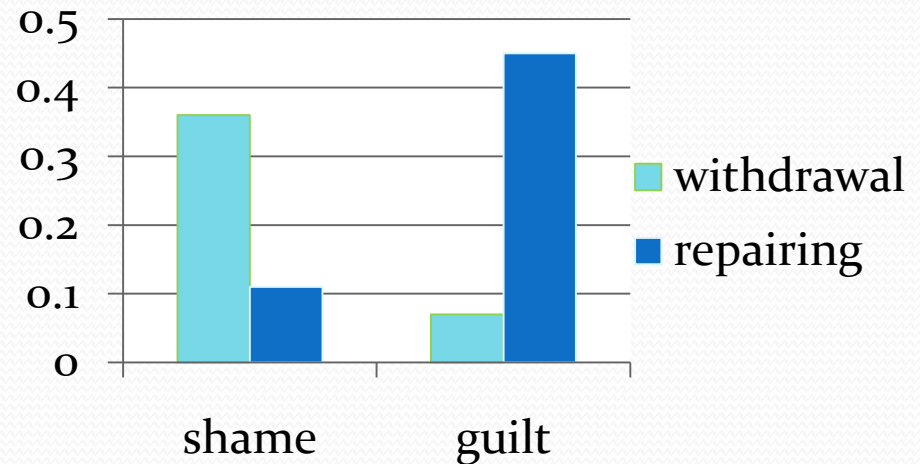
Withdrawal vs. *repairing action* responses to *guilt* in Chinese and Euro-Canadian Participants



Interaction between response (*withdrawal* vs. *repairing action*) and emotion (*shame* vs. *guilt*) in Chinese and *Euro-Canadian* Participants



Interaction in Chinese,
 $X^2(1, N=39) = 2.21, ns.$



Interaction in Euro-Canadian,
 $X^2(1, N=34) = 40.07, p < .05$

Discussion

- Although English lacks equivalent terms for all the categories, European Canadians also distinguished between the different types of shame and guilt
- Distinctions are not identical

Public versus Private

- Shame and guilt can be experienced in public and private in both cultures
 - For European Canadians, public and private unequally frequent in guilt scenarios
 - For both cultures, public always more frequent in shame scenarios

Self versus Action

- Participants in both cultures blamed their actions more than themselves in *guilt* situations
 - However, Chinese people in shame situations focused on both self and actions when experiencing shame
 - Euro-Canadians focused more on actions in both shame and guilt scenarios

Withdrawal versus Repair

- Participants in both cultures focused more on repairing actions in guilt scenarios
 - However, Euro-Canadians focused on withdrawal more than repairing in shame scenarios
 - Chinese participants focused on repairing actions in both shame and guilt scenarios

Conclusion

- Euro-Canadian seemed to recognize the breadth of shame and guilt despite lacking the same terms
- However, the experience of these universal emotions are different by culture
- The results confirm that shame and guilt may be universal, but that cultural background moderates their experience

Thank you !

