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### Special Emotion Words: Interpersonal Joy and Sorrow

While people have emotional responses to their own successes and failures, they often have emotional responses to the experiences or emotions of others as well. These emotional responses can be complex or confusing, but can usually be regarded as either forms of joy or resentment. Additionally, they arise from either positive or negative experiences of others (see *Figure 1*). The English language only has words for the negative or resentful responses caused by another's experiences. These words include *sympathy*, a feeling of sadness caused by another's pain or misfortune, and *envy*, a feeling of resent caused by another's good fortune. English appears to lack words for pleasurable feelings caused by other's experiences, however such words can be found in other languages.

The German word *Schadenfreude* is a compound of the German words for harm and joy and describes pleasure derived from other people's misfortunes ("Schadenfreude", 2014). Although this word has recently been adopted into English and several other languages, English has no native words with the same definition that have modern usage. Some sources site the word *epicharikaky* or *epicaricacy* which comes from the Greek roots for upon, evil, and joy and is found in several 18<sup>th</sup> century English dictionaries, as an English equivalent for *Schadenfreude* (Shipley, 1955). However this word is found in very few modern dictionaries and does not appear in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) or the British National Corpus (BNC) suggesting that the word has either fallen out of use or was never widely used to begin

with. Even though the word *Schadenfreude* and its equivalents are found in few languages, the emotion it describes is widely studied and thought to be universally experienced (McNamee, 2007). Wierzbicka is careful to note that people experiencing *Schadenfreude* are not sadists who specifically enjoy other people's suffering but instead enjoy the advantage they have over the other people (Wierzbicka, 1999). As a song in the musical *Avenue Q* goes: "*Schadenfreude*: making me feel glad that I'm not you," (Lopez & Marx, 2003). In this way *Schadenfreude* an antonym of *envy* since someone experiencing envy is sad or angry that they do not have another person's advantage. *Schadenfreude* can also be seen as an antonym of *sympathy* and *compassion* since the person experiencing these emotions feels unhappy that someone else is suffering.

Standard English has not borrowed any words for yet the third antonym of *Schadenfreude* (as well as of *envy* and *sympathy*), which would mean taking pleasure from somebody else's happiness, success, or well-being. While in English people say things like "I'm so happy for you," "my pleasure," "congratulations" or "it warms my heart" to express this sentiment, there are no words for this sentiment itself. *Goodwill* may be the closest approximation, but *goodwill* is thought of as more of an intention than an emotion. The first person subject does not "experience goodwill," he "has goodwill," another person "experiences the subject's goodwill." Taking pleasure from someone else's well-being may also be called a form of *love* or *empathy*. Yet, the term *love* is too broad to be used for this definition without confusion with its other definitions or implications. The term *empathy* can either be defined as the understanding of others' emotions without an emotional correlate in oneself or as an emotion similar to sympathy elicited by others suffering. However, several words with this approximate definition can be found in other languages and specific cultures. For example, the term *mudita*, from the dead Indo-Aryan language of Pali, is still widely used in Buddhist cultures and is described as

delighting in rather than begrudging other people's well-being. One cannot experience *mudita* while experiencing vicarious pride. *Mudita* is a selfless emotion and the experiencer should not be directly gaining anything from the other's accomplishments or success (Salzberg, 1995). The Hebrew word *firgun*, borrowed from Yiddish, may mean either treating someone kindly for the sole purpose of making that person feel good or not being envious of another person's accomplishments (Levinson, 2011). While the Hawaiian word *aloha* has been viewed or even adopted in English as simply a greeting the word's Hawaiian meaning is actually much broader. Wierzbicka defines *aloha* in her natural semantic meta language as "x feels something good towards y; x wants y to feel something good." Unlike love, it does not imply that x and y are acquainted and unlike sympathy it does not imply that something bad happened to y. Aloha is also more personal and emotional than *friendliness* or *goodwill* (Wierzbicka, 1992).

Why are there no English words for pleasurable feelings caused by other's emotions or experiences? Considering that *love* and *happiness* are both highly valued emotions in English it seems strange that it have no equivalent for *mudita*. Also since English is spoken in competitive and capitalistic societies, shouldn't it have a more prominent native word for *Schadenfreude*? Maybe English lacks such words because English speakers view happiness as the norm and sadness and anger as extremes (Wierzbicka, 2004) (Wilson). When somebody else causes us to feel something unpleasant like *envy* or *compassion*, we are more likely to notice this feeling in ourselves and name it. Likewise when someone causes us to feel something good we likely shrug it off as normal and do not put a name to it. This may also be why the English language has adopted the word *Schadenfreude* and not *mudita*, because it is more noticeable or unusual for an English speaker to see someone sad or suffering than to see someone who is happy and well. Additionally, since negative emotions are often described as more "basic" than positive

emotions, words for *sympathy* and, especially, *envy* are likely to be found in most languages. In contrast, the words for *mudita* and *Schadenfreude* are more rare and specific. Cultures with emphasis on collectivism or religion may be more likely to have a word similar to *mudita* since it implies that one may derive joy from seeing other people happy and successful even when one is suffering themselves. Words similar to *Schadenfreude* may be more readily adopted into competitive and secular societies where people constantly look to outdo one another.

Figure 1:

|  | Person X, The 1 <sup>st</sup> Person Subject           |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| Person(s) Y, the cause of person X's emotion |  | Feels happy or "positive emotions"  | Feels sadness, anger or resent, or "negative emotions" |
|  | Has success, well-being, happiness, an advantage, etc. | <i>mudita</i> (Buddhist), <i>firgun</i> (Yiddish/Hebrew), <i>aloha</i> (Hawaiian) | <i>envy</i>  |
|  | Has sadness, suffering, a disadvantage, etc.           | <i>Schadenfreude</i> (German)   | <i>sympathy</i> ,<br><i>compassion</i>                 |

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