



# Environmentally friendly consumer choices: Cultural differences in the self-regulatory function of anticipated pride and guilt



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## ABSTRACT

Anticipated self-conscious emotions, such as pride and guilt, help individuals to behave in line with their personal and social standards regarding the environment. We seek to explore whether this self-regulatory role of anticipated pride and guilt functions similarly across individuals from different cultures ( $N = 3854$ ). We show that there are no differences across countries in the self-regulatory function of anticipated pride and guilt *within* collectivistic and individualistic cultures but that there are differences *between* collectivistic and individualistic cultures. For example, for individuals from individualistic countries, anticipated emotions are more strongly affected by attitudes than they are for individuals from collectivistic countries. The results provide a first indication that the function of emotions is more social in nature for individuals from collectivistic than individualistic cultures. These findings imply that cultural differences in the function of emotions are associated with cultural differences in self-construal.

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## 1. Introduction

The world is confronted with environmental issues such as climate change, air and water pollution, and loss of biodiversity. Many of these problems are caused by human behaviour (DuNann Winter & Koger, 2004; Gardner & Stern, 2002) and therefore can be managed by guiding consumer behaviour in a way that reduces environmental impact (Steg & Vlek, 2009).

Recently is shown that anticipated pride and guilt guide individuals to behave themselves in accordance with pro-environmental social norms and attitudes thus pointing to a self-regulatory function of these emotions (Onwezen, Bartels, & Antonides, 2013). We aim to explore whether the self-regulatory function of pride and guilt can be validated across a range of countries. We conduct a first test of whether this self-regulatory function differs between individuals from collectivistic and individualistic cultures. Based on previous studies (Mesquita, 2001; Tracy & Robins, 2007), we suggest that cultural differences in the function of emotions are primarily caused by differences in the construal of the self, i.e. regarding how consumers perceive themselves in relation to others.

Accordingly, we offer theoretical insights into the nature and functioning of self-conscious emotions, respond to the call for research on emotions in the context of environmentally friendly behaviour (Kals & Maes; Vining & Ebreo, 2002), and provide practical insights into ways of stimulating pro-environmental behaviour cross-culturally. We focus on purchases of organic products because they are among others purchased out of concern for the environment (Lockie, Lyons, Lawrence, & Mummery, 2002; Magnusson, Arvola, Hursti, Åberg, & Sjöden, 2003).

We first provide an overview of the literature on the self-regulatory function of anticipated pride and guilt and on the proposed differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Next, we report on our study procedures and results, and discuss their implications.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Self-regulatory function of anticipated pride and guilt

Self-conscious emotions are evoked when people evaluate their behaviour with respect to a set of personal or social standards (Lewis, 1993; Tracy & Robins, 2004a). The current study focuses specifically on two self-conscious emotions, pride and guilt, because these emotions seem to be especially relevant in the context of pro-environmental behaviour. *Pride* is a positive emotion

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that is experienced as a pleasant feeling and that often accompanies feelings of self-worth (Rodríguez Mosquera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2000; Tracy & Robins, 2007). Guilt is a negative emotion that leads to feeling tense, remorseful, and worried (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994; Ferguson, Stegge, & Damhuis, 1991). Pride (Lewis, 1993; Mascolo & Fischer, 1995; Tangney, 1999; Tracy & Robins, 2004b) and guilt (Kugler & Jones, 1992; Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996) have some common characteristics. Both arise when one feels responsible for an individual act and evaluates this act with respect to personal or social standards. Individuals tend to strive towards and maintain pride, and to avoid and get rid of guilt. Subsequently, these emotions guide behaviour in accordance with personal and social standards. A limited body of recent research shows evidence for a self-regulatory function of self-conscious emotions (e.g., Hynie, MacDonald, & Marques, 2006; Su, Lu, & Lin, 2011), such that they help to monitor and adapt one's own behaviour to reflect one's standards or goals (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Anticipated negative self-conscious emotions mediate the relationship between attitudes and social norms on intentions in the context of condom use (Hynie et al., 2006) and in the context of textbook piracy (Su et al., 2011).

In the context of environmentally friendly behaviour, previous studies show that pride (Harth, Leach, & Kessler, 2013) and guilt (Arvola et al., 2008; Bamberg, Hunecke, & Blöbaum, 2007; Bamberg & Möser, 2007; Carrus, Passafaro, & Bonnes, 2008; Ferguson & Branscombe, 2010; Harth et al., 2013; Kaiser, Schultz, Berenguer, Corral-Verdugo, & Tankha, 2008; Verhoef, 2005) are associated with pro-environmental behaviour. In addition, Onwezen, Bartels, et al. (2013) recently explored the function of pride and guilt in the context of the environment. They show evidence for a self-regulatory function of anticipated pride and guilt, such that they mediate the effects of personal norms, attitudes, and social norms on environmentally friendly intentions. We therefore hypothesise the following:

**Hypothesis 1.** *Anticipated pride and guilt regarding the environment mediate the effects of attitudes and social norms on environmentally friendly purchase intentions.*

Fig. 1 shows a graphical representation of the conceptual model. Next, we describe the proposed differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

### 2.2. Similarities within individualistic and collectivistic cultures in the self-regulatory function of anticipated pride and guilt

Studies show that the proposed basic mechanism (Hypothesis 1) exists across a range of cultures such that the self-regulatory function of guilt is found in both individualistic (i.e. Canada; Hynie et al., 2006) and collectivistic (i.e. Taiwan; Su et al., 2011) countries. Mesquita (2001), furthermore, states that although

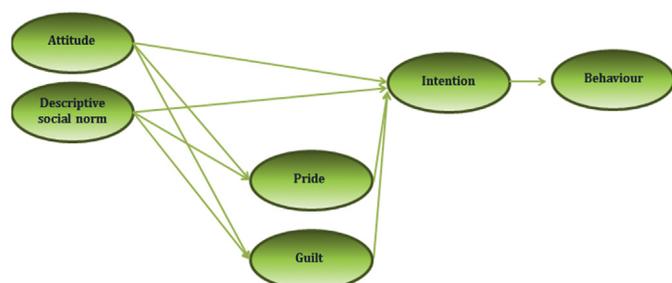


Fig. 1. Proposed conceptual model.

multiple differences in emotions (e.g., concerns, appraisals and action readiness) exist between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, individuals within individualistic and collectivistic cultures have comparable emotions and functions of emotions. We therefore hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 2.** *The mediating effects of anticipated pride and guilt on the effects of attitudes and social norms on organic purchase intentions do not differ within individualistic or within collectivistic cultures.*

### 2.3. Differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures in the self-regulatory function of anticipated pride and guilt

Although we hypothesized that anticipated pride and guilt have a self-regulatory-function in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Hypothesis 2), we propose that the strength of the associations differs across individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Several researchers suggest that a different construal of the self how individuals see themselves in relation to others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) leads to different self-conscious emotions, as these emotions rely on self-awareness and self-evaluations (Tracy & Robins, 2004a; Tracy, Robins, & Tangney, 2007). Because individuals from different cultures have a different construal of the self, self-conscious emotions are sensitive to cross-cultural differences (Eid & Diener, 2001; Tangney & Fischer, 1995).

In cross-cultural psychology, two prototypical types of self-construal have been distinguished by several authors: the independent self and the interdependent self (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The independent self is emphasised more in individualistic cultures, while the interdependent self is represented more often in collectivistic cultures (Cross, Hardin, & Gercek-Swing, 2011). An independent self is associated with individual goals, attributes, abilities, and preferences, independent from others. An interdependent self encompasses larger social groups (e.g., family, neighbourhood, or a sports team) and is associated with a self that is regulated by the emotions, thoughts, and actions of other people (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Previous studies show that individuals from collectivistic and individualistic cultures differ in their sensitivity to social norms and attitudes. Collectivistic cultures are shown to be more inclined to follow social norms and less inclined to follow attitudes in their green purchasing behaviour compared to individualistic cultures (Chan & Lau, 2002). We believe that these differences occur due to cultural differences in the underlying emotional mechanism, such that collectivistic and individualistic cultures differ in the mediating effects of self-conscious emotions between the norm-intention and attitude-intention association. Additionally, we believe that these cultural differences result from differences in self-construal, as that we expect to find differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures, and not within these cultures. Below we formulate specific propositions based on previous research findings.

Previous findings have shown that self-construal plays an important role in predicting thoughts and behaviours related to the environment (Arnocky, Stroink, & DeCicco, 2007; McCarty & Shrum, 2001). However, research on cross-cultural differences in the self-regulatory function of anticipated pride and guilt is lacking. Previous studies do compare cultural differences in the effects of personal and social standards in evoking pride and guilt (i.e. first part of mediation effect) and in the effects of pride and guilt on intentions or behaviour (i.e. second part of mediation effect). Regarding the first part of the mediation effect two studies indicate that social norms have a larger effect on emotions in collectivistic compared to individualistic cultures. Norm violations related to

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