



Intrapersonal characteristics of body-related guilt, shame, pride, and envy in Canadian adults[☆]



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ABSTRACT

This study examined differences in body-related shame, guilt, pride, and envy based on intrapersonal characteristics of sex, age, and weight status in 527 Canadian adults. Compared to men, women reported significantly higher shame and guilt contextualized to the body. No sex differences were observed for envy or pride. Middle-aged adults reported higher shame and lower pride compared with young adults, whereas no age differences were observed with body-related guilt. Meanwhile, shame and guilt were highest for individuals who had overweight or obese weight status, and pride was highest in individuals with average weight status. Overall, effect sizes were small and there were no significant interaction effects between sex, age, and weight status across body-related emotions. Further research is needed to capture similarities and differences of body-related self-conscious emotions between intrapersonal characteristics, to aid the development of intervention strategies to manage this important dimension of body image.

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Introduction

Body image is a multidimensional construct encompassing perceptions of body appearance, thoughts and beliefs regarding body shape and appearance, emotions reflecting how individuals feel about their body size and shape, and behaviors that embody actions related to appearance (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). While many of these dimensions have been examined extensively in the literature, affective aspects of body image and distinct emotional experiences have been relatively understudied. Specifically, researchers have highlighted the value of focusing on self-conscious emotions contextualized to specific domains (Tangney & Tracy, 2012), such as body image. The current research aims to explore body-related shame, guilt, envy, and pride by identifying person-specific factors (e.g., sex, age, weight status) that will help to better inform theoretical conceptualizations and individuals at risk for experiencing body-related emotions.

Body-related Self-Conscious Emotions

Body-related shame has been defined as a negative feeling elicited from a perceived or feared failure to meet societal standard of physical appearance and body shame (Noll & Fredrickson, 1998; Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996). Researchers have identified two facets of shame (Gilbert, 1998, 2002), consisting of external shame (e.g., awareness that self may be viewed negatively by others) and internal shame (e.g., negative self-evaluation originating from the self). Chronic experiences of generalized and body-specific shame have been linked with maladaptive psychological, behavioral, and physical outcomes, such as depression (Ashby, Rice, & Martin, 2006; Tiggemann & Kuring, 2004), decreased self-esteem (Bessenoff & Snow, 2006), disordered eating (Gupta, Rosenthal, Mancini, Cheavens, & Lynch, 2008; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998; Swan & Andrews, 2003), lower physical activity (Sabiston et al., 2010), and suicidal behavior (Brown, Linehan, Comtois, Murray, & Chapman, 2009). Specifically, the external facet of shame is more strongly tied to psychopathology (Kim, Thibodeau, & Jorgensen, 2011), since it involves the possibility of social exclusion. Considering the consequences associated with body-related shame, research is needed to identify intrapersonal predisposing factors tied to these emotional experiences.

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Body-related guilt is a negative emotion that involves remorse and regret in reference to a specific behavior related to the physical self that is perceived as undesirable (Calogero & Pina, 2011; Tangney et al., 1996). Experiences of guilt are typically less detrimental and intense than experiences of shame, and can serve an adaptive role by motivating individuals to engage in reparative actions to mend their perceived transgression(s) (Tangney et al., 1996). Due to this reparative nature, body-related guilt can be adaptive by motivating exercise (Crocker et al., 2014; Sabiston et al., 2010), but may also have maladaptive functions by eliciting restrained eating and compensatory exercise behaviors (Calogero & Pina, 2011; Thompson, Dinnel, & Dill, 2003). However, little is known about personal characteristics that heighten experiences of guilt in the context of the physical self. This limits our ability to understand who should be targeted in interventions developed to promote optimal body-related emotional functioning.

Body-related envy arises in response to unfavorable social comparisons with others who are perceived as being superior in domains of the body and appearance (Parrott & Smith, 1993; Pila, Stamiris, Castonguay, & Sabiston, 2014; Salovey & Rodin, 1991). Body-related envy is characterized as a complex combination of unpleasant psychological states, including feelings of inferiority, resentment, hostility, and injustice towards the envied other (Pila et al., 2014; Salovey & Rodin, 1991; Smith & Kim, 2007). Body-related envy may also involve two primary affective components, such as more benign states of inferiority and admiration (Pila et al., 2014; van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2009), and more malicious states of hostility and ill-will (Foster, 1972; Parrott, 1991; Pila et al., 2014). Compared to the focus on body-related shame and guilt, there is very limited research on body-related envy, and little is known about the personal characteristics that foster experiences of envy around the body.

The only positive self-conscious emotion, body-related pride is elicited from engagement in socially valued behaviors or socially presenting the physical self in a positive manner (Castonguay, Brunet, Ferguson, & Sabiston, 2012; Tracy & Robins, 2007). Although two facets of pride have been identified (i.e., hubristic and authentic pride; Tracy & Robins, 2004), authentic body-related pride more closely reflects recent conceptualizations of positive body image, specifically body appreciation (e.g., acceptance and gratitude of body's characteristics, functions, health and social representations; Webb, Wood-Barcalow, & Tylka, 2015). Both generalized and body-specific pride have been associated with the development of genuine self-esteem, intrinsic motivation to engage in goal-directed tasks and behaviors (Carver, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2010; Sabiston et al., 2010), positive social representations (Williams & DeSteno, 2008, 2009), and flourishing (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Given evidence that generalized pride is experienced differently based on age (Orth, Robins, & Soto, 2010) and sex (Else-Quest, Higgins, Allison, & Morton, 2012), it is important to better understand the specific intrapersonal determinants of pride pertaining to the physical self. Examining body-related pride can aid in broadening both theoretical frameworks of positive body image (Tylka, 2011; Webb et al., 2015) and self-conscious emotions (Tracy & Robins, 2004) and inform the development of clinical strategies that can both reduce negative emotion and independently promote positive emotion (Webb et al., 2015).

Intrapersonal Characteristics

Sex. Despite the universality of emotional experiences, there is evidence to suggest that men and women differ in self-reported emotional experiences (Hutson-Comeaux & Kelly, 2002; Krings & Gordon, 1998). For example, women report more frequent and intense negative and positive emotions in social domains and men in achievement domains (Fabes & Martin, 1991;

Fujita, Diener, & Sandvik, 1991). Given the social representation and self-presentational nature of body appearance and function (Bagozzi & Edwards, 2000; Brunet & Sabiston, 2009), there may be important sex differences that characterize different body-related self-conscious experiences. Moreover, in a meta-analysis of sex differences in self-conscious emotions, Else-Quest et al. (2012) concluded that women reported more negative emotions such as shame ($d = -0.29$) and guilt ($d = -0.27$), with larger effects in domains that focused on physical appearance and the body. Similarly, a higher percentage of women have reported experiences of body-related envy compared to men (Pila et al., 2014). There have been fewer sex differences in reports of positive body emotions. For example, Else-Quest et al. (2012) reported negligible gender differences in authentic pride ($d = -.01$) and Castonguay, Gilchrist, Mack, and Sabiston (2013) reported no significant differences in reports of authentic body-related pride between women and men. Based on this evidence, sex-specific intervention strategies may be needed to help reduce negative emotional experiences and sex-inclusive strategies could be used to promote positive body-related emotions.

Age. Little is known about the developmental course of self-conscious emotion experiences, especially within the domain of the physical self. In the only study examining cross-sectional age differences of men and women aged 13–89 years old, Orth et al. (2010) suggested that self-conscious emotions with adaptive properties (i.e., guilt and authentic pride) are increasingly experienced as people age, while more maladaptive emotions (i.e., shame) are more prevalent among adolescents and young adults. These findings are generally consistent with research on other body-related constructs. For example, increases in body satisfaction have been reported in older adulthood, which may reflect (a) the development of techniques to manage changing body appearance and function (Peat, Peyerl, & Muehlenkamp, 2008), (b) declining pressure to achieve body ideals in older age (Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001) and (c) increased appreciation for body's functionality versus esthetics (Swami, Tran, Stieger, & Voracek, 2015). Based on preliminary evidence that self-conscious emotions may function differently throughout the lifespan, and well-documented evidence for developmental changes in body-related constructs, understanding age differences in body-related self-conscious emotions may be valuable to inform theoretical and practical advancements.

Weight status. Drawing more generally from the body image affect literature, higher weight status (e.g., body mass index [BMI]) is linked with more negative and less positive emotions (Brewer, Diehl, Cornelius, Joshua, & van Raalte, 2004; Hill & Williams, 1998), although this pattern might be more complex among men, who evidence a curvilinear trend between BMI and body satisfaction (Benford & Swami, 2014; Frederick, Peplau, & Lever, 2006). Some researchers have found positive associations between weight status and body-related guilt and shame (Conradt et al., 2007; Pila, Sabiston, Brunet, Castonguay, & O'Loughlin, 2015). Both Conradt et al. (2007) and Pila et al. (2015) speculate that weight stigma linked with overweight and obesity may play an important role in experiences of negative self-conscious emotions in these individuals. Specifically, individuals with weight status that is discrepant from the socially-prescribed physique ideals of thinness and muscularity may experience higher body image concerns such as body-related shame (Bessenoff & Snow, 2006; Dittmar & Howard, 2004). Given the evidence linking higher weight status with negative body image correlates, it is important to examine the relationship between BMI and a range of negative and positive body-related self-conscious emotions.

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