

Abstract of thesis entitled:

How Age Affects Negative Self-Conscious Emotions: The Roles of Self-Concept and Self-Compassion

Submitted by WANG, Hao

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology

at The Chinese University of Hong Kong in July, 2017

Abstract

Negative self-conscious emotions (e.g., shame and guilt) are closely related to individuals' mental health and well-being. A lot of research has been done on the emergence of negative self-conscious emotions in childhood, while little is known about their development trends in the second half of life. To learn more about older adults' negative self-conscious emotions, three studies were conducted to explore (a) older adults' experience of negative self-conscious emotions, (b) factors which might contribute to the age differences in experiencing negative self-conscious emotions, and (c) strategies which might help people to cope with their negative self-conscious emotions, respectively.

Specifically, Study 1 explored the developmental trends of shame and embarrassment across adulthood by using the data from General Social Surveys (GSS) of 1996 and 2006. Hierarchical regressions partially supported Strength and Vulnerability Integration theory (SAVI). Compared to young adults, older adults reported a lower frequency of embarrassment experiences, suggesting that older adults were more skillful at avoiding negative events. On the other hand, older adults were more vulnerable once negative self-conscious emotions were elicited. They were more likely to experience embarrassment and feel ashamed for their family members in hypothetical negative situations.

Since the emotion assessments in GSS were single item measures and did not contain assessments for guilt feelings, Study 2 further tested SAVI theory in older adults' experience of guilt, embarrassment, and shame from the perspectives of

proneness, frequency, and intensity by using experience sampling method.

Meanwhile, Study 2 also examined the role of self-concept in the development of negative self-conscious emotions. Results further supported SAVI theory showing that older adults were more prone to adaptive emotions (i.e., guilt), and less prone to maladaptive emotions (i.e., shame) than young adults. On the other hand, older adults did experience a higher intensity of negative self-conscious emotions than young adults, especially when they perceived stress. Hierarchical linear model and linear regression analyses suggested that stable low self-esteem status seemed to be a risk factor for older adults to experience negative self-conscious emotions more intensely and more frequently.

Apart from examining age differences and identifying risk factors, this research also tried to find ways to help individuals cope with their negative self-conscious emotions. By manipulating participants' self-compassion and state self-esteem, Study 3 tested the coping effects of the two strategies. Results showed a similar effect size of the two strategies in reducing individuals' intensities of negative self-conscious emotions. Further analyses suggested that the two strategies might reduce individuals' intensities of negative self-conscious emotions by lowering their expectations on potential influences caused by the negative events.

Keywords: negative self-conscious emotions, guilt, embarrassment, shame, self-esteem status, self-compassion

年齡對負性自我意識情緒的影響：自我概念及自憫的作用

摘要

負性自我意識情緒（如，羞恥、內疚）與個體的心理健康及幸福感緊密相關。然而現有研究大多集中於兒童早期負性自我意識情緒的出現及分化，極少提及成年後的發展情況。為進一步了解老年人的負性自我意識情緒，本研究旨在通過三個實驗探索（a）老年人負性自我意識情緒體驗的特徵，（b）影響負性自我意識情緒發展的可能因素，及（c）有助於個體應對其負性自我意識情緒體驗的方法。

具體而言，實驗一利用 1996 年及 2006 年的綜合社會調查數據（General Social Survey, GSS）初步檢驗了羞恥（shame）及難為情（粵語語境下採用此翻譯方案對應英語語境中的 embarrassment）在成年階段的發展軌跡。分層回歸結果支持優劣並存假說（Strength and Vulnerability Integration theory, SAVI），即，相比青年個體，老年人在日常生活中更少體驗到難為情，表明老年人可能更擅長迴避負性事件；與此同時，一旦受到激發，老年人通常會體驗到更為強烈的負性自我意識情緒，比如本實驗中老年人在虛擬負性情境中更容易體驗到難為情，也更容易因為家庭成員的情況而感到羞恥。

鑒於 GSS 中測量情緒的工具多為單一條目且並不涉及內疚（guilt）的測量，實驗二通過經驗取樣法（experience sampling）從情緒易感性、體驗頻率、及體驗強度三個角度出發深入探索老年人對於內疚、難為情、及羞恥的情緒體

驗，以進一步檢驗優劣並存假說。同時，實驗二亦對自我概念在負性自我意識情緒發展中起到的作用進行了探討。結果表明，老年人更容易體驗到適應性情緒（如內疚），也更不易體驗到非適應性情緒（如羞恥）；而在日常生活中，尤其是在應激狀態下，老年人體驗到的負性自我意識情緒強度更高，以上兩點均進一步支持了優劣並存假說。另外，分層線性模型及線性回歸分析結果表明保持穩定低自尊狀態的老年人更易體驗到頻率更高且強度更大的負性自我意識情緒。

除檢驗負性自我意識情緒的年齡差異及影響因素之外，本研究還致力於尋找可以幫助個體有效應對負性自我意識情緒的方法。通過操控被試的自憫水平（self-compassion）及狀態自尊水平，實驗三比較了自憫及自尊在應對負性自我意識情緒時的效應大小。結果表明激發自憫或提高自尊均可以有效降低個體負性自我意識情緒體驗的強度，且二者對上述情緒的調節效果並未表現出顯著差異。進一步的分析表明，上述兩種應對策略可能是通過降低個體對負性事件潛在影響的預期進而起到降低個體負性自我意識情緒體驗強度的作用。

關鍵詞：負性自我意識情緒，內疚，難為情，羞恥，自尊狀態，自憫