

Body appreciation: A buffer against the impact of shame on depression

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Abstract

Shame is defined as a painful affect, associated with the perception that one's personal characteristics and/or behaviours are seen by others as unattractive. Since it signals the possibility of rejection, high levels of shame associate with high psychological suffering and several psychopathological conditions, namely depression. In contrast, body appreciation is considered a set of attitudes of acceptance and affection towards one's body image, even when one is displeased with certain body characteristics, being therefore a disposition to self-soothing and care. Taking into account the association of body appreciation with healthy mental functioning, this study aimed at exploring the buffering effect of body appreciation against shame's impact on the display of depression symptoms. This hypothesis was tested through path analysis in a community sample of adult men and women. Results revealed body appreciation as a significant moderator of the association between external shame and depressive symptomatology. The tested model explained 45% of the variance of depressive symptomatology. A graphical representation allowed understanding that this moderator effect is particularly expressive in those who experience medium to high levels of shame. In these cases, men and women who present higher body appreciation tend to display fewer depression symptoms. These

results seem to emphasize the importance of establishing a positive relationship with one's own body image, which appears to be protective either for men's and women's mental health. Considering its buffering effect of shame's impact on depression, upcoming interventions in this area could benefit from the assessment and cultivation of positive body image.