CHAPTER 10

Avoiding and Alleviating Guilt through Prosocial Behavior

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INTRODUCTION

Good deeds are often motivated by feelings of guilt. When we feel guilty over neglecting our mothers, we phone them. When we feel guilty over damaging property, we offer to pay for it. When we intentionally or unintentionally hurt our relationship partners, we apologize. Guilt is a negative emotional state associated with an internal experience of tension, remorse, and agitation (Ferguson, Stegge, & Damhuis, 1991; Tangney, 1992). Guilt is an integral component of conscience. Empirical evidence suggests that feelings of guilt play an important role in motivating behaviors that preserve, strengthen, and sustain social bonds (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Tangney, 1995) and prevent individuals from being ostracized (Kochanska, 1993). In this chapter, we briefly define guilt and prosocial behavior and examine their development. We examine how guilt may repair damaged relationships, help people refrain from committing proscribed actions, and spontaneously engage in relationship-enhancing behavior. Finally, we examine how the processes of forgiveness ameliorate feelings of guilt.
GUILT

When Do We Feel Guilty?

Guilt may occur when someone feels responsible for another person’s negative affective state or over harming another person. Hoffman (1994a) points out that guilt may arise from actions (such as lying) or from inactions (such as forgetting somebody’s birthday). Baumeister et al. (1994) note that guilt arises even when individuals do not feel personally responsible for another’s negative situation. Guilt by association, for example, may arise when an individual who did not personally injure someone was part of a group who did (Hoffman, 1994a). Moreover, existential or survivor guilt may result when a person did not commit a transgression but, “feels culpable owing to life circumstances beyond one’s control” (p. 170), such as being both wealthy and aware of the suffering of those in extreme poverty. In each of these situations, the guilty party is sensitive to the welfare of others, feels an interpersonal connection—however remote—with them, and/or is aware of a condition of inequity.

The Social Functions of Guilt

The initiation, maintenance, and avoidance of guilt serves a number of useful functions inside the context of interpersonal interactions (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994, 1995a,b; Tangney, 1995; Vangelisti & Sprague, 1998). Differences between guilt and other negative affective states such as shame (see Tangney, chapter 1, this volume) may help explain why guilt is more typically associated with prosocial behavior. Feelings of guilt promote victim-oriented concern and attempts to increase social contact. Guilt, unlike shame, is associated with action tendencies such as apologies, attempts at reparation, and reconciliatory actions that are inherently prosocial in nature. Feelings of shame prompt avoidance, social withdrawal, and attempts to hide or cover up (Tangney, 1995).

Guilt typically arises in reaction to a specific event, situation, or outcome, whereas shame arises from a negative evaluation of the entire self (Tangney, 1992, 1995; Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996). It may be easier to undo or repair a circumscribed event than to remake or recast the self (Tangney, chapter 1, this volume). A person who unintentionally bumps into a table, knocking over and breaking someone’s cup of coffee, for example, might react with guilt over the damage that was caused or shame over their own clumsiness. An individual may be readily able and willing to apologize or provide compensation (such as financial restitution for the property damage), but may feel daunted by and paralyzed into
inactivity at the prospect of trying to become permanently more graceful or attentive.

Furthermore, among individuals experiencing guilt, the concern is with the transgression or lapse, whereas with shame, the concern is more often with what onlookers or observers will think (Lewis, 1979). Guilt compared to shame may more often give rise to attempts to manage and improve one's social relationships, whereas shame compared to guilt may motivate attempts at impression management.

Guilt serves a number of interpersonal functions, such as prompting people to treat others well and helping people to avoid actions that would harm those around them. Guilt may redistribute power within unbalanced relationships, enabling the person with less power to sometimes get their way by making the other person feel guilty (Baumeister et al., 1994). Indeed, guilt can be used as a tool to manipulate and influence others to behave in ways that benefit the inducer (Baumeister, chapter 5, this volume; Baumeister et al., 1995a). Because guilt motivates prosocial behaviors, individuals inducing guilt may expect to benefit from positive responses (such as apologies and attempts at reparation) that the emotion engenders.

The Emergence of Guilt as a Social Emotion

Social emotions, such as guilt, have attracted increasing attention recently among developmental psychologists. Although the empirical base of data on the emergence of guilt among children is still quite small, theorists point to the importance of empathy in its development (Hoffman, 1982; Kochanska, 1993; Zahn–Waxler & Kochanska, 1990). Guilt is thought to emerge early in development when children empathize with another person's anger, sadness, or distress and are aware that they are responsible for the other person's affective state (Hoffman, 1994a, 1994b; Zahn–Waxler & Radke–Yarrow, 1990). Hoffman (1994b) suggests that, "blaming oneself becomes possible once one has acquired the cognitive capacity to recognize the consequences of his action for others and to be aware that he has choice and control over his own behavior" (p. 139).

It is difficult to observe exactly when children begin to feel guilty, since unlike sadness, anger, or surprise, the emotion is accompanied by few objective facial expressions or physical characteristics. Children may also lack the linguistic sophistication necessary to understand the multiple and sometimes ambiguous definitions of guilt. Indeed, adults often have difficulty articulating differences between guilt and closely related emotional states such as shame. In attempts to identify early markers of guilt, some researchers rely on a subjective appraisal of the child's discomfort when viewing a distressed or injured person as evidence of the emotion. Indicators suggest this form of discomfort appears during the second year of life (Kagan, 1981; Zahn–Waxler & Radke–Yarrow, 1990; Zahn–Waxler & Robinson,
1995), and there is general agreement that guilt feelings among children emerge around this time. Evidence suggests, however, that very young children have difficulty distinguishing between harm they cause and harm they observe. Guilt feelings among young children may not be proportionate to their degree of personal responsibility (Zahn-Waxler & Kochanska, 1990). Interestingly, even among adolescents, guilt feelings are common even when the individual is not at fault (Williams & Bybee, 1994). Individuals may, for example, feel guilt by association or guilt over accidents.

Recent evidence indicates that effects of socialization are particularly important in the evolution of guilt. Zahn-Waxler and Robinson (1995) report results from a longitudinal study of the impact of socialization on the development of a variety of negative emotions, including guilt. They compared monozygotic (MZ) and dizygotic (DZ) twins at ages 14, 20, and 24 months. They found that all negative emotions (including guilt) showed considerable genetic influence (as evidenced by higher concordance rates for MZ compared to DZ twins), but guilt was unique in that it was also highly affected by the social environment. With age, the influence of shared environment on guilt became stronger, while the effects of genetic factors decreased.

Parental warmth has been linked with greater guilt in children (Zahn-Waxler & Kochanska, 1990). Indeed, feelings of guilt are common in healthy and happy relationships (see Baumeister et al., 1994). Within warm, communal relationships, feelings of empathy may thrive, and empathy in turn may give rise to guilt. In addition, as Baumeister (chapter 6, this volume) notes, it may be necessary to care about another person in order to experience guilt over hurting them. In family situations where caring and compassionate behaviors abound, the potential for guilt may be maximized.

From adolescence onward, females are more prone to feelings of guilt than are males (Bybee & Miller, chapter 5, this volume; Tangney, 1990; Zahn-Waxler & Kochaska, 1990). There are also gender differences in the situations that evoke guilt. Williams and Bybee (1994), in a content analysis of self-reports given by 5th, 8th, and 11th graders, found that proportionately more males compared to females reported feeling guilty about externally directed aggression (e.g., property damage, fighting, and victimization of animals), whereas females more commonly reported feeling guilty about violating norms of compassion and trust (e.g., inconsiderateness and lying). Females compared to males were more likely to allude to intimate others (e.g., parents and extended family) when mentioning individuals who evoke guilt. Gender differences in guilt-evoking situations and individuals may reflect a greater sense of communality among women (Gilligan, 1982). Findings that females, who compared to males, more often mention guilt as occurring within close interpersonal contexts and also experience higher levels of guilt are consistent with Baumeister et al.'s (1994) assertion that guilt is frequently evoked within the context of important interpersonal relationships.
PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR

What Is Prosocial Behavior?

Many types of behavior share the common feature of providing benefits for someone else. Doing favors, offering assistance, paying compliments, resisting the temptation to insult, or simply being cooperative all benefit those around us and therefore can be considered prosocial behaviors. Prosocial behavior is generally defined as encompassing actions that are voluntary and that specifically benefit another person (e.g., Franzoi, 1996). In our view, prosocial actions are those performed with the intention of helping others which commonly results in promoting positive interpersonal relationships.

Why do people help others? A variety of explanations have been offered ranging from the selfless to the selfish and from the biological to the philosophical. Cialdini and his colleagues (e.g., Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976; Cialdini et al., 1987) have argued that most instances of prosocial behavior can be explained by selfish motives, such as trying to manage one's public impression or relieve a negative mood state. Similarly, Salovey, Mayer, and Rosenhan (1992) point out that helping behavior can benefit the individuals who provide assistance, not only by repairing current bad moods, but also by regulating long-term mood states. Dispositional factors (such as abilities and knowledge) may also affect rates of prosocial actions (Knight, Johnson, Carlo, & Eisenberg, 1994; Kochanska, 1993).

Alternatively, some researchers have proposed that motives for prosocial behavior are linked to a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969, 1973). From this perspective, prosocial actions not only benefit others, but also strengthen the sense of community. Prosocial actions may reinforce social bonds by satisfying our desire to have others value, need, and appreciate us, and satisfy our need to be esteemed and valued by a social group (see also Fiske, 1992).

Batson and his colleagues (Batson, Turk, Shaw, & Klein, 1995; Batson et al., 1988) argue that the motivation for truly altruistic behavior is not to serve egoistic needs such as avoiding guilt, shame, or censure. Nor in this view is truly altruistic behavior motivated by the need to receive praise or boosts to self- or social esteem. Rather, altruistic behaviors are said to occur when the person values the welfare of the other person. For Batson, prosocial behavior is motivated by simple empathy rather than by egocentric rewards or punishment. For Batson, then, behaviors prompted by the avoiding of guilt are not truly altruistic. We take issue with this position, arguing that prosocial behavior is any behavior that benefits others.

The number of behaviors that can be considered “prosocial” is staggering, especially if one includes abstention from antisocial action. For present purposes, we focus on two major categories of prosocial behavior: relationship-enhancing behaviors that promote, develop, or sustain relationships, and relationship-mending behaviors that repair or restore relationships. In Table 1, we provide examples of relationship-mending and relationship-enhancing behaviors.
TABLE I  Examples of Relationship-Mending and Relationship-Enhancing Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship-mending prosocial behaviors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Gestures of reparation and restitution</td>
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<td>• Making amends</td>
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<td>• Apologizing</td>
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<td>• Confession</td>
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<td>• Expressing guilt or remorse to the harmed individual</td>
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<td>• Concession and admission of blameworthiness</td>
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<td>• Compensation</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship-enhancing, developing, and sustaining behaviors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Politeness; kindness, considerateness; thoughtfulness; being encouraging, caring, friendly and benevolent to others, attempting to maintain common spirit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Honesty and trustworthiness</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Helping behaviors, generosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Comforting</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Understanding others</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Good classroom conduct</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Volunteerism, contributing to a charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Well-developed conscience, sense of right and wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reliability, carrying out requests responsibly</td>
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Development of Prosocial Behaviors

As with guilt, prosocial behaviors emerge during the second year of life (Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). Although children are responsive to the emotional reactions of others almost from birth, they do not display prosocial behaviors, such as helping, sharing, or comforting until their second year. This increase in prosocial behaviors coincides with the child’s sense of growing autonomy and the concomitant increase in the ability to take another’s perspective and empathize with their emotional distress. One of the most informative studies was conducted by Zahn-Waxler and Radke-Yarrow (1990) who trained mothers to observe and report on their 1- to 2½-year-old’s responses to distressed others. Situations were included in which the children were or were not responsible for the other person’s distress and situations. In addition, the researchers examined children’s reactions to their mothers’ simulated distress. Rudimentary prosocial behaviors emerged just after the first birthday when young children provided physical comfort (e.g., pats and hugs) to self or others when observing someone who was emotionally upset. As children matured, their responses became more sophisticated and appropriate to the situation such as asking why someone was crying or trying to remedy the problem. “Children are observed to help, share, provide physical comfort, provide verbal sympathy,
protect, and defend victims in distress” (Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990, p. 114). Both relationship-mending and relationship-enhancing behaviors are apparently present during the second year of life.

Prosocial behaviors are generally more likely to occur when the other person is someone with whom we are personally involved. Darley (1991) notes, for example, that in the original Latané and Darley study of bystander intervention, any degree of acquaintance among subjects led to increased helping (see also Gottlieb & Carver, 1980). With development, individuals become increasingly likely to help others outside the context of close relationships. Costin and Jones (1992) had children watch a puppet show in which the hurt character was described as either a friend or an acquaintance. They found that the children described strategies to improve the target’s mood mainly when the target was a friend. This would indicate that, at least initially, prosocial actions are most likely to occur in the context of close relationships. Zahn-Waxler and Radke-Yarrow (1990) note that comforting interventions (such as trying to cheer up or physically comfort the distressed person) are initially directed only towards caregivers or close family members and only later towards distress in strangers.

THE LINK BETWEEN GUILT AND PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Our limited review of guilt and prosocial behavior indicates several apparent similarities. Guilt and prosocial behaviors are both closely linked with empathy, both occur most commonly within the context of close interpersonal relationships, and both function to strengthen interpersonal bonds and social cohesion. In the next section, we develop two principles: (a) that people engage in relationship-mending behaviors in order to alleviate guilt and (b) that people engage in relationship-enhancing behaviors to avoid guilt.

Relationship-Mending Functions of Guilt

When people transgress against others, studies indicate that they spontaneously engage in a number of reconciliatory actions such as confession, concession, and apology to repair those relationships (Gonzales, Manning, Haugen, 1992; Gonzales, Peterson, Manning, & Wetter, 1990; Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989; Schlenker & Darby, 1981). As the offense becomes more severe or the transgressor becomes more blameworthy, so does the elaborateness of the response (Gonzales et al., 1992; Schlenker & Darby, 1981). Apologies, for example, become more involved and an array of reconciliatory responses rather than just one may be made. When people engage in reconciliatory behaviors, evidence suggests that these efforts are generally
successful in mending or minimizing damage to relationships. An apology from the perpetrator or information attributing the lapse to causes other than harmful intent typically reduces the victim's feelings of anger, aggressiveness, and desire for retaliation (Baron, 1990; Ohbuchi et al., 1989).

Results of these studies complement those of earlier investigations from the late 1960s and 1970s that sought to examine the effects of guilt over transgression on compliance and victim compensation. Individuals who committed a transgression (staged by the experimenter such as "breaking" an expensive piece of equipment or bumping into and knocking over a confederate) were more likely to compensate the victim or agree to a request for assistance from the experimenter or an ostensibly unrelated individual (e.g., Knoecri, 1972; D. T. Regan, Williams, & Sparling, 1972; J. W. Regan, 1971). The lack of manipulation checks confirming that guilt was the mediating variable between the transgression and prosocial behavior, however, led critics to propose alternative interpretations, such as impression management or general negative affect, for the findings (e.g., Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973). These and other contemporaneous critiques preceded a period of relative dormancy in research on guilt and, indeed, may have triggered this retreat.

More recently, narrative studies have been used to understand guilt-producing incidents (Baumeister et al., 1995b; Tangney, 1992). Researchers find that both transgressors and victims report attempts to make amends when they feel guilty. Indeed, Baumeister et al. (1995b) find that people purposefully induce guilt in order to receive an apology. For instance, sometimes the transgressors are unaware that their actions have caused someone else harm (such as when they had not phoned often enough to satisfy their partner). In these situations, the victim mentions resultant pain and suffering in order to make the transgressor feel guilty and take reparative action. This often works, but not without feelings of resentment and anger occasionally arising among those transgressors who may believe they have done nothing wrong. If overused, guilt induction may lose effectiveness as an influence technique. Making someone feel guilty does, however, make the inducer feel better (Baumeister et al., 1995b), primarily because when the inducer successfully provokes guilty feelings in another person, this provides a social signal that the other person values the relationship. Thus, guilt following transgression may prompt prosocial behavior and send a social signal that serves to repair and strengthen interpersonal relationships.

Studies of young children, preadolescents, adolescents, and young adults confirm that guilt feelings follow transgressions (Barrett, Zahn-Waxler, & Cole, 1993; Ferguson et al., 1991; Harwas-Napierala, 1992; Williams & Bybee, 1994). Narrative accounts by children indicate that guilt is associated with having done something wrong and is accompanied by regret, a need to provide reparation and make amends, and anger with the self (Ferguson et al., 1991). Barrett et al. (1993) identified a group among 2-year-olds who, when they believe they have broken a
favorite toy of the experimenter exhibit a constellation of guilt-related behaviors: they attempt to amend the transgression by confession and by trying to fix the broken toy. In contrast to this amenders group, Barrett et al. identify a group they call avoiders who engage in prototypic shame reactions such as withdrawing and attempting to hide the toy. Whether guilt leads to reparative behaviors or whether they are both manifestations of the same underlying construct remains unclear, but links between the indices appear clear at a very early age.

**Relationship-Enhancing Functions of Guilt**

According to Merisca and Bybee (1994), "Guilt may . . . not only prompt reconciliatory actions, but may also initiate prosocial behavior unprompted by a precipitating event" (p. 17). Surprisingly, there has been relatively little research linking guilt with relationship-enhancing functions. Although considerable research has examined how guilt may prompt people to redress injuries they have caused and to help others through reconciliatory actions, relatively few studies have examined how guilt may prompt helping behavior in the absence of a precipitating transgression. Yet prosocial behavior that occurs spontaneously rather than in reaction to some previous wrongdoing may be critically important in maintaining good interpersonal relationships. Work by Rusbult and her colleagues (e.g., Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991), for example, demonstrates that sacrificing for the sake of the relationship (referred to as accommodating) is one of the best predictors of marital satisfaction and commitment. Moreover, accommodation is greater among those who value their relationships, acting as an important factor in the strengthening and maintenance of social bonds.

Baumeister et al. (1994) propose that the anticipation of guilt helps prevent behavior that would otherwise threaten a relationship. Feeling guilty also provides a valuable lesson and a reminder not to repeat the offending behavior. Indeed, individuals commonly report learning from past guilt-inducing transgressions (Baumeister et al., 1995b). When a person chooses to forego a hedonistic experience in order to not hurt their relationship partner, their actions (or inactions) communicate to the other party that the relationship is important. Thus, individuals who forego marital infidelity, who control rude, impulsive behaviors, and who work hard to avoid disappointing their loved ones are all engaging in behavior that benefits their relationship partners and prevents feelings of guilt from occurring.

Merisca and Bybee (1994) provide evidence that guilt is related to prosocial behaviors that are not forms of redress, apology, or reparation. These researchers had college students complete questionnaires measuring predispositional guilt and racist attitudes, and then had roommates of these students provide ratings of prosocial behavior. Phone calls to participants from an on-campus volunteer group were
used to collect information on their past history of volunteer charity work. Greater guilt was related to more caring, trustworthy, and thoughtful behavior as rated by roommates. Greater guilt was correlated with less self-reported racism. Finally, individuals scoring higher on guilt were more likely to have engaged in volunteer charity work.

The few studies among children that have examined guilt in relation to spontaneous prosocial behavior corroborate findings among college students. Children with a higher predisposition for guilt are more likely to spontaneously help small animals, infants, and adults (Chapman, Zahn-Waxler, Cooperman, & Iannotti, 1987). Bybee and Williams (1994) had 5th, 8th, and 11th graders complete inventories measuring guilt and asked their teachers to rate prosocial behavior. Greater self-reported guilt was associated with less acting-out behavior. In a second study, students high in self-reported guilt were nominated as ranking among the most caring and considerate members of their class by peers. Higher guilt was also correlated with honest and trustworthy behavior as assessed by peer nominations. These findings together indicate that young people who are high on predispositional guilt avoid transgressing against others (e.g., are less prone to acting out) and spontaneously show considerate and ethical behavior.

Zahn-Waxler and Robinson (1995) note that, among young children, an important feature of guilt is its ability to aid in the inhibition and control of behavior. Consistent with this position, studies indicate that children with a greater predisposition for guilt are less likely to play with forbidden toys (Kochanska, DeVet, Goldman, Murray, & Putnam, 1994), are more likely to perform well in school (Bybee & Williams, 1994; Bybee & Zigler, 1991; Merisca & Bybee, 1994), and score higher on frustration tolerance (Bybee & Williams, 1994). Baumeister et al. (1994) argue that guilt may be one of the few emotions capable of interrupting an action sequence midstream and redirecting it. Guilt may prevent antisocial behavior from occurring by interrupting antisocial thoughts and actions and may imbue individuals with the self-control and motivation necessary to engage in prosocial actions.

A cautionary note is in order, however. Individuals who experience chronic guilt show less prosocial behavior (Bybee & Williams, 1994; Zahn-Waxler & Kochanska, 1990). Baumeister et al. (1994) point out that although guilt has a number of relationship-enhancing features, it may be maladaptive when it becomes excessive. When guilt feelings are continuous, unresolved, and unalleviated, they may become incapable of fostering prosocial behavior (Bybee & Williams, 1994). Moreover, guilt induction may backfire as a social influence technique.

In summary, currently available evidence suggests that a healthy sense of guilt based on empathetic concern and value of relationships promotes a variety of prosocial behaviors. This healthy sense of guilt is socialized through parental affection and trust, and appears to convey a number of lifelong benefits, both to the people who experience guilt and to those around them.
THE PROCESSES OF FORGIVENESS

Just as guilt prompts confession, apologies, and reparation, reconciliatory responses may, in turn, moderate and alleviate feelings of guilt. The role that reactions to guilt-producing events may play in alleviating guilt feelings is covered elsewhere (see Bybee, Merisca, & Velasco, chapter 9, this volume). The processes of forgiveness, however, have been almost entirely neglected by social psychologists. Common sense suggests that guilt and prosocial behaviors, such as apology, play an important role in the forgiveness process. Perpetrators seek to be forgiven and sometimes victims wish to forgive as a means of dealing with guilt that arises from transgression. Being forgiven may help individuals alleviate feelings of guilt, whereas being denied forgiveness may exacerbate guilt and even lead to other negative emotions (e.g., shame, anger, resentment). In the next section, we describe a narrative study that was conducted to examine the role that feelings of guilt and prosocial behavior play in the forgiveness process and how forgiveness affects interpersonal outcomes.

An Original Study Based on Autobiographical Narratives and Self-Report Data

Micronarratives are personal accounts that focus on specific events, experiences, or memories. They represent one person's beliefs about the factors most important to the situation (such as the various motives and strategies that the person used to affect the situation), as well as precipitating events and consequences. These stories may be biased in multiple ways. People may, for instance, selectively construct, retrieve, and distort personal accounts. A strength of micronarratives is that they contain information that the narrator believes to be most important (Baumeister et al., 1990). Micronarratives are useful for studying topics such as divorce (Harvey, Flanary, & Morgan, 1988; Harvey, Weber, Galvin, Huszit, & Garnick, 1986), life changes (Heatherton & Nichols, 1994), criminal activity (Katz, 1988), anger (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990), guilt (Baumeister et al., 1995a,b; Ferguson et al., 1991; Tangney, 1992), and forgiveness that are difficult to test using conventional laboratory methods.

In this research, 80 participants (students from Harvard University and local community members) were randomly assigned to one of four conditions that varied according to perspective (victim or perpetrator) and forgiveness outcome (occurred or did not occur). Participants were asked to write a personal account of a meaningful event that involved forgiveness. They were instructed to take as long as they needed to tell the full story, and they were also asked to provide as much detail as possible. The four conditions were as follows:

1. Please describe a meaningful life situation in which you wanted to forgive someone and did not.
FIGURE 10.1 Percentage of narratives that contained descriptions of the perpetrator apologizing or making amends in situations where forgiveness of the perpetrator occurred versus did not occur and in descriptions provided by the victim versus those provided by the perpetrator.

2. Please describe a meaningful life situation in which you wanted to be forgiven by someone and were not.
3. Please describe a meaningful life situation in which you wanted to forgive someone and did.
4. Please describe a meaningful life situation in which you wanted to be forgiven by someone and were.

The responses were then content-analyzed and coded for themes theoretically relevant to guilt, forgiveness, or prosocial action. Because of the lack of research in this area, this study was exploratory in nature:

We found that perpetrators often performed prosocial actions in an attempt to be forgiven. Consistent with Baumeister et al. (1994), both perpetrators and victims noted that perpetrators apologized and attempted to make amends following a transgression. One perpetrator wrote, “I felt so low I wrote him a letter of apology and called him . . . to explain my story and apologize.” A victim wrote, “He sent me flowers. They were beautiful flowers. The card attached was his apology for not having the answer that he knew I deserved.” Compared to accounts written from the victim’s perspective, accounts written by the perpetrator more often mentioned that the perpetrator apologized, $F(1, 78) = 3.20; p < .08$, and attempted to make amends, $F(1,78) = 4.13; p < .05$. These finding suggests that there may be a reporting bias depending on perspective. (The percentage of narratives that contained descriptions of the perpetrator apologizing or making amends are shown in Figure 10.1.)
the perpetrator in terms of alleviating guilt feelings. In sum, forgiveness may be a more important process for the victim than for the perpetrator. Especially when the transgressor is remorseful, many nonremorseful, real transgressors tend to induce guilt but who indefinitely or unimportantly ignore the new perpetrator you want to forgive. Leads to increased guilt feelings among victims. This may reflect the perpetrator's sense of guilt, which is more prominent than individuals who actually commit violent crimes. This finding suggests that after forgiveness, other persons are more prominent after forgiveness, which does not forgive the perpetrator.

In contrast, victims who forgive the perpetrator feel less guilty (\( 
\mu = 1.4 \) than those who do not forgive. The perpetrator feels guilt over transgression. Guilt over transgression continues to be experienced even when the person feels that the perpetrator's innocence is maintained. It is clear, however, that forgiveness reduces guilt feelings, which is why the victim's guilt feelings are reduced. There were no significant differences in guilt ratings among victims. When they were instructed to account for perpetrators, reported level of guilt after they wrote the autobiographical account, perpetrators reported less guilt after.

Where forgiveness of the perpetrator occurred versus did not occur.

FIGURE 10.2  Self-reported guilt felt by the victim versus guilt felt by the perpetrator in situations where forgiveness of the perpetrator occurred versus did not occur.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORGIVE</th>
<th>NO FORGIVE</th>
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<tr>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>NO</td>
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We also examined attitudes towards the interpersonal relationship when forgiveness did or did not occur. In a questionnaire filled out after completion of the narrative, we found that before the incident, both victims and perpetrators reported feeling relatively positive about the other person, and there were no differences between those relationships in which forgiveness occurred ($M = 5.6$) or those in which it did not ($M = 5.4$). After the incident, however, people rated relationship quality as better when forgiveness occurred ($M = 4.04$) than when it did not occur ($M = 3.2$), $F(1,81) = 4.72, p < .05$. This pattern held true for both perpetrators and victims. In addition, perpetrators and victims felt more positively toward one another when forgiveness occurred ($M = 4.8$) than when it did not ($M = 4.0$), $F(1,81) = 3.46, p < .06$. In general, transgression led to negative feelings about the other person for both victims and perpetrators. Negative feelings were stronger, however, when forgiveness did not occur.

CONCLUSION

Feelings of guilt motivate individuals to engage in prosocial actions that mend, repair, or remedy damaged relationships once transgressions occur. These guilt feelings also help individuals avoid behaviors that threaten or damage relationships. Prosocial behaviors benefit both the victim and the perpetrator in that the victim benefits from reparative acts (or is spared being the victim of transgression) and both the victim and perpetrator benefit from strengthened social bonds. Expressions of guilt and reparative acts show that the transgressor values the relationship. Such findings have implications for how to facilitate, teach, and promote prosocial behavior in children as well as how to create a social climate that supports prosocial behavior among adults. In conclusion, although guilt has traditionally been viewed as undesirable, recent research demonstrates that feelings of guilt play an important role in the initiation, development, and maintenance of important personal relationships. Although chronic guilt is unhealthy, predispositional guilt may be an indispensable ingredient in a healthy social life.

REFERENCES


