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Consequences of guilt in children and adolescents

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CONSEQUENCES OF GUILT

IN

CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

by

John Joseph Pietrangelo

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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ABSTRACT

The role of guilt within the context of interpersonal relationships, the definitions of guilt, the origins of guilt, and whether or not outcomes associated with guilt tend to be negative or positive are the focus of this research paper. Four hundred and seventy-two (472) articles, covering a period of thirty-three years (33), were tabulated as to their perspective concerning the phenomenon of guilt. A determination was made as to whether each article leaned toward presenting guilt as a negative or positive influence pertaining to human behavior and/or interaction. It is hypothesized that the literature reflects significantly more negative outcomes associated with guilt than it does positive outcomes; that, overall, guilt can be said to have but little constructive use in human behavior and/or interaction. The findings of this study support the hypothesis.
Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to review the literature on the theory of, and research into, the phenomenon of guilt. Definitions of guilt; origins of guilt; the role of moral reasoning, self-esteem, and altruism in relationship to guilt; normal versus pathological guilt; cultural influences pertaining to the phenomenon of guilt; and the role of guilt within the context of interpersonal relationships will all be addressed.

Studies Concerning the Phenomenon of Guilt

There have appeared in the educational journals four hundred and seventy-two (472) articles pertaining to the phenomenon of guilt over the past thirty-three (33) years (1961-1993). In addition, books, research projects, and experimental studies have been produced in an effort to understand just how guilt "places its mark" upon human interaction. In this review, every approach from the Psychoanalytical to the Developmental, from the Existential to the Social-Psychological, as well as from the Cognitive and the Behavioral is represented, so as to cover as many bases as possible concerning the culpability or innocence.
of guilt regarding its influence over human behavior and/or interaction.

According to Adams (1981), one characteristic that distinguishes sociopathic disorders from the normal population, as well as from most other pathological populations, is an absence of guilt, or the feelings associated with guilt:

Lack of anxiety and guilt is notable in sociopaths who violate moral or legal standards, physically or emotionally harm others...etc. Because sociopathic personalities do not have these characteristics, they are often assumed to lack a conscience. (Adams, 1981).

Of interest with respect to this observation is a more recent finding indicating that in a criminal population, sociopaths experienced significantly more guilt than non-sociopaths (Braun, 1984). (See Regan, 1971). However, Braun later notes that his study's indices of guilt were not designed to measure guilty affect, but rather to measure "personality" disposition to commit moral, or immoral, behavior. (See Harpur, 1988, Rosenkoetter, 1977, & Ziv, 1976).

Claims such as those asserted by Adams (1981) and Braun (1984) lead to the question: Precisely, what is meant by the term "guilt"? Even a superficial review of the literature suggests that psychologists are far from unanimous in their answer to this question.
Hypothesis

It is the null hypothesis of this paper that the literature reflects no significant difference between negative and positive outcomes associated with the phenomenon of guilt. The alternative hypothesis states that the literature reflects significantly more negative outcomes associated with guilt than it does positive outcomes; that, overall, guilt can be said to have but little constructive use in human behavior and/or interaction.
Chapter II
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the various definitions explicated by researchers and theorists from Freud to Bandura, covering a period of over sixty-five (65) years, will be examined. In addition, thru the avenue of past research, the origins of guilt and the role of guilt within the context of interpersonal relationships will also be examined.

Definitions of Guilt

For Freud, guilt was an emotion used by the super-ego to punish the individual for a violation of standards; indeed, guilt was the way the personality was pressured to behave in morally acceptable ways (Freud, 1958). However, social psychologist Berkowitz (1980) believes that what is commonly described as guilt is really more related to a loss of self-esteem. (See Moses, 1970).

According to Berkowitz (1980), when the individual believes that he has violated some moral or ethical standard, he experiences a lowering of the value he normally places upon the self, thus making the individual feel unhappy. From this point forward, the individual is motivated to act in such a way as to make himself feel happier and, in this regard, Berkowitz claims that the individual is inclined to do
anything to alleviate his mood (i.e., confess, rationalize, deny, compensate for by an altruistic action, punish self, etc.).

Berkowitz's view is somewhat similar to that offered by George Kelley (1955). While Kelley did not supplant guilt to the same extent as did Berkowitz (1980), he did note that guilt feelings were related to the perception of a disassociation or dislodgement of the individual's "self" from his core role structure. Specifically, Kelley (1955) asserted that when the individual feels guilty, he is aware of a deviation from his basic role, or roles; for example: a college student who views himself as a scholar, but acknowledges that he spends most of his free time partaking at a local beer joint rather than studying. This violation of his self-image creates a feeling of guilt.

Developmental psychologists, Clarke-Stewart, Friedman, and Koch (1985) define guilt differently, noting that this emotion is more than mood. They contend that guilt embraces cognitive components such as a belief that a sin has been committed, or something has been done which is unjust or evil. They propose that guilt generally has as its focal point an attitude of "wrong doing", complimented by the idea that this wrong doing deserves some sort of punishment. (Wallach, 1991).

Erik Erikson (1963) also saw guilt as a cognitive/emotional phenomenon. From his perspective, guilt
develops in the individual around the age of four (4) or five (5) as a function of the child-parent relationship. (See Phillips, 1986). Erikson claimed that at this age a child sets out to engage in new activities and to express new understandings. If parents fail to respond to the child's questions and comments or restricts the child's activities, a sense of guilt is developed. (See Clayer, 1984).

Kohlberg (1963) tied guilt to conscience and, like Erikson, related the feeling of guilt to developmental stages. Specifically, Kohlberg claimed that individuals with a developed conscience tended to be those who experienced strong and persistent guilt, whereas individuals with poorly developed consciences were able to shrug off any guilt feeling rather easily through rationalization, or some other cognitive strategy. (See Schnell & Gibbs, 1987). Kohlberg reasoned that it was because of a desire to avoid these strong guilt feelings that the individual engaged in moral behavior.

While each of the above theories defines guilt as originating from a breach of a valued standard, the delineation of the standard varies. For instance, Freud held that the super ego established the measure of morality by which the individual was judged and punished. Kelley perceived the individuals core role structure as the standard against which an individual evaluates himself. Clark-Stewart, Friedman, and Koch perceived spiritual beliefs to be the
criterion of self-measure, while for Erikson, a child's interpretation of parental responses formulates the model by which guilt is gauged.

Furthermore, the theories reviewed thus far offer quite divergent explanations for the function of guilt and its effect upon the individual. For example, Kohlberg and Freud view guilt as a positive force fundamental to the commission of moral rather than immoral behavior. For Erikson, guilt is an unhealthy emotion which serves to subvert the individual's inherent potential. Still others perceive guilt as a self-defeating and socially dysfunctional phenomenon which translates into worry, anxiety, and concerns involving self-image, social-image, and self-esteem.

Because guilt appears to be a construct which lends itself to a wide variation in definition, some theorists and researchers have attempted to obtain more precision in their discussions of guilt by speaking of types of guilt. With respect to this, Adams (1979) pointed out that many psychologists distinguish between "neurotic guilt" and "normal guilt". According to Adams, normal guilt is a valuable part of the personality because it re-enforces positive values. Neurotic guilt, on the other hand, is self-destructive and self-punishing in nature.

Another type of guilt (one used almost exclusively in terms of guilt experienced by adults and adolescents) is
existential guilt. According to Martin L. Hoffman (1980), existential guilt occurs when an individual has done nothing wrong, but nonetheless feels culpable because of circumstances he cannot control. (See Hoffman, 1973). An example of an individual suffering from existential guilt would be someone born into a favored background who feels "bad" because others are less advantaged. Hoffman views existential guilt as so powerful a force that many acts of social conscience (i.e., participation in civil rights demonstrations, abortion-related activities, etc.) are manifested, not out of lofty ideologies, but rather to reduce the feelings of existential guilt. (See Nappo, 1979, & Hoffman, 1972).

In other literature, diverse definitions of guilt persist. For example, Aufhauser (1975) explains that confusion, with respect to defining guilt, is due to failure to distinguish between a state of guilt and a feeling of guilt. Aufhauser argues that the feeling of guilt is power-related, and stems from erroneous conclusions about the individual's personal power. On the other hand, Phillips (1985) argues that guilt is related to a sense of personal responsibility and an individual's obligations to his fellow man.

To arrive at a viable definition of the term guilt that is usable for the purpose of this paper, it seems necessary to examine the dichotomy between "good" or normal guilt, and
"bad" or neurotic guilt. Clearly, some guilt feelings appear to be "bad" in the sense that they emerge as crucial components of psychopathology. For example, the compulsive personality, as defined by Carr (an individual experiencing "recurrent thought, image, impulse, or action.... accompanied by a sense of subjective compulsion and a desire to resist it"), has been identified by clinicians as having constant feelings of guilt (White & Watt, 1982).

Similarly, a variety of depressive disorders are characterized by strong guilt feelings which are commonly expressed as a conviction that the individual has sinned and must be punished (White & Watt, 1982). It is interesting to note that Phillips (1968) associates the strong guilt experienced by depressives to an upbringing in which very high standards, ideals, and social values were internalized. Such individuals, Phillips asserts, tend to interpret failures in terms of personal wrong-doing.

Additionally, there is empirical research that suggests that guilt is, indeed, a motivator of moral behavior. For example, Fisher (1971) found that when individuals are made to feel guilty, despite whether they are alone or with others, they tend to behave more charitably and altruistically toward others than do people not made to feel guilty. Similar findings have been reported by many other researchers (see
Sherrod, 1982). Such findings suggest that guilt may have positive as well as negative components.

Given the aforementioned research, it seems reasonable to suggest that guilt appears to be a multi-faceted construct embracing useful and deleterious components, cognitive and emotional components, as well as personal and social components. However, there is one component of guilt that seems common to all definitions; the fact that the affect associated with it is painful and aversive. With this understanding, it seems reasonable to wonder whether moral behavior might not be equally motivated by less aversive emotions and cognitions such as empathy and a sense of injustice.

It is the contention of this paper that guilt is an aversive feeling attached to a belief that the individual has violated some personally meaningful code of behavior, and that while guilt may play a part in motivating pro-social behavior (i.e., moral behavior), its involvement in psychopathology, and the availability of other motivators for pro-social behavior, make guilt particularly un-useful as far as concerns the human personality. (See Tangney, 1987). This contention is explored and explicated more fully in the remaining sections of this review of pertinent research.
Origins of Guilt

Not unlike the attempt at defining guilt, researchers and theorists have tried to arrive at an understanding of the origins of guilt from diverse angles. For those who believe that guilt is a fundamental component of conscience, an attempt has been made to discover the factors that lead to the development of a child's conscience (See Kochanska, 1991). In this regard, Martin L. Hoffman (1979) has summarized the types of life experiences which his studies indicate favor the internalization of moral guides and standards.

The first factor related to a child's development of conscience reported by Hoffman is parental disciplinary techniques. Specifically, Hoffman reports that when children engage in immoral behavior, they are most likely to internalize moral principles and standards if their parents discipline them through an explanation of the harmful consequences of their transgressions of these moral principles. However, Hoffman points out that the extent to which the child accepts parental explanations depends upon the degree of warmth and expressed affection that exists between the parent and the child outside of the disciplinary situation.

On the other hand, Hoffman observed that parents who are punitive in disciplinary situations, especially if they use excessive power-assertive discipline, tend to produce children
who follow moral norms out of fear rather than out of any internalization of such standards.

With respect to general child development, it is interesting to note that Hoffman's description of disciplinary impact upon the development of conscience is quite similar to findings reported by Diana Baumrind (1967, 1971) on the development of general competence in children. Specifically, Baumrind observed that competence is fostered by parents who explained rules and restrictions within the context of a generally warm and affectionate interaction pattern with their offspring. Conversely, authoritarian parents bred a sense of incompetence in their offspring due to their harsh and coercive tactics, thus; making them concentrate more on their fear rather than on the reason why they should not be engaged in such activities.

With respect to the impact of disciplinary techniques on the development of conscience, Hoffman (1979) makes one final point. He notes that explanations of the harmful consequences of a child's transgressions of moral codes will not assist in the internalization of standards unless parents capture the child's attention. If matters are treated casually, there is a likelihood that the child will not be impressed. Thus, Hoffman notes that such explanations must be stated in terms of the seriousness of parental attitude and behavior.
The second factor related to a child's development of conscience as reported by Hoffman is imitation. He adds that this factor is most crucial. Children, Hoffman notes, imitate their parents' behavior. This notion is not new; indeed, Freud stressed the significance of imitation of parents' moral behavior by noting that children identified with parents and used imitation to quell their anxieties over either physical attack or loss of love.

Of interest is the fact that Hoffman reports that while imitative behavior can lead to the development of both moral behavior and moral reasoning in children, it is not likely to cause children to feel guilty after violation of moral standards. Because Hoffman feels that there can be no internalization of morality without guilt, he suggests that, overall, setting a good example for children does not contribute to the development of conscience. However, Hoffman does not explain on what basis the child's moral behavior is forthcoming. If he observes and then practices moral behavior, it may be that this is done because the child thinks about what has been modeled, and then arrives at certain notions and feelings (other than guilt) that are sufficient to elicit moral behavior.

The third factor related to a child's development of conscience as related by Hoffman is empathy. Once children begin to understand that others experience both pleasure and
pain in a variety of ways, they are likely to inhibit actions harmful to others on the basis of the empathetic understanding of the pain another might feel if a transgression were committed. According to Tomlinson-Keasey (1985), empathy tends to be best acquired by children who have had a variety of diverse experiences, who express their feelings in a strong manner, and who experience a strong sense of pleasure when helping someone else. (See Hager, 1990).

It is interesting to note that in empathy, there is a cognitive/emotional variable which leads to moral behavior, leads to the internalization of moral values, and, unlike guilt, is associated with a pleasure rather than a pain response.

The fourth and final factor which Hoffman holds crucial to the development of conscience is the development of interpersonal reasoning. This concept has been comprehensively examined by Selman (1976a, 1976b), who postulates a series of stages in which a child slowly comes to understand the subtleties of human feeling and the societal perspective.

Another view of the origin of guilt (one briefly alluded to earlier) is psychoanalytic. It involves Freud's (1930) notion that morality develops in early childhood out of fear and anxiety at the thought of losing a parent's love, and from a sense of guilt over incestuous fantasies about the opposite-
sex parent. This sense of guilt emerges as a direct result of the child’s ability to identify with his parents. Specifically, the child takes on the role of his parents, internalizes parental standards wholly and unquestionably, and then feels guilt when he fails to live up to these standards.

Empirical research by Kohlberg (1964) of Israeli children does not support the Freudian contention that conscience and guilt arise from a child’s identification with his parents. In this regard, a series of studies were conducted of family-reared and Kibbutz-reared children (children receiving their moral education primarily from care-givers and teachers). (See Ziv, & Others, 1979). These studies revealed no differences in guilt felt by the two groups of children, or in their morality. Nonetheless, while parents may not be a necessary factor, it seems likely that identification with some adult authority and acceptance of that authority’s standards is probably involved in the origins of guilt.

Still another approach to understanding the origins of guilt is to study how moral judgments and emotions (i.e., empathy, guilt) are linked to moral behavior. Most of this research was undertaken in an effort to research the assumption that feelings of guilt arise, necessarily, as a function of the development of moral reasoning. Before examining these studies, context is provided by first briefly reviewing moral reasoning. In this regard, the most
comprehensive view of moral reasoning is that offered by Kohlberg (1969).

Based on the previous work of Jean Piaget, Kohlberg proposed that children arrive at advanced moral reasoning by a series of successively more intellectual stages of thought concerning morality. These stages of thought may be briefly delineated as follows:

1. **Pre-Conventional Moral Reasoning** - This level of moral reasoning is described as a two stage level of thought in which moral reasoning is viewed first from the standpoint of avoiding punishment and reaping rewards. This perspective is then said to shift to encompass the notion that fairness and equity guide moral action.

2. **Conventional Moral Reasoning** - This level of reasoning also involves two stages. In the first stage, moral action is viewed in terms of living up to what family and friends expect. In the second stage, moral reasoning involves expanding the first stage notion into the idea of compliance with the expectations and obligations the individual has as a contributing member of society in general.

3. **Post-Conventional Moral Reasoning** - Having two stages also, the Post-Conventional level of moral reasoning (a level said to be acquired by only twenty per cent (20%) of the adult population) is based on one's own evaluation of circumstances. The thought is abstract and hypothetical. There is a sense of
the relativism of right and wrong, and individuals at this level of moral reasoning are not as constrained by social conventions as they were at previous levels. Rather, they are able to consider certain individual needs and rights as worthy, even if these needs and rights conflict with the interests of the majority.

Given this delineation of moral reasoning, the question can be asked as to whether guilt is a necessary product of the development of moral reasoning? Interestingly enough, Clarke-Stewart, Friedman, and Koch (1985) point out that most studies that examine this question have assessed the degree to which moral action correlates with moral reasoning, and then merely infer guilt and empathy components.

With respect to this, one early study did examine guilt feelings (Hartshorne & May, 1928-30). In this study it was observed that guilt feelings did not motivate honest behavior, and that at least among children, the cognitive and affective factors influencing the decision to behave honestly, or dishonestly, were such variables as:

1. Group pressure to conform.
2. Risk of detection.
3. Amount of effort necessary to carry out a dishonest task.
4. Degree of regard obtained from honesty versus the degree of reward obtained from dishonesty.
With respect to the aforementioned study, it can be argued that the subjects therein were not motivated by guilt because they were operating at a level of moral reasoning which had not yet produced this emotion. However, this argument can be effectively countered by the fact that guilt feelings have been observed for children as young as four (4) to five (5) years of age (Tomlinson-Keasey, 1985). Indeed, according to studies conducted by Maccoby (1959) and Santrock (1975), the relationship of guilt to both moral reasoning and moral behavior is quite weak. However, Santrock (1981) asserts that while the notion that guilt will inhibit moral transgression is unsupported by the few studies directly assessing it, it must be noted that the relationship may require closer examination when more precise and reliable means of measuring guilt are developed.

A theory regarding the origins of guilt has been formulated by Elizabeth Simpson (1976). According to Simpson’s Holistic Theory of Moral Development, the moral development of individuals in general, and adolescents in particular, cannot be distinguished from the development of personality. Placing her views into the context of Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs framework, she asserts that regardless of the extent to which individuals feel guilty, they will not function at higher levels of moral development as long as they are motivated by unfulfilled needs, and that
the growth of their cognitive abilities will not affect higher levels of functioning either. Thus, according to Simpson, guilt is a facet of personality developed in the same manner that other emotionally charged cognitions are developed, and this is basically unrelated to moral behavior, or moral development.

The extent to which personality is intertwined in Simpson's view of moral development can be seen in the following quote in which she attacks Kohlberg's assessment that adolescents, if made to reason at higher levels of moral reasoning, will then, necessarily, function at higher moral levels:

Reasons can be a shelter, as we all know, especially when they are developed after the fact, and are applied to our own behavior, or to that of someone in whom we have an ego investment. In any case, reasons are inseparable from the personality of the reasoner, whether they apply to his own behavior, or that of others. They are grounded not in the situation in which decisions are made, but in the reasoner's psychic definition of past experience, and that psychic definition frequently crosses all boundaries of rationality. Passionate irrationality in the name of impassioned reason occurs in the market, the classroom, and in science, as well as elsewhere, and often unconsciously. (Simpson, 1976, pp.162-163).

Refinements in moral reasoning, Kohlberg believed, were due to role-taking opportunities. Simpson also disagreed with this view. She argued instead that refinements and advances in moral reasoning derived from the individual's degree of gratification of basic psychological needs, and from the
cultivation of imagination, creative thinking, and imagery. 

With respect to imagination, she specifically noted that:

*Imagination can provide a tentative morality as well, which, like anticipatory socialization, allows the individual to assume a point of view, and a set of values, before he actually acquires them, so that he may taste, test, and explore them without inappropriate, or permanent commitment. (Simpson, 1976, pp.164-165).*

What is interesting here is that Simpson views morality as a sort of irrational aspect of personality. In order to test her assumption that moral views/feelings are embedded in the structure of the personality, Simpson examined the emotional needs and moral judgments of fifty (50) upper-middle class high school students. As her theory is grounded in Maslow's studies, she attempted to examine which of his need categories were linked with Kohlberg's levels of moral reasoning. She observed that:

1. Belongingness needs and the need for esteem from others (social-esteem) were negatively related to level of moral reasoning. In other words, the more an individual craves the esteem of others, or needs to belong, the more primitive was his moral reasoning.

2. The need for self-esteem and self-competence is positively related to the level of moral reasoning. In other words, the more one seeks to value himself, or to view self as competent and able, the more advanced the level of his moral reasoning.
Santrock (1981) has noted that another way of conceiving of the origin of guilt comes from the literature on altruism (selfless concern for the welfare of others). In this regard, Santrock noted that some moral theorists hold that altruism develops out of empathy, and then from this empathy, guilt is developed.

Consider the life of an infant. As Santrock sees it, soon after birth, a baby feels distressed about certain events (i.e., hunger, thirst, pain, etc.). When parents relieve this discomfort, they become associated with these feelings. The inability of infants to distinguish between self and others, then, leads infants to show distress when others are distressed, and pleasure when others are pleased. Therefore, they begin to develop empathy. As their cognitive ability, and number of social experiences increases, their degree of empathy grows.

As delineated by Santrock, guilt arises in relation to children's inability to distinguish their pain from the pain of others. At this stage, if children believe (whether valid or invalid) that they have caused the pain which they are sympathetically experiencing with another individual, this empathy will turn to guilt. Guilt feelings, once manifested, then begin to grow. For example, an older child, feeling sympathetic pain with someone else might feel guilty even if he is not responsible for this pain on those occasions when it
occurs to the child that he could have done something to prevent the painful situation. In this way, certain stimuli (both internal and external) lead to successive applications of guilt to a variety of situations.

Some approaches to moral development explain that guilt is not a motivator in this regard. Indeed, Burton (1976) found that the children most likely to engage in dishonest behavior were the very ones who evidenced strong signs of reparation and guilt. He suggests that these responses might be acquired almost solely to ward off parental anger and forestall punishment, and that, therefore, the guilt response is not a measure of a child's underlying conscience.

It, then, must be concluded that the origins of guilt are strongly related to multiple factors such as the flavor of parent-child interaction, parental disciplinary techniques, identification of the child with adults and acceptance of their standards, the nature of personality, etc. What must also be concluded is that guilt does not appear to affect moral behavior, or to index conscience. Rather, guilt is a learned response with both cognitive and affective components that appear to be related to moral behavior, because guilt is frequently expressed in situations involving moral behavior. But, as noted earlier, guilt is also frequently expressed in situations and/or over events that are not at all related to moral behavior.
The aforementioned conclusions lead to speculation as to what factors do produce moral behavior if guilt does not. In this regard, the literature on pro-social behavior provides some understanding. This literature is succinctly discussed by Liebert and Wicks-Nelson (1981), who note that pro-social behavior is influenced by the following factors:

1. **Reward or Reinforcement** - Specifically, researchers have observed that children behave more cooperatively with others and are more willing to share and exhibit more concern over others’ welfare when they are directly reinforced, or rewarded, for doing so.

2. **Developmental Trends** - In most instances, as children grow, they perceive that life proceeds more harmoniously for them and others, and is less frustrating, if they engage in pro-social behaviors.

3. **Cultural Influences** - Almost all behavior is at least in part influenced by culture, and in this regard, some cultures tend to be more pro-social than others. For example, Liebert and Wicks-Nelson (1981) report that Mexican children are far more cooperative than Anglo-American children or Mexican-American children. This finding is not surprising when one considers that American culture is more oriented toward individuality and competitiveness than is Mexican culture. Indeed, Liebert and Wicks-Nelson report that there is evidence that American children are so influenced by the
anti-collectivist emphasis of American culture that they exhibit some of the lowest levels of cooperation in the world.

4. **Modeling** - It has been observed that pro-social behavior is far more likely to occur when children see it modeled by their peers.

5. **Empathy** - Liebert and Wicks-Nelson (1981) report that pro-social behavior involving concern over others is more likely to occur among empathetic individuals. In this regard, they report that children can be trained to increase their empathy, and that when given such training, the frequency with which they help, or show concern for others, often excellerates.

6. **Mood and Emotional State** - An increasing number of studies are showing that pro-social behavior such as sharing, generosity, and degree of cooperation are influenced by children's immediate emotional state. For example, if children have just experienced some form of success, they tend to behave more generously toward others. Conversely, if children have just experienced failure, they tend to decrease their generosity. Of special interest are findings indicating that pro-social behaviors themselves can produce positive emotions in others. Liebert and Wicks-Nelson (1981) note that these positive feelings are most likely due to empathy rather than to any intrinsic property of pro-social action.
7. **Punishment** - There are some indications that within a limited framework, the threat of punishment can make for an increase in pro-social behavior. However, subsequent observances indicate that these increases do not last over time. This is especially true in the cases of children who are given the option of "share or else".

Given the fact that guilt is not supported as a motivator of moral behavior, or an index of conscience, and that other factors have been shown to be elicitive of moral actions such as sharing, helping, cooperating, etc., it seems reasonable to suggest that guilt is not an especially relevant concept with respect to human morality. Moreover, its involvement in diverse forms of psychopathology and neurosis further suggest that guilt may not be a psychologically healthy human response. Nonetheless, it must be said that guilt is indeed a part of diverse human interaction.

**Guilt Within Interpersonal Relationships**

Research from many perspectives has examined how guilt effects human interaction. Because the emotion of guilt can be fairly destructive, much of this research has been conducted within the context of therapy. In this regard, Lange and van der Hart (1983) have provided some descriptions of the manifestation of guilt in situations of family dynamics.
One case presented by Lange and van der Hart was that of a nine (9) year old boy whose problem was psychosomatic stomach pain. His pain was related to the boy's fears of going to school, his fears of other children, and his fears of being asked to play by these other children. After extensive interviews and discussions with the boy and his family, the clinicians decided that many of his problems were the result of guilt feelings. First, he felt guilty because he thought himself the cause of his parents' quarrels. The only way he seemed to escape his guilt feelings was by day-dreaming and fantasizing, which he did often. As a result, he frequently came home from school, went to his room, and remained there alone throughout the night. He also had repressed feelings of anger and hostility toward his parents because he felt guilty for having these feelings.

Another example of the influence of guilt within the interpersonal content of the family discussed by Lange and van der Hart (1983) concerns a set of parents who have strong differences of opinion regarding how to raise and discipline their problematic child. The mother refuses to see that her behavior is, in part, responsible for the ongoing arguments between the father and herself, and to her child's problems. Instead, she blames everything on the fact that her husband drinks too much. Because the father does feel guilty for drinking, and because he drinks, in part, to overcome guilty
feelings regarding his harsh treatment of his child, he allows his wife to blame and berate him.

Another family related illustration of the negative impact of guilt, and how it operates, can be found in Wallerstein and Kelley (1977). They note in their longitudinal data collected on many divorcing families, that when divorce occurs, many children respond by feeling guilty because, being egocentric in their views of life, they feel that the break-up of their parents occurred as a result of something of their own making. Wallerstein and Kelley further explain that children's guilt feelings about divorcing parents can then be intensified by the parents themselves who, in emotional turmoil as well, grow irritable with their children, and exacerbate the problem by verbalizing their irritabilities with statements of how much of a nuisance the children are, etc. What happens, then, is that these feelings of guilt so distress and burden the children that, frequently, they begin to manifest symptomatic behavior such as academic difficulties, aggression, and social anxieties.

Indeed, Auster (1977) feels that the issue of guilt and divorce has enormous side effects upon children; so important that parents must take some definite action to help stop their children from experiencing these feelings and their destructive impact, during, as well as after, the divorce.
process. The major actions recommended by Auster can be delineated as follows:

1. Tell children that the divorce is the result of problems between mother and father, and that it has absolutely nothing to do with the children - no matter if they think that it does.

2. Tell children that there is absolutely nothing that they can do to change the situation, or to bring their parents together again.

3. Tell the children that the divorce means that they will see one parent more often than another, but that this does not mean that the parent who they will not see that much of loves them any less.

Auster (1977) also goes on to note that guilt feelings can be minimized if parents prepare and assist their children with the practical difficulties attendant to a divorce (i.e., going to a new school, having less money, etc.). The picture that emerges when one reviews the operation of guilt within a family unit is that the emotion of guilt manifests in far more destructive than positive ways. Specifically, based on the examples provided by Lang and van der Hart (1983) and Wallerstein and Kelley (1977), it can be concluded that in the family unit context, guilt can cause the following phenomena to occur:
1. Guilt can cause psychosomatic pain.

2. Guilt can engender social fears and anxieties.

3. People can often escape their guilt only by altering reality in some way (i.e., by taking drugs, drinking alcohol, or frequently engaging in fantasy).

4. Individuals can feel guilty for feeling certain emotions which they consider somehow negative (i.e., feeling angry and/or hostile toward one's parent's).

5. Guilt can motivate one individual to let another individual use them and/or abuse them.

6. In children and adolescents, guilt can underlie such behaviors as aggression, social withdrawal, frequent fantasy, academic difficulties, and social fears.

7. Even when guilt is self-engendered, the behavior of others can serve to intensify, or minimize, it.

Given the aforementioned impact that guilt feelings impose upon family units, it is not difficult to recognize that all of these characteristics of guilt can also manifest in non-family contexts such as interactions between friends, as well as with enemies. What has not been discussed so far is the fact that individuals are rarely aware of the impact that the emotion of guilt has upon others, nor are they willing to stop the utilization of the negative consequences of guilt to get what they want out of a given situation.
It should be noted that individuals use guilt within the context of their interpersonal relationships for a variety of reasons. One important reason that motivates an individual to use guilt in this way is the desire to control the behavior of others. A classic example is a mother who wants her grown son to spend more time with her, but believing that if she comes right out and asks him to do so, he may very well not comply with her wishes; therefore, she behaves as if, because of his infrequent visits, she suffers terrible loneliness — loneliness so intense that it aggravates existing chronic physical illnesses she may have. So guilt ridden by this, the son takes to stopping by and calling upon her more frequently.

A second reason that an individual is motivated to make others feel guilty is in order to punish them. An example of this can be seen in the case of a woman with three (3) sisters who is driving their mother to a doctor’s appointment. On the way, another car swerves in front of her car whereupon an accident happens, and the mother is killed. That night, in their anger and grief over their mother’s death, the woman’s three sisters blame the accident on her driving. The intent here is to punish her for their loss, which has made them intensely angry and frustrated, as well as saddened. This example illustrates the fact that guilt can be evoked to punish an individual, not only for real misdeeds, or injustices, but also for perceived misconduct as well.
Guilt, of course, can be used to control others, but an individual can also use guilt to control their own behavior. For example, a man who wants to quit smoking may attempt to make himself feel guilty over the harm smoking is doing to his body as part of his effort to elicit self-discipline to stop smoking. This kind of behavior is often supported by certain religious views. For example, in stories of "sainted" and "holy" individuals, there is often the notion that due to guilt over living a selfish or hedonistic life, the individual turns to "God", and begins to live a holy and disciplined life. Indeed, it is the belief that feeling guilty can spur an individual to a more disciplined and better life that often serves as a reason individuals berate and denigrate themselves when they engage in an activity that they consider wrong.

Guilt is a double-edged sword. On one hand, individuals attempt to use guilt to help themselves live a more disciplined life, or to modify their behavior. On the other hand, guilt is used as a punishment for past offending behavior. Indeed, religion can again play a key role, with respect to this, in that certain religions over the centuries have advocated self-punishing behaviors in order to purify the self of guilt.

One psychological model of the way people use guilt is explained by Bandura (1977). According to him, activation of any behavior (i.e., dependency, achievement, aggression, etc.)
may be viewed as the consequence of certain factors. First, the behavior may be motivated by certain aversive experiences which are mediated by emotional arousal and anticipated benefits to be obtained from engaging in a particular act, or failing to engage in a particular act (which is, of course, also a behavior). Secondly, an individual may behave in some way due to incentive inducements, these also mediated by emotional arousal and anticipated outcomes, or thoughts about anticipated outcomes.

An example of the operation of guilt and its frequent failure to, by itself, serve as sufficient stimulus to the good, or moral, can be seen in Bandura's analysis of aggression. According to Bandura (1977), aggression is activated by either painful stimuli, or expectation of reward. But whether or not aggressive behavior will occur depends not only on these factors, but also on the degree of arousal of emotion and thought, such as the anticipated outcome of this behavior.

According to common notions of guilt, if an individual feels guilty when he contemplates taking an aggressive action, a feeling of guilt exerts such control that the behavior is not forthcoming (i.e., Tommy wants to hit his brother over the head for breaking his truck, but knowing that he will feel guilty if he does so, he refrains from the aggressive behavior.). But as other factors (i.e., alternative
cognitions, interpretation of the stimulus situation, etc.) yield the aggressive response, or lack thereof, guilt can be over-ridden in such a way that the aggressive behavior is still forthcoming. Indeed, one of the more frequent ways that individuals over-ride their feelings of guilt is by convincing themselves that an action which would make them feel guilty has been misinterpreted - that, in fact, the action is not wrong, but justified, or right. For example, Tommy tells himself that it was wrong of his brother to break Tommy's truck, and that after all it is only right to punish a wrong; indeed, this is one of the ways that younger children learn what is right and wrong. Therefore, Tommy hits his brother on the head, carrying out the socially approved act of punishment and, if you will, educational tool. Thus, the aggression becomes acceptable behavior, and no guilt is attached to it.... in Tommy's mind.

So easily is guilt dispensed with by this process, outlined above, that Bandura (1977) noted that:

Over the years much destructive and reprehensible conduct has been perpetrated by decent, moral people in the name of religious principles and righteous ideologies. Acting on moral, or ideological imperative, reflects not an unconscious defense mechanism, but a conscious offense mechanism. (p. 43).

What this example well illustrates is really the uselessness of guilt in affecting moral behavior in interpersonal relations. And what the examples of
interactions preceding the above illustration have shown is the power of guilt in affecting human turmoil and maladaptive behavior.

Not only does guilt not affect moral behavior, a study conducted by Montana (1985) indicates that it may actually operate in certain situations to make individuals feel helpless and powerless, thus, not motivating them to do anything. Specifically, it was observed in Montana’s study that guilt was associated with high degrees of helplessness in subjects when they were blamed for causing a negative outcome over which they had no control.

While this illustrates the use of guilt in interpersonal relations, and how in terms of consciously judging the morality of our actions, guilt can be easily overcome, there are other instances in which guilt persists. Some researchers have attempted to explain this, not so much in terms of the mechanisms giving rise to actions over which one may or may not feel guilty, but rather through personality.

Examining for associations between personality, shame, and guilt, Silverman (1980) found that individuals low in guilt and high in shame tend to be more rule-bound, dependent, and help-seeking than are those who are high in guilt and low in shame.

Other researchers have attempted to understand how interpersonal experiences engender messages that make an
individual feel guilty, or ashamed. In one such study, Lindsay-Hartz (1980) interviewed nineteen individuals on a variety of guilt and shame experiences. Lindsay-Hartz found that experiences tend to make an individual feel guilty when they take responsibility for some violation of a moral action while believing that had they behaved otherwise, the violation would not have occurred. Furthermore, guilt arose when the individual perceived himself as in some marginal relation to mainstream, or normative, society which is somehow connected with being "bad". Also, isolation and loneliness can lead to guilt, presumably because it ties into this marginal relation circumstance.

Another account of guilt in the social context has been offered by Remy (1977). According to Remy, guilt arises as a function of a gap between what one intends and the objective social situation. He notes that differences between individuals and society are nonvoluntary, and, therefore, they tend to affect the individual more deeply than any differences between individuals and a specific group. Tying the emotion of guilt into an even larger social context, Remy (1977) notes:

Guilt is a...form of institutionalized behavior, the expression of failure relative to a positively valued self-image, and of a desire to reintegrate that norm; self-image is bound to the dominant values of society...Collective culpability pre-supposes a degradation of the image society has of itself. (p. 81)
It was noted earlier that individuals use guilt, frequently attempting to evoke it in others. One of the most common methods of evoking guilt in another is through blame. An exploration of blaming phenomena has been conducted by Pomerantz (1978). In Pomerantz's study, she analyzed tape recorded conversations containing naturally occurring blamings. She noted that when one person blames another, there appears to be a sequential pattern to the interaction. First, there is some statement, or report, of an unhappy incident. In this regard, the incident is reported with terms and reflections making it obvious that it is to be considered blame-worthy; however, at this initial point, a responsible agent for the misfortune is not designated.

Pomerantz explains that the agent is not designated at this point because such a structure provides for interactional negotiation with the other. This leaves the other free to respond to the incident merely as an incident, or else to respond to the implied charge, or accusation of blame. What most individuals do is respond to the accusation inherent in the report, and the original speaker is now involved in blaming as a result. However, Pomerantz notes that for those individuals who merely respond to the unhappy incident, blaming tends not to be evoked in the speaker, even if the speaker seemed to want to blame the other. For this reason, Pomerantz claims that blaming requires two individuals for its
Pomerantz claims that blaming requires two individuals for its ultimate manifestation in many social situations.
Chapter III

METHOD

In this chapter, the method used to determine if the literature on guilt suggests that guilt significantly affects human interaction; and if so, in what manner - negatively or positively - will be described.

Journal Selection

The present study primarily examined educational journal articles dealing with the concept of guilt, but also took advantage of other publications for information gathering purposes as well. A search within the Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC) system was used because the focus of this study was on educational issues pertaining to the phenomenon of guilt. The ERIC system search revealed four hundred and seventy-two (472) articles that dealt with the topic of guilt. Abstracts of these articles were studied and rated by the primary researcher to determine whether each article depicted guilt as having a negative or positive influence on human behavior and/or interaction. To determine the reliability of the primary researcher, a randomly chosen sample of fifty (50) articles was rated by a secondary researcher (i.e., interrater reliability).
Procedure

The Chi-Square Statistic was used to test the null hypothesis that the literature reflects no significant difference between negative and positive outcomes associated with the phenomenon of guilt. The chi-square formula compares observed frequencies to expected frequencies. The value of chi-square measures the discrepancy between the observed frequencies (data) and the expected frequencies. When there are large differences between the observed frequencies and the expected frequencies, the value of chi-square will be large, and it can be concluded that the data do not fit the null hypothesis. On the other hand, when the observed frequencies are very close to the expected frequencies, chi-square will be small and it can be concluded that there is a very good fit between the data and the null hypothesis.

An alpha level of .05 was chosen, and it was determined from the Table entitled The Chi-Square Distribution in Appendix B of Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition) that any value greater than 3.84 would prove significant.
Chapter IV

RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the comparison of the negative versus positive affect of guilt within the context of human behavior and/or interaction will be given.

Journal Tabulation

Over the past thirty-three (33) years, four hundred and seventy-two (472) articles have been published in the educational journals concerning the phenomenon of guilt. Out of these four hundred and seventy-two (472) articles, the primary researcher tabulated that four hundred and thirty (430) of them make a case for guilt having a negative influence on human interaction, while only forty-two (42) implied that guilt influenced human interaction in a positive manner. To determine the reliability of the primary researcher's assessment of the articles, a secondary researcher's assessments (i.e., interrater reliability) of fifty (50) randomly selected articles, taken from the total of four hundred and seventy-two (472), were used for comparison.

The Chi-Square formula was used to determine whether the sample data support or refute the hypothesis of this paper:
Chi-Square = $X^2 = \frac{(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$

As the formula indicates, the value of chi-square is computed by the following steps:

1. Find the difference between $f_o$ and $f_e$.
2. Square the difference. This ensures that all values are positive.
3. Divide the squared difference by $f_e$.
4. Sum the values from all categories.
5. Determine the significance.

$$X^2 = \frac{(430 - 236)^2}{236} + \frac{(42 - 236)^2}{236} = \frac{37249}{236} + \frac{37249}{236} = \frac{37249}{236} + \frac{37249}{236} = \frac{157.83 + 157.83}{236} = \frac{315.66}{236}$$

When the null hypothesis is true, it is expected that the data ($f_o$ values) will be close to the hypothesis ($f_e$ values); therefore, it is expected that chi-square values will be small when the null hypothesis is true. An unusually large value indicates a big discrepancy between the data and the null hypothesis, and suggests that the null hypothesis be rejected.
The Chi Square value of 315.66 is far greater, of course, than that of 3.84; therefore, the null hypothesis of this paper should be rejected, while the alternative hypothesis which states that negative outcomes associated with guilt are more apparent than positive outcomes, is supported as being valid.

Interrater Reliability

Regarding the interrater reliability between the primary and secondary researcher's assessments of the educational journal articles; Out of the fifty (50) randomly selected articles, the primary researcher determined that forty-five (45) were "negative" and five (5) were "positive, while the secondary researcher determined that forty-four (44) were "negative" and six (6) were "positive". The reliability of these assessments proves significant in that there is a ninety-eight per cent (98%) compatibility between the primary researcher's assessments and that of the secondary researcher. All but one of these fifty articles were assessed identically.
Chapter V

DISCUSSION

The preceding review has examined the literature on the nature of human guilt. In this chapter, the major points which were covered are examined, and conclusions are formulated based on the existing research.

Summary

What is human guilt and how does it operate and function in a social and interpersonal context? In order to fully answer this question, it is important to note that the existing research offers several findings. These may be summarized as follows:

1. There is a lack of consensus involving a definition of the term "guilt" although it appears to have several characteristics which include: negative affect; a variety of cognitions; elements of self-image; moral judgments; motive to make restitution or compensation; violation of perceived role structure; developmental experiences in the area of childhood exploration and expression; and personal responsibility and power. However, while definitions vary considerably, all contain the common element that the experience of guilt is primarily aversive.
2. Guilt is a significant component of psychopathology of different kinds. For example, it has been found to be associated with depressive disorders, compulsive personality disorders, and other mentally unhealthy outlooks on life.

3. Guilt appears to rise from a variety of sources, the most major of which are experiences related to the development of conscience which can be defined as the internalization of moral standards. These sources are:

   a) Parental disciplinary technique with guilt more likely to occur when parents offer explanations of the consequences of harmful actions.

   b) Imitation with internalization of standards and guilt unlikely to occur unless those being imitated share their own experiences of guilt with the children imitating them.

   c) Empathy with internalization of standards based on this feeling most likely to occur with children strong in self-expression, and exposed to a variety of experiences. With empathy, good behavior is likely to be forthcoming due to pleasure obtained from helping others rather that due to the aversive feeling of guilt itself.

   d) Interpersonal reasoning with internalization of standards developing simultaneously with the child's increasing understanding of people and society, as well as his place therein.
4. Other views of guilt involve moral judgments with guilt being viewed as a necessary component to the development of moral reasoning. However, studies do not support the view that guilt arises in relation to refinements of moral reasoning.

5. Most studies do not support the notion that guilt is a motivator of moral reasoning.

6. Some theorists believe that guilt is not so much an emotion, or motivator, of moral action, as it is an irrational aspect, or facet, of personality which leads to aversive consequences on both a personal and interpersonal level.

7. While guilt does not appear to motivate human behavior, studies have supported the notion that there are a number of influences that do operate as either motivators, or general influences, on an individual's level of moral behavior. These factors are reinforcement or reward; developmental trends such as cognitive and moral reasoning development; cultural influences; modeling influences; empathy; mood or emotional state; and, to a limited extent, punishment.

8. In human interactions, guilt has been observed to be used by individuals in attempts (frequently unsuccessful on a personal level) to control themselves, to control others, to punish themselves, and to punish others.
9. In human interactions, guilt appears to be instrumental to the production of psychological and emotional pain, to feelings of helplessness, and willingness to let oneself be used and/or abused.

10. Often, individuals feel guilt in their interactions with others, and usually only in situations that have very little, if any, connection to moral behavior (i.e., Individuals can feel guilty because they find themselves alone, or isolated, from others, or they can feel guilty because they feel angry and/or hostile toward others); this even if others have behaved in a way that would make most anyone feel angry and/or hostile.

What this review of the literature on guilt illustrates is that, essentially, the emotion of guilt is useless. Far from spurring individuals toward positive moral actions, it operates to hurt them both emotionally and psychologically. Guilt, if allowed to grow and fester within the personality, can lead to dysfunction, and guilt, if used as a tool, or weapon, against others, can cause dysfunction in them as well.

Conclusion

The findings of this review support the hypothesis that as an emotion, guilt tends to influence human behavior in a more negative light than positive one. Indeed, there is little in the existing literature that supports the notion that guilt is a contributor to positive human outcomes.
Clearly, some theorists have suggested that it is guilt which makes an individual's obligations to others conspicuous, and, so, fosters a sense of personal responsibility, but when this idea becomes subject to empirical testing, what is observed is that obligation to others, and the taking of actions based on these obligations, arises not from guilt, but from such factors as how a person has been disciplined when he was growing up, the individual's levels of moral and interpersonal reasoning, and the number of others in his life who have modeled moral behavior.

If there is an emotion which fosters moral behavior, this emotion is empathy, not guilt. And empathy leads to moral behavior because empathy engenders in the human heart a certain "joie de vivre" in the helping of others, and doing right by them - this as opposed to engendering feelings of oppression, because one might not, or did not, treat others fairly.

The seeming uselessness of guilt can be seen by a brief comparison of it to other emotions. For example, anger is a feeling that many individuals term "negative" because of its association with aggressive behavior; however, anger can be a release, a guard against an individual, or individuals, taking advantage of another. Anger can compel an individual into being willing to stand up for his rights, or stand up for the rights of others. Indeed, when anger is not expressed,
individuals can suffer from a variety of psychological problems and/or physical illnesses; (i.e., Colitis is frequently an illness associated with repressed anger, and so is the psychological disorder of depression).

Another emotion that individuals sometimes erroneously assume to be negative is fear. But fear can operate to save a life. Fear can make individuals turn away from something (i.e., drugs) that might give them immediate satisfaction and good feelings, but that which they know in the long run will ruin their lives and their bodies.

Yet another emotion that is sometimes labeled "negative" is sadness, or pain. But it is pain and hurt that can cause an individual to seek means of changing an unsatisfactory life. Pain can lead an individual who has always been a loner to reach out and attempt to communicate with others. It can bring dysfunctional individuals into therapy, and there, help them to be willing to work on bettering their lives.

Now, some will say that guilt does have a positive outcome; that sometimes when individuals do wrong to others, they feel guilty, and then because they feel so bad, they take steps to make amends for their misbehavior. But is this really true? Is it guilt that produces the attempt to correct a situation because of misconduct, or is it a sense of remorse stemming from inner compassion? Human beings feel remorse because they feel for others. Remorse causes the
individual to re-evaluate his intentions, his behavior and its consequences; guilt does not. Rather, guilt seems to have no compassion whatsoever.

One final point that must be made with respect to conclusions regarding the guilt literature is that guilt, like most human behavior, is learned; and like most human behavior, it is maintained as a result of certain reinforcements, or consequences, which are payoffs for the behavior. Individuals allow themselves to feel guilt because by doing so they can avoid certain other emotions, or avoid certain other behaviors, or even, in some cases, avoid certain other cognitions. Some examples of these payoffs can be delineated as follows:

1. As long as I feel guilty as a punishment, I can manipulate you.

2. As long as I feel guilty, I can feel sorry for myself.

3. If I allow myself to be punished through my guilt feelings, I don’t have to take on the responsibility of a certain action.

4. Because I feel guilty, it is alright to expect to be treated better than others.

5. Because I feel guilty a lot of the time, I have more sensitivity than others, and I am a better person.
While this list does not begin to comprehensively cover the many payoffs individuals obtain in exchange for guilty feelings, it does provide a flavor of how these payoffs accrue. In conclusion, then, this review of the literature on human guilt and the findings addressed by the assessment of educational articles as to the culpability or innocence of guilt support the hypothesis that guilt is, significantly more than not, a destructive and negative emotion of little use in human behavior and/or interaction.
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