Empathy, Shame, Guilt, and Narratives of Interpersonal Conflicts: Guilt-Prone People Are Better at Perspective Taking

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ABSTRACT Both guilt and empathic perspective taking have been linked to prosocial, relationship-enhancing effects. Study 1 found that shame was linked to personal distress, whereas guilt was linked to perspective taking. In Studies 2 and 3, subjects were asked to describe a recent experience of interpersonal conflict, once from their own perspective, and once from the perspective of the other person. Guilt-prone people and guilt-dominated stories were linked to better perspective taking (measured by changes between the two versions of the story) than others. Shame had no effect. Guilt improved relationship outcomes but shame harmed them. Path analysis suggested that trait guilt-proneness leads to perspective taking, which leads to actual guilt feelings, which produces beneficial relationship outcomes. Guilt feelings may mediate the relationship-enhancing effects of empathy.

Much of the general public tends to regard guilt as a pointless exercise of self-torment or an irrational, possibly neurotic interference by outmoded religious, sexual, and otherwise puritanical strictures in natural modes of human self-expression. Perhaps surprisingly, however, recent evidence has suggested that guilt serves many adaptive, beneficial, and prosocial functions (see Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994;

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Hoffman, 1982; Jones, Kugler, & Adams, 1995; Tangney, 1991; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, 1992). In particular, it appears that guilt helps strengthen and maintain close relationships.

The goal of the present research was to suggest one consequence of guilt that may contribute to the prosocial and relationship-enhancing nature of guilt. Specifically, we hypothesized that guilt would be linked to an increased capacity to understand the perspective of other people, particularly people with whom one is in conflict. Improved understanding of another person, in combination with guilt, could well promote cooperation, compromise, and other responses that can prevent a conflict from damaging or even terminating a relationship.

The present investigation was also concerned with shame. Shame and guilt have many common features, and people often use the terms interchangeably, even though people can maintain consistent, reliable distinctions if necessary (Lewis, 1971; Tangney, 1989, 1991, 1992). Both shame and guilt involve affective reactions to evaluations by other people and external (although possibly internalized) standards, and so both imply some form of social sensitivity. Moreover, previous researchers have linked shame and guilt to empathy, both on theoretical grounds (Hoffman, 1982, 1983; Lewis, 1971, 1981, 1983, 1987; Nathanson, 1992) and on empirical grounds (Eisenberg et al., 1989; Houston, 1992; Tangney, 1991). Yet shame does not appear to have the socially desirable or relationship-enhancing effects that guilt has (Alonso & Rutan, 1988; Hoffman, 1983; Hultberg, 1988; Kaufman, 1989; Lewis, 1971; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Nathanson, 1992; Retzinger, 1991; Tangney, 1989; Wharton, 1990). We propose that the explanation for these discrepancies lies in the complex, multidimensional nature of empathy. With guilt, the cognitive response of understanding the other's point of view may predominate. With shame, in contrast, the affective response of focusing on one's own distress may predominate, and this is less likely (as compared with taking the other's perspective) to produce beneficial consequences. Hence the present studies examined links among guilt, shame, and multiple aspects of empathy. Our main hypothesis was that guilt-proneness would promote perspective taking, but that shame-proneness would not. The broader context of causal relationships that we hypothesized was as follows: the trait of being guilt-prone would increase the likelihood of feeling guilty in a specific interpersonal conflict; these guilt feelings would increase the tendency to consider the other person's perspective;

and the perspective taking would lead to interpersonal outcomes that would be beneficial for the relationship.

Theoretical Basis and Hypotheses

Shame and Guilt

Both shame and guilt refer to negative affects associated with the self-appraisal that one has done something wrong. Both are used in socializing children to obey social norms and treat other people in socially desirable ways, and both are frequently linked to interpersonal transgressions or to situations in which other people believe that the person has violated norms of proper behavior.

Despite these similarities and overlaps, it is clear that people can reliably and consistently distinguish between shame and guilt, in the sense that people can describe episodes of the two emotions in ways that maintain consistent distinctions (Lewis, 1971, 1981, 1983, 1987; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; Tangney, 1989, 1990, 1992). One important difference is the globality of focus. Guilt is typically attached to a particular action and does not condemn the entire self, whereas shame spreads out from the particular misdeed to encompass the self as a whole (Lewis, 1971, 1987; Tangney, 1989).

Guilt may therefore be far less debilitating and demoralizing than shame. In guilt, the negative affect and remorse remain linked to the particular action; in simple terms, one can regard oneself as a good person who has done a bad thing. As a result, guilt stimulates people to counteract the bad consequences of their actions, for example, by confessing, by apologizing, or by making amends (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995; Lewis, 1971, 1981, 1983, 1987; Holtzworth-Munroe, 1989; Katz, 1963; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; McGraw, 1987; Tangney, 1989, 1990, 1991; Tangney et al., 1992). All of these prosocial responses seemingly involve an appreciation of the other person's perspective, insofar as the guilty individual reflects on how his or her transgression has affected the other person and how particular reparative acts (such as an apology) will offset the harm and possibly restore the other's positive attitude toward oneself.

Shame, in contrast, involves feeling that the entire self (rather than just one particular action) is bad, and no simple apology could be expected to resolve such a far-reaching and complex predicament. Shame involves critical, painful scrutiny of the self as a whole, and the resultant distress may inhibit any simple or pragmatic effort to deal with the immediate

situation (Wicker, Payne, & Morgan, 1983). After all, it would be futile to focus on remedying one particular misdeed if the core problem is that the entire self is riddled with inadequacies; all that such remedial efforts might accomplish would be to dwell on this latest reminder of one's deficient personhood. The only responses that seem to minimize the subjective distress of shame are to ignore the problem, to deny one's responsibility, to avoid other people, or perhaps to lash out at one's accusers (Lewis, 1971, 1981, 1983, 1987; Holtzworth-Munroe, 1989; Katz, 1963; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984; McGraw, 1987; Tangney, 1989, 1990, 1991; Tangney et al., 1992). Such responses would obviously be unlikely to have the prosocial, relationship-enhancing effects that the responses to guilt seem to have.

Benefits of Empathy and Perspective Taking

Although conventional wisdom may have erred in condemning guilt, its perception of the beneficial, constructive nature of empathy is largely consistent with research findings. Batson and his colleagues have repeatedly demonstrated significant links between empathy and altruistic behavior, such as the fact that empathy promotes helping another in need (Batson, 1986; Batson et al., 1981, 1983, 1988, 1989; Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978). Empathy has been linked to healthy, satisfying romantic relationships and good marital adjustment (Davis & Outhout, 1987, 1992; Holtzworth-Munroe, 1989; Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985; Long & Andrews, 1990). Indeed, Krauss and Fussell (1991) found that relationship quality was directly related to how empathic each partner perceived the other one as being, such that better relationships involved partners who regarded each other as highly empathic and sensitive. One way that anxiety apparently exerts destructive effects on close relationships is by interfering with empathic responses (Davis & Oathout, 1992).

Yet the nature of empathy and its resultant ability to produce beneficial effects are complex. Various authors have conceptualized empathy in different ways. For example, some have emphasized the cognitive aspects of empathy (especially understanding another person), whereas others have focused on the affective aspect (of feeling what another feels).

An influential analysis and measure by Davis (1983) proposed four basic dimensions of empathy. *Fantasy*, the first, was defined as being able to transpose oneself (imaginatively) into the feelings and actions of a

fictional character. The second dimension was *perspective taking*, which Davis defined as the ability to place oneself in another's shoes and comprehend his or her point of view. *Empathic concern*, the third dimension, referred to caring about the welfare of others and becoming upset over their misfortunes. The fourth dimension, *personal distress*, was defined as one's own anxiety (or other negative affect) that is connected with the suffering or distress of another. The first two dimensions, fantasy and perspective taking, have come to be regarded as the cognitive components of empathy, because they seem to revolve around understanding the other person without necessarily involving emotional sensitivity or affective responses. The other two are seen as the affective components, and indeed they have been linked to high levels of social anxiety, emotional vulnerability, and emotional reactivity (Davis, 1983; Davis & Franzoi, 1991).

Our reading of the research literature suggested that perspective taking was more important than the other three components for producing beneficial, relationship-enhancing effects. Thus, in the studies we cited above to show the beneficial effects of empathy, it was the ability to understand the partner's perspective—particularly during a conflict—that was the crucial predictor of good marital adjustment (Davis & Oathout, 1992; Holtzworth-Munroe, 1989; Holtzworth-Munroe & Jacobson, 1985; Long & Andrews, 1990). Kraus and Fussell (1991) found that people who believed their partners could understand their perspective were more willing to communicate openly and honestly. Chalmers and Townsend (1990) were able to bring about significant improvements in the social behavior of maladjusted female juvenile delinquents by administering a 15-session training program in perspective taking. The exercise of taking the perspective of a needy person has also been shown to help produce empathic emotion, which in turn increases the desire to help such an individual (Coke et al., 1978).

In contrast to the prosocial effects of perspective taking, the fourth dimension of Davis's conception of empathy, namely, personal distress, has been controversial and does not appear to have positive effects on interpersonal relations. Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, and Miller (1989) have argued that personal distress is not a component of empathy at all but rather a form of self-centered anxiety that actually prevents the empathic process. Even if it does originate in empathic response to another's suffering, the emerging preoccupation with one's own distress may preclude the person from doing what might otherwise benefit the

other and strengthen the relationship. Eisenberg et al. found that sympathy (which they understood as combining perspective taking and empathic concern) led to altruistic concerns marked by focusing on the other person, whereas personal distress was associated with self-focus and egoistic motivations.

Thus, although empathy has been broadly linked to prosocial benefits, it appears to have several components that are not all equally beneficial. Perspective taking may be particularly helpful for facilitating good relationships and promoting satisfactory, constructive interactions. Personal distress may be far less helpful.

Empathy, Shame, and Guilt

Previous work (e.g., Hoffman, 1982, 1983; Tangney, 1991) has provided both theoretical and empirical grounds indicating that empathy is linked to both shame and guilt. Yet these links have not been demonstrated consistently or conclusively, in part because of variations in the measures and concepts of empathy, as well as in various measures of shame and guilt. The present studies were designed to clarify these relationships.

Davis and Oathout (1992) showed that it is common that one or another component of empathy becomes the prepotent basis for the response in a given situation (as opposed to having several components operate together to produce the response). If this finding is correct, then guilt and shame may lead to different outcomes despite a common link to empathy—simply because they derive from different components of empathy.

One reason to suspect that guilt is particularly linked to perspective taking is that, as already noted, both guilt and perspective taking seem to have prosocial, relationship-enhancing effects. Hoffman (1982) proposed that guilt originates in the empathic recognition of another person's distress. Thus, understanding the other's perspective would contribute directly to feeling guilty. Baumeister, Stillwell, and Heatherton (1994) proposed that a second root of guilt is the anxiety felt over possible loss of a social bond, because one's misdeeds may lead to rejection by others. In both cases, guilt is an aversive state and motivates people to escape from it, which can be accomplished by helping the other person to feel better, so guilt would thus produce beneficial relationship outcomes. The specificity of guilt may help this process along: there is a specific, presumably solvable problem involving a particular action by the self,

and by understanding the other's perspective one may be able to resolve the conflict.

In other words, guilt-prone people are likely to feel guilty in a specific conflict situation, and the emotion of guilt represents a problem that can be addressed and solved by appreciating the other person's perspective. Thus, trait guilt would facilitate state guilt, which would enhance perspective taking, which would help solve the problem in a way that may benefit the relationship.

Shame, in contrast, does not seem to have such beneficial effects, and in that respect it resembles the personal distress component of empathy. The globality of shame could make perspective taking highly aversive: if one assumes that the particular misdeed reveals oneself to be a bad person, one will not wish to contemplate oneself from one's victim's perspective. Moreover, as already noted, there would seem to be little chance of rectifying the situation or resolving the predicament if one's entire self is deemed inadequate, deficient, or otherwise bad. The overriding response may therefore be simply the emotional distress arising from the perception of one's globally deficient self.

There are actually two mechanisms by which shame connected with empathy might produce an overriding preoccupation with one's own distress. One is what Hoffman (1984) described as "egoistic drift," in which the person initially feels empathy in response to another, but, as the empathic feeling resonates with the person's own needs, the focus gradually shifts from the other to the self. The other is that an initial empathic appreciation of the victim's distress draws attention to one's own misdeed that caused it, and hence to the perception that one's entire self is bad. Global perceptions that the self falls short of standards have been widely recognized as a powerful cause of emotional distress (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Eells, Horowitz, Stinson, & Fridhandler, 1990; Higgins, 1987; Houston, 1992; Strauman & Higgins, 1993). In either case, the focus would then remain on the self, with continuing negative affect. The focus on the self would probably be less than optimally helpful in resolving the conflict; indeed, it could conceivably prevent the person from understanding the other's viewpoint.

Our hypothesis, therefore, was that guilt-prone people would be effective at taking the other person's perspective, whereas shame-prone people would not be effective. Study 1 sought to test this hypothesis by investigating how shame and guilt correlated with the various components of empathy. Studies 2 and 3 compared the perspective taking of shame-

prone and guilt-prone people (and controls) by asking subjects to describe a recent, important interpersonal conflict they had experienced both from their own perspective and from the perspective of the other person involved.

Preliminary Studies 1a and 1b

The first pair of studies sought initial evidence that guilt rather than shame would be linked to the important perspective-taking component of empathy—and in particular whether this relationship would be significant after self-esteem was held constant. Previous work has linked empathy to shame and guilt (Hoffman, 1982, 1984; Tangney, 1991), but inconsistencies and ambiguities about those relationships have remained. Thus, Tangney (1991) reported four correlational studies, but the measures and results were somewhat different in each study. The link between dispositional guilt-proneness and total empathy was significantly positive in Studies 1 and 3 of her article but zero in Study 2 and not reported in Study 4. Nonetheless, she did consistently find a significant positive link between guilt-proneness and cognitive empathy.

In research published since the studies reported here were carried out, Tangney (1994, 1995) has shown guilt-proneness (using both SCAAI and TOSCA measures) to be consistently related to perspective taking, as measured by Davis's Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983). In the same studies, shame-proneness was consistently correlated with personal distress.

In this research, we also used Davis's Interpersonal Reactivity Index to measure empathy, and we sought to examine how both dispositional guilt-proneness and dispositional shame-proneness correlated with the global empathy score as well as with the four cognitive and affective subscales. Consistent with prior work, the prediction was that guilt-proneness would be correlated with perspective taking whereas shame-proneness would be linked with the affective components of empathy.

We also included a measure of self-esteem. The concept of shame implies a global negative judgment about the self, which is thus conceptually similar to the concept of low self-esteem. Empirically, shame-proneness is correlated with low self-esteem (Sorotzkin, 1985; Harder, Cutler, & Rockart, 1992). The possibility thus emerged that some apparent effects of shame could actually be due to low self-esteem. By

controlling for self-esteem, we hoped to be able to establish the independent effects of shame.

Data were collected from two separate samples at different times. Study 1a was done first. They had exactly the same measures, and so we treat them as replications.

METHOD

Subjects

One hundred fifty-four introductory psychology students (56% male, 41% female, 3% unreported) participated in Study 1a in large group sessions. One hundred ninety-nine students (49% male, 51% female) took part in Study 1b. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 20.

Materials

Shame-proneness and guilt-proneness were measured with the TOSCA, that is, the Test of Self-Conscious Affect. This is a revised version of the Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory (SCAAI; Tangney, 1990). It describes 15 situations and asks how the subject would react to them.

Self-esteem was measured using the measure by Fleming and Courtney (1984), which is a revised version of Janis and Field's (1959) scale. Consistent with our standard practice, we deleted the subscales on physical appearance and coordination, and so subjects filled out the three main scales which assess global self-regard, social confidence, and school abilities.

Empathy was assessed with the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1983). It consists of 28 items that are equally divided among four subscales that assess fantasy, perspective taking, empathic concern, and personal distress.

Procedure

Participants attended group testing sessions and filled out the questionnaires at their own pace. All subjects were given packets that contained the three scales in the following order: self-esteem, TOSCA, and IRI. They were separated by filler questionnaires (from another study) to minimize any apparent connection between them. Pilot testing indicated that there were no order or sequence effects, and so it seemed acceptable to serve the goal of secretarial simplicity by having all packets the same.

RESULTS

Studies 1a and 1b had almost identical procedures. As will be noted later in this article, Study 2 also contained a replication of the same questionnaires. We shall therefore present the results for Studies 1a, 1b, and the relevant part of Study 2 together, to make it easier to compare the parallel results. Table 1 presents the relevant results concerning the links between empathy and shame and guilt for all three studies.

As Table 1 shows, global empathy (based on the Davis scale, without the personal distress subscale) was correlated with guilt-proneness but not with shame-proneness. In general, guilt-proneness was mainly linked

Table 1
Residual Correlations with Empathy

Empathy dimension	Shame-proneness	Guilt-proneness
Fantasy		
Study 1a	.13	.16*
Study 1b	.10	.13
Study 2	.10	–.02
Perspective taking		
Study 1a	–.02	.32**
Study 1b	–.01	.28**
Study 2	–.11	.37**
Empathic concern		
Study 1a	.15	.14
Study 1b	.17*	.09
Study 2	.06	.15
Personal distress		
Study 1a	.41**	.00
Study 1b	.38**	–.04
Study 2	.40**	–.04
Total empathy		
Study 1a	.12	.28**
Study 1b	.12	.23**
Study 2	.02	.22*

Note. Correlations under Shame-proneness are residuals after controlling for guilt-proneness, and those under Guilt-proneness are residuals after controlling for shame-proneness. "Total empathy" scores omit the Personal distress subscale. $N = 154$ (Study 1a), 199 (Study 1b), 99 (Study 2).
*$p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

to the cognitive components of empathy, namely, fantasy and perspective taking. Shame-proneness, in contrast, was mainly linked to the affective components, namely, empathic concern and personal distress. These effects were consistent across all three studies.

Shame-proneness and guilt-proneness were highly correlated with each other, $r = .50$, $p < .001$, and that correlation remained precisely the same in all three studies (there was variation in the third decimal place). This raised the possibility that some correlates of shame could actually be due to guilt, and vice versa. Accordingly, we conducted partial correlation analyses to examine how shame-proneness and guilt-proneness fared when the other was controlled.

Our main interest was in perspective taking. When shame-proneness was held constant, guilt-proneness had a strong independent relationship to perspective taking. The correlation was $r = .32$, $p < .01$ in Study 1a; $r = .28$, $p < .01$ in Study 1b; and $r = .37$, $p < .01$ in Study 2. In contrast, when guilt-proneness was held constant, the correlation between shame-proneness and perspective taking shrank to nearly zero: $r = –.02$, *ns* in Study 1a; $r = –.01$, *ns* in Study 1b; and $r = –.11$, *ns* in Study 2. Using an r to Z transformation, we found that the difference between those two correlations was significant, $t = 4.28$, $p < .01$ (Study 1a), $t = 4.18$, $p < .01$ (Study 1b), and $t = 4.83$, $p < .01$ (Study 2).

A similar polarization occurred in the partial correlation analysis of personal distress. When shame-proneness was held constant, guilt-proneness had no relationship to personal distress: $r = .002$, *ns* in Study 1a; $r = –.04$, *ns* in Study 1b; and $r = –.04$, *ns* in Study 2. Meanwhile, though, shame-proneness strongly predicted personal distress once guilt-proneness was factored out, $r = .41$, $p < .01$ (Study 1a), $r = .38$, $p < .01$ (Study 1b), and $r = .40$, $p < .01$ (Study 2). These differences were significant, $t = 5.34$, $p < .01$ (Study 1a); $t = 6.10$, $p < .01$ (Study 1b); and $t = 4.03$, $p < .01$ (Study 2).

Lastly, we conducted analyses using self-esteem as the covariate, in order to verify whether self-esteem might be a hidden factor accounting for some of the significant relationships. Covariance analyses seemed desirable because self-esteem was significantly correlated with shame-proneness in all three studies, $r = –.62$, $r = –.63$, $r = –.63$, respectively. Self-esteem was not, however, significantly correlated with guilt, $r = –.16$, $r = –.10$, and $r = –.12$. The correlations of the components of empathy with guilt-proneness were virtually unchanged when self-esteem was used as a covariate. In contrast, all the correlations with shame-proneness were

weakened when self-esteem was partialed out. Still, even with self-esteem held constant, the correlation between shame-proneness and personal distress was significant and consistent, and this value was significantly higher than the correlation between guilt-proneness and personal distress. Table 2 summarizes these analyses from the three studies. Thus, shame-proneness remains correlated with personal distress independent of self-esteem.

Table 2
Residuals After Using Self-Esteem as Covariate

Empathy dimension	Shame-proneness	Guilt-proneness	Value of *t*
Fantasy			
Study 1a	.12	.15*	ns
Study 1b	.12	.15*	ns
Study 2	.11	–.04	ns
Perspective taking			
Study 1a	–.03	.32**	4.34**
Study 1b	–.03	.31**	4.93**
Study 2	–.05	.34**	3.98**
Empathic concern			
Study 1a	.14	.13	ns
Study 1b	.14	.13	ns
Study 2	.08	.16	ns
Personal distress			
Study 1a	.23**	.04	2.38*
Study 1b	.24**	.04	2.86**
Study 2	.29**	–.01	3.04**
Total empathy			
Study 1a	.11	.23**	ns
Study 1b	.11	.27**	ns
Study 2	.05	.15	ns

Note. Correlations under Shame-proneness are residuals after controlling for guilt-proneness, and those under Guilt-proneness are residuals after controlling for shame-proneness. "Total empathy" scores omit the Personal distress subscale. $N = 154$ (Study 1a), 199 (Study 1b), 99 (Study 2). Final column *t*-tests concern difference between residuals in same row.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.

DISCUSSION

Studies 1a and 1b provided correlational evidence linking guilt-proneness to empathy and specifically with perspective taking, which is the cognitive component that may be crucial in producing some of the beneficial effects of empathy. These results closely replicate the various findings of Tangney (1991, 1994, 1995), and they extend that earlier work by showing that the effects of guilt-proneness and shame-proneness on various aspects of empathy are independent of self-esteem. The link between guilt-proneness and perspective taking remained strong and significant after controlling for shame-proneness and self-esteem. The pattern of results was found in Study 1a and replicated in Study 1b and Study 2.

Examination of the patterns of correlations between shame, guilt, and the four dimensions (subscales) of empathy showed that the relationships are different. Unlike guilt, shame had no relation to perspective taking, or to the other cognitive component of empathy (fantasy). In contrast, shame but not guilt was significantly correlated with the affective components of empathy, namely, personal distress and empathic concern.

Taken together, these results suggest that shame and guilt will have quite different effects on interpersonal sensitivity. The guilt-prone person appears to be someone who is inclined to be able to understand the other person's perspective. Guilt may thus conceivably reduce conflict and strengthen relationships by helping people to step outside of their own views and concerns in order to appreciate the other person's point of view.

The implications regarding shame are far less sanguine. The strongest independent effect of shame appears to be a rise in personal distress. Thus, in a conflict situation, the shame-prone person may well become upset in response to another's distress, but the shame-prone person's own feelings of distress appear to predominate, and these seem less directly helpful than understanding another's perspective for the sake of resolving the conflict or solving the problem. These findings suggest that interpersonal dilemmas may leave the shame-prone person preoccupied with his or her own upset feelings, as opposed to the guilt-prone person who is striving to understand the other's perspective.

Study 2

The results of Study 1 linked guilt-proneness to perspective taking. Study 2 provided a more direct and ambitious test of this relationship. In Study

2, we asked subjects to describe in their own words a recent interpersonal conflict they had experienced—and then to describe it a second time from the perspective of the other person in the conflict. By comparing the two stories, we obtained an experiential, behavioral measure of whether subjects actually could take the other's perspective. Perspective taking would be evident if the subject's second account revealed the other person's feelings, beliefs, interpretations, or values that were not included in the initial account. The prediction was that guilt-proneness would facilitate this appreciation of the other person's perspective, whereas shame-proneness would not.

The method for assessing subjects' interpretations, including any shift in perspective taking, involved autobiographical accounts. We approached guilt and shame in two ways, first by using the same dispositional measures used in Study 1, and second by using a content analysis of the accounts to establish situational indices of shame and guilt. The autobiographical method and the situational coding indices require comment.

Use of Autobiographical Narratives

Recent years have seen a steady expansion in the use of autobiographical narratives as a useful method for studying subjective interpretations of important events (e.g., Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Harvey, Orbuch, & Weber, 1992; Harvey, Weber, & Orbuch, 1990; McAdams, 1985; Ross & Holmberg, 1990; Schank & Abelson, 1995). By assembling first-person accounts of personal experiences, researchers have been able to study self-interpretation of incidents involving guilt (Baumeister, Stillwell & Heatherton, 1995; McGraw, 1987; Tangney, 1992; Tangney et al., 1992), divorce and romantic breakup (Harvey, Flanary, & Morgan, 1988), sexual masochism (Baumeister, 1988), major life change (Heatherton & Nichols, 1994), unrequited love (Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993), first dates (Ross & Holmberg, 1990), differences between victim and perpetrator perspectives (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990), the appeal of criminal activities (Katz, 1988), and relationship confidence (Murray & Holmes, 1994).

Such memories are often strongly tied to the perspective of the rememberer. Nigro and Neisser (1983) observed that autobiographical memories tend to evoke the perspective that the rememberer had at the time of the experience. This theory has been verified by studies showing that autobiographical accounts of interpersonal events differ systematically

by role perspective (Baumeister et al., 1990, 1993; Vaughan, 1986; Weiss, 1975). The perspectival nature of such memories makes it difficult for individuals to explain how someone else might have perceived and interpreted an event, especially when the other person held a view opposed to their own.

In the present study, then, asking subjects to describe an interpersonal conflict from their opponent's perspective was a potentially difficult task. To help overcome this difficulty, we decided to do more than simply instruct subjects to write the story from the other point of view. Both writings were preceded by a brief period in which subjects were asked to sit quietly and relive the experience in their own minds. During this period, the experimenter used several prompts, for example, instructing the subject to reflect on what he or she was doing, seeing, or feeling. Prior to writing the story from the other person's perspective, subjects were instructed to put themselves in the other person's place while reliving the experience. Thus, our procedure measured how well subjects could take the other person's perspective given that they tried to do so, as opposed to measuring whether subjects would spontaneously take another's perspective.

Guilt and Shame Features

Our hypothesis was that guilt-proneness would lead to increased perspective taking. Although our main test of the hypothesis involved the trait measures of guilt- and shame-proneness used in Study 1, we also sought to examine guilt and shame as situational occurrences. That is, we wanted to see whether the ability to take the other's perspective would predict actual indications of guilt and shame in the narratives. To achieve this, we needed to have some criteria by which to code the stories for their degree of shame and guilt content.

To obtain these criteria, we turned to the work of Helen Block Lewis (1971, 1981, 1983, 1987). Her work has been widely influential and is commonly regarded as the essential link between traditional theorizing about guilt and the modern, empirically based approaches.

Lewis's work depicted guilt as a matter of some deficiency in past behavior (as opposed to the self being deficient). Blame is internalized but there is no felt need to lash out against another person. Instead, the guilty person can isolate those feelings from the global self and can therefore take an active role in seeking to rectify the situation by atoning for the misdeed or communicating positive feelings to the other person.

The person may also handle the guilt by rationalizing or explaining the event in more desirable ways. Based on Lewis's analysis, we reasoned that it would be appropriate to code the guilt content of these accounts in terms of the following features: deficiency in behavior, indignation, isolation of feeling, no mention of prior feelings, self as active, communication about the particular incident, shared or self blame based on one's behaviors in the situation, efforts to make amends or restitution, concern for the other person, rationalization, and good thought formation.

In contrast, shame was analyzed by Lewis as involving a deficiency in the global self. Shame arises as a result of real or perceived rejection, which leads to a bitter, persistent anger. Shame-based anger can emerge as demeaning or hostile criticism of others, externalized blame, insults to others, or withdrawal from social interaction. The emotion of shame is intolerable and results in either denial of feeling or projective externalization of blame. Accordingly, we coded the shame content of these accounts in terms of the following features: deficiency of self, definite connections to prior feelings, self as passive, humiliation, denial, repression of ideas, defensive affirmation of self, avoidance of the other person or the situation (i.e., social withdrawal), sense of worthlessness, lingering or seething anger based on the incident being described, blaming the other, and derogating the other person (with whom one had the conflict).

METHOD

Subjects

One hundred eleven students from introductory psychology classes participated. They ranged in age from 17 to 42 and consisted of slightly more males than females (62 male, 46 female, 3 unreported). Eleven subjects were dropped after the initial group testing because English was not their native language and they seemed to have difficulty expressing themselves in English, which would compromise their ability to furnish usable accounts (in English).

Pretest

A pretesting session was done using the same materials as in Study 1, namely, the measure of guilt and shame proneness (TOSCA; Tangney, 1991), the empathy scale (Davis, 1983), and the self-esteem measure (Fleming & Courtney, 1984). The measures were separated by other, unrelated surveys. This pretesting was conducted in a large group session that was presented as a separate experiment. Subjects who had done the group testing session were then called

and invited to participate in the laboratory session. Subjects were not made aware that there was any connection between the group session and the laboratory session. The experimenter for the laboratory session remained blind to the results of the group testing and hence to the subjects' guilt- and shame-proneness. These preliminary questionnaires from the group testing session provided the data for the second replication of Study 1a, the results of which were presented along with those of Study 1a and will not be discussed further in this section of the report.

Laboratory Session

Laboratory sessions were scheduled several weeks after the group testing session. Subjects participated individually. After an initial briefing (that stressed the importance of confidentiality and of honest, intense recounting of stories), each person was asked to recall quietly the most intense interpersonal conflict that had occurred during the past 6 months and that had involved the participant and only one other person. It was also specified that the conflict should be one that had evoked strong feelings. Guided meditation instructions were used to help the subject relive the episode. The subject was asked to close his or her eyes and put himself or herself back where the conflict took place. The experimenter asked a series of questions to aid the subject's quiet recall, including "Can you see where you are? Who is around? Are there any smells and sounds that are present?" Subjects were then asked to focus on the conflict itself. They were told to try to visualize the other person and to feel their own emotions, including any changing feelings.

The participant was asked to stay with those thoughts and feelings for an additional quiet period of 30 to 45 seconds. At that point, the participant was instructed to open his or her eyes, turn over the sheet of paper, and begin writing about the incident. The participant's attention was drawn to several prompts listed at the top of the page, including "how it started, what was the problem, what you were feeling, who was to blame, how it ended, and what if anything you learned from the situation." Subjects were also reminded to use only initials so as not to identify either themselves or the other person in the conflict.

When the subject finished writing, he or she was again asked to sit with eyes closed. This time, the subject was instructed to try to become the other person in the situation. To facilitate this, the subject was asked to say out loud three or four times, "I am ___ " (with the name of the other person in the blank). Following this, the guided meditation exercise was repeated, except that this time the subject was supposed to be reliving the experience from the other person's point of view. Again there was a further quiet period, and then the subject was instructed to write the incident from the other person's point of view.

After the second writing exercise, subjects were given a final questionnaire that asked subjects to rate the intensity of the incident, the intensity of their feelings, who was to blame, and other related factors. It also asked whether the subject had felt any shift in blame for the conflict as a result of rethinking the recalled conflict. Following this, subjects were debriefed and enjoined to secrecy. To counteract any lingering unpleasant feelings deriving from reliving this intense conflict, each subject was given a small gift of candy before leaving.

Coding of Stories

All stories were typed before coding. The first author, who was blind to all the personality measures, coded all the stories. A second coder, who was also blind as well as unfamiliar with the hypotheses and goals of the study, coded a subsample of the stories for the sake of establishing reliability.

Each story was coded for guilt and shame characteristics, as described in the Introduction. More precisely, guilt characteristics consisted of deficiency in behavior, little or no mention of past feelings, depicting the self as active, indignation, isolation of feeling, rationalization, good actions or thoughts (or other reaction formation), communication designed to correct the problem, a sense of having control, resolution of anger, shared or self blame, and concern for the suffering of the other. Shame characteristics consisted of deficiency of self, depicting the self as passive, negation of the other person, blaming the other completely, humiliation of self, denial, connections to prior feelings, affirmation of the self, lingering anger, repression of ideas, avoidance of the other person or of the situation, and a sense of powerlessness or worthlessness. Each characteristic was coded either "yes" or "no" depending on whether the feature was present in the story or not. If a story was unclear or ambiguous with respect to some characteristic, it was coded as "not containing that feature." Separate indices for guilt and shame were constructed by adding up the number of features contained in any given story.

The main dependent variable was change in perspective. By "perspective change" we understood a meaningful difference in the information or evaluations presented in the two stories. That is, successful perspective change entailed that the subject's second story (i.e., the one written from the other person's perspective) contained new information that was not included in the subject's first story or that the second story presented some emotions, desires, opinions, or other evaluative responses that were not apparent in the first story. Thus, the basic difference was between a pair of stories that simply covered identical material from two different viewpoints and a pair of stories in which the second story introduced important new material that was missing from the first one.

The coding of perspective change required the coder to compare the two stories written by each subject. Like the other codings, it was dichotomous, that is, each subject was coded as either indicating perspective change or not. Substantive changes in the thinking involved in explaining the conflict, and particularly a sense of what the other person was presumably feeling during the conflict, were the vital basis for coding a pair of stories as showing change in perspective. In contrast, subjects who seemed merely to change the wording of their stories so as to make them appropriate to the other person were coded as not having changed. For example, if the subject's own account said, "My parents think I am incapable of being responsible and exercise too much control over me," a second story that showed no change in perspective might say: "My daughter is incapable of being responsible. I need to plan out everything for her." In contrast, a change in perspective might lead to saying, "My daughter thinks I feel she has no responsibility. That isn't true. I just don't want to let go yet. She is my only child."

Stories were coded further for evidence of positive and negative relationship outcomes, using a 3-point scale in which 1 = deterioration or dissolution of relationship, 2 = maintenance of relationship status quo, and 3 = ultimate improvement of relationship. Participants who gave no indication of relationship outcome were dropped from this analysis, leaving a total of 69. We then conducted a series of analyses designed to ascertain whether the various guilt and shame measures could predict these relationship outcomes. As in the main analyses, we sought to preserve the maximum amount of information by using the categorical variable (relationship outcome) as the independent variable and the more continuous variables as dependent variables for the analyses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Manipulation Checks and Reliability of Coding

Postexperimental questioning verified that all subjects understood the directions. All subjects were able to recall a conflict and to provide the requisite pair of accounts of it.

The main dependent variable was whether there was meaningful evidence of change in perspective in the second story. This was coded on a dichotomous basis by two coders, one of whom was blind to the hypotheses and goals of the research. Interrater agreement was 92% and reliability of coding was high, kappa = .80. These calculations were based on 85 stories, which were randomly chosen from the full sample of 100, except that we made sure that they included all 69 of the stories used in the relationship outcome analyses and path analyses.

We also checked the internal consistency of the codings of guilt and shame characteristics. These were alpha = .60 for guilt and alpha = .63 for shame. Deleting the stories about strangers (see below), these increased slightly to alpha = .66 for guilt and alpha = .65 for shame ($N = 69$). Given that these alphas are for coded story features rather than for questionnaire items, these reliabilities seem fairly strong and encouraging.

Interrater agreement on shame and guilt characteristics of the stories was calculated based on a subsample of 70 stories. The two raters (only one of whom was involved in the ratings of perspective change) achieved 90% agreement across all dimensions. Thus it appears that the codings of situational shame and guilt features were also quite suffiently reliable. Lastly, reliability of the relationship outcome was calculated based on only 45 stories, selected randomly from the 69 stories that did explicitly indicate what the relationship outcome was. Given the restriction of this coding to stories that were explicit about relationship outcome, it is not surprising that reliability was high; in fact, the two raters achieved 100% agreement.

Perspective Taking and Guilt

The main analysis tested the hypothesis that guilt-proneness would predict success at changing perspective. Out of 100 stories, 72 were coded as indicating change and 28 as indicating no change. In order to take advantage of the full range of guilt scores, we ran the analysis using the dichotomous variable (change) as the independent variable and the trait scores as the dependent variable.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) confirmed the hypothesis that guilt-prone subjects would show more perspective change, $F(1, 97) = 11.23$, $p < .001$. The mean level of guilt-proneness was 59.93 among subjects who changed perspective, as opposed to 54.30 among subjects who did not change. Thus, the tendency to change perspective between the two stories was associated with a higher level of guilt-proneness.

A similar conclusion emerged from examining the guilt index of the story, based on the coding of guilt characteristics. Among subjects who changed perspective, their first story contained a mean of 5.83 guilt characteristics. In contrast, subjects who did not change perspective had a mean of only 4.04 guilt characteristics, which is significantly less, $F(1, 97) = 11.74$, $p < .001$. Thus, both situational and dispositional measures of guilt were positively linked to perspective taking.

Based on a reviewer's suggestion, we redid these analyses using a different guilt index. Specifically, we dropped the three coded indicators of concern for the other, rationalization, and communication, because these seemed less central to the concept of guilt and hence more ambiguous. The reanalysis yielded a similar conclusion: subjects who changed perspective had a mean of 4.39 guilt characteristics, whereas those who showed no change had a mean of only 3.00, and the difference was significant, $F(1, 98) = 9.59$, $p < .01$.[1]

Perspective taking and shame

Unlike guilt, shame showed no relation to perspective taking. Shame-proneness scores on the TOSCA were not significantly different between subjects who did change perspective ($M = 43.10$) and those who did not change ($M = 40.19$), $F(1, 97) = 1.79$, *ns*. Likewise, the index of shame characteristics in the story was unrelated to perspective change, $F(1, 97) = 1.52$, *ns.* Subjects who did change perspective averaged 3.04 shame characteristics in their first story, as opposed to 3.67 for subjects who did not change.

Based again on reviewer suggestions, we reanalyzed these data after deleting the conceptually more peripheral shame codings, namely, lingering anger, blaming the other, and derogating the other. Subjects who did change perspective had an average of 1.86 shame characteristics, whereas those who did not change had an average of 2.07, and the difference fell far short of significance, $F < 1$, *ns*.

Once again, there was concern that overlap between self-esteem and shame could produce misleading results. Self-esteem itself was unrelated to perspective change, $F(1, 97) = 1.14$, *ns*. An analysis of covariance did find a significant link between change in perspective and shame-proneness after using self-esteem as a covariate, $F(1, 96) = 4.73$, $p < .05$, such that high shame-proneness predicted less perspective change. The shame characteristics of the stories remained unrelated to perspective change even with self-esteem used as covariate. Thus, it appears that shame does not increase the capacity to take the other's perspective as guilt does; if anything, dispositional shame-proneness inhibits appreciation of the other's perspective, if self-esteem is held constant.

1. The degrees of freedom increased because dropping those three codings enabled us to add in one more subject whose data were missing on the dropped dimension.

Spontaneous Perspective Taking

Another approach was to code each subject's first story as to whether there was evidence of perspective taking in it (e.g., telling one's own story but acknowledging what the other person might have been thinking). Spontaneous perspective taking was coded as present if the participant actually included a statement in the narrative that indicated that he or she was aware that the other person held a different view of what was happening. What mattered was awareness of a difference, as opposed to an accurate understanding of the other's point of view (and indeed there was no way to assess such accuracy from these data). The earlier measure of comparing the stories shows whether subjects could take the other's perspective when instructed to do so; this measure shows whether they actually, spontaneously (i.e., without being instructed to do so) considered that the other person had a different perspective. Guilt-proneness was positive linked to evidence of spontaneous perspective taking, $F(1, 67) = 5.61$, $p < .05$ (with self-esteem as covariate). Shame-proneness showed a nonsignificant trend in the opposite direction, $F(1, 67) = 1.86$, *ns*.

Evidence of spontaneous perspective-taking in the first stories was also positively linked to the guilt characteristics in the stories, $F(1, 67) = 5.99$, $p < .05$. The reanalysis conducted after deleting the coding dimensions of concern for the other, rationalization, and communication also yielded a significant difference, $F(1, 65) = 5.11$, $p < .05$. Meanwhile, spontaneous perspective taking was negatively associated with shame characteristics, $F(1, 67) = 6.57$, $p = .01$. When we followed the reviewer suggestions and deleted codings for lingering anger, blaming the other, and derogating the other, shame again emerged as detrimental and inimical to spontaneous perspective taking, $F(1, 65) = 6.08$, $p < .05$.

Thus, guilt-proneness and actual guilt feelings seem to be linked to actual, spontaneous perspective taking in a positive way. Shame-proneness was irrelevant, and actual feelings of shame seem somewhat incompatible with spontaneous perspective taking.

Relationship Outcome

The trait measures of guilt-proneness and shame-proneness yielded no significant relationship to interpersonal outcome, both Fs < 1, *ns*. The guilt and shame indices of story *content* did predict these outcomes, however. The more positive relationship outcomes were more common

in the stories with higher guilt content, $F(2, 68) = 11.89$, $p < .001$. The reanalysis using the briefer and more focused set of guilt criteria (based on reviewer suggestions) yielded a similar result, $F(2, 68) = 8.63$, $p < .001$. In contrast, good interpersonal outcomes were found in stories that had lower shame content, $F(2, 68) = 5.85$, $p < .005$. The reanalysis based on the alternative codings also yielded a significant effect, $F(2, 68) = 2.80$, $p < .01$. These results suggest an important pattern in subjective perceptions of interpersonal conflict: *guilt is associated with better interpersonal outcomes and shame is associated with poorer ones.*

To gain a more precise understanding of how the guilt and shame content of stories predicted relationship outcomes, we subdivided the characteristics on an a priori basis into cognitive, affective, and management subscales based on the work of Mayer, Salovey, Gomberg-Kaufman, and Blainey (1991). Those authors noted that moods and emotions consist of both experiential and management (response) aspects. Thus, the affective guilt subscale consisted of indications of indignation, concern for the other, and absence of past feelings. The cognitive guilt subscale consisted of evaluating behavior as deficient, attributing an active role in the conflict to oneself, and indicating some control by the self. The guilt management cluster contained indications of rationalization, positive thought formation, corrective communication, restitution or apology, self-blame (or shared blame), and efforts to isolate feelings. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) using these independent variables (affective, cognitive, management guilt and affective, cognitive, management shame) provided conceptual replication of our findings about what aspects of guilt and shame predicted perspective change in the conflict stories. The MANOVA found that cognitive components of guilt (as reflected in story content) were positively related to change in perspective, $F(1, 97) = 4.34$, $p < .05$, whereas the affective features of guilt were not, $F < 1$, *ns*. Guilt management was also positively linked to perspective change, $F(1, 97) = 14.15$, $p < .001$. None of the three shame subscales predicted change in perspective.

We then turned to examine how these more narrowly defined features of emotional experience predicted the interpersonal or relationship outcomes, as indicated in the story content. In view of the limited number of possible scores on the subscales, we analyzed their relationship to the three interpersonal outcome categories with a chi-square test. Three of the six variables yielded significant results. The cognitive guilt subscale showed a significant effect on relationship outcome, $\chi^2(6,$

$N = 69) = 16.84, p < .01$, as did guilt management, $\chi^2(12, N = 69) = 34.22$, $p < .001$, and shame management, $\chi^2(8, N = 69) = 20.60$, $p < .01$. ANOVAs yielded the same results and conclusions. Better relationship outcomes were associated with greater frequency of indicators of guilt cognitions and guilt management but with less frequent indicators of shame management, respectively.

We also investigated whether actual perspective taking (as indicated by spontaneous consideration of the other in the subject's first story) was linked to relationship outcome. Using a 2 (perspective taking) × 3 (relationship outcome) design, we found a significant relationship, $\chi^2(2, N = 68) = 6.75$, $p < .05$. Inspection of the tallies suggests that the significant result was mainly influenced by a very high count in the cell defined by poor relationship outcomes and lack of perspective taking. Thus, a failure to refer to the other's perspective in one's own story was strongly linked to deterioration or dissolution of the relationship.

Path Analysis

A path analysis was conducted to clarify the possible interrelationships among the various shame and guilt clusters, perspective change, and relationship outcome. The analysis used the 69 cases in which relationship outcome had been coded. Thus, stories involving conflicts with strangers were dropped, as were stories that did not give any information about the status of the relationship after the conflict.

Path analysis requires some assumptions about the temporal or causal sequence of the variables. We assumed that personality traits exist prior to involvement in the actual situation, so dispositional shame-proneness and guilt-proneness were treated as preceding the responses of guilt, shame, and perspective taking in the actual situation. We found that guilt-proneness did not directly predict actual feelings of guilt in the story, but guilt-proneness did predict perspective taking (as measured by contrasting the two stories written by each subject), and that perspective taking did in turn predict situational guilt. This pattern of results suggested that the better causal sequence (i.e., the best fit with the data) began with trait guilt-proneness, leading to the ability to take the other's perspective in the situation (when instructed to do so), leading in turn to feeling guilty in the situation. Relationship outcomes by definition occurred subsequent to the conflict, and so they must be considered as consequences rather than causes of the conflict.

We conducted two path analyses. The first was based on our original codings; the second was based on the revised codings that resulted from deleting the six indices of situational guilt and shame that may have been confounded or peripheral (as suggested by a reviewer).

There were some violations of the normality assumption with the guilt and shame clusters, but transformations of the variables did not add to the explained variance or best fit of the model, and so the linear model was used as the most parsimonious. No evidence of multicollinearity was found with any of the variables. All independent variables were entered simultaneously.

The first analysis using all the originally coded characteristics of shame and guilt explained 39% of the variance. The revised analysis with the shorter list of codings explained 21% of the variance. The outcomes of both path analyses are depicted in Figure 1. Significant betas are indicated with solid lines.

The resulting path analyses mirrored and confirmed the analyses of variance reported earlier in this section. Guilt-proneness predicted perspective taking, whereas shame-proneness did not. Successfully taking the other's perspective predicted feeling guilty in the situation, but it had no relation to feelings of shame. Guilty feelings during the conflict were associated with better relationship outcomes, whereas feelings of shame had no link to relationship outcomes.

Thus, the relevant causal pathway that is tentatively suggested by this model is trait guilt-proneness promotes changes in perspective, which in turn lead to guilt feelings, which have a significantly beneficial effect on interpersonal outcomes. To express this in plainer and more concrete terms: *having a guilt-prone personality increases the tendency to consider the perspective of the other person with whom one is in conflict.* This causes one to feel guilty rather than ashamed. These feelings of guilt help preserve the relationship from damage, presumably because they stimulate reparative behaviors such as apologizing and making amends.

Study 3

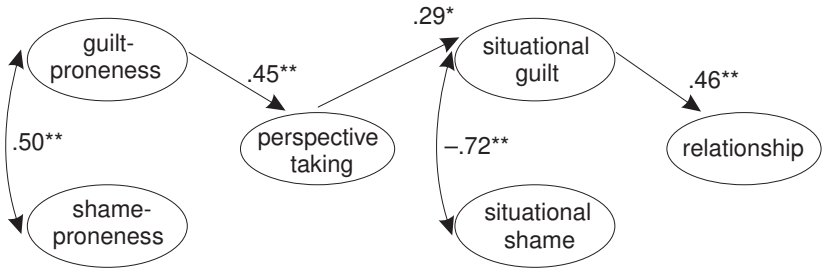
The relevance of guilt and shame to relationship outcomes emerged as an important issue in Study 2. Unfortunately, that study had not stipulated any specific type of relationship, and so the data contained a broad assortment. In particular, it included relationships that can be terminated (e.g., friend, romantic partner) and those that cannot (e.g., parent, child),

and so the range of response options was not the same for all individuals. Study 3 sought to replicate the main findings with a sample that was restricted to relationships that did contain the option of terminating.

METHOD

Thirty-seven students (23 males, 14 females) were recruited from introductory psychology classes in connection with a course requirement. They ranged in age from 17 to 24 (M = 19.41). In this sample, the mean guilt-proneness (M = 57.00) was higher than the mean shame-proneness (M = 39.49), but some subjects did exhibit higher shame-proneness than guilt-proneness.

Path analysis with all of the original list of shame and guilt characteristics. Only significant βs reported.



Path analysis with the revised list of shame and guilt characteristics. Only significant βs reported.

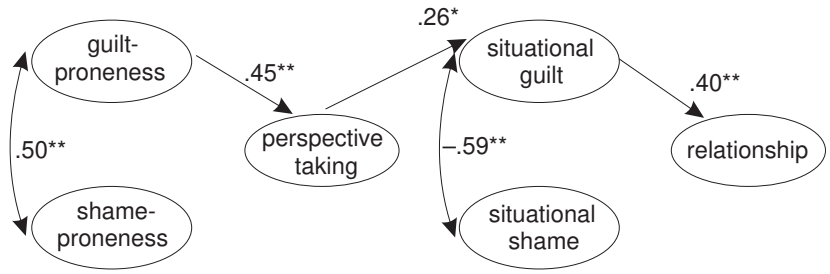


Figure 1

Materials and Procedure

Pretesting. Pretesting again included the TOSCA (Tangney, 1991), the revised self-esteem scale (Fleming & Courtney, 1984), and the empathy measure (Davis, 1980, 1983).

Narratives. There was no preselection of subjects, in order to keep the experimenter blind to trait scores. Individual sessions were conducted using the same method as in Study 2, except that conflicts were limited to those between friends or romantic partners. The final questionnaire asked only questions regarding regret, intensity of relationship, and change of blame. Debriefing was essentially the same as in Study 2.

Coding of stories. All stories were typed before coding. Coding was done by an experimenter who was blind to all personality measures. Personality scores were matched to stories after the coding was completed. Coding procedures followed those of Study 2, except that first stories were also coded for evidence of actual perspective taking in the report of the conflict. Stories coded positive on this dimension indicated that at the time of the conflict the person had actually considered the other's perspective (e.g., "I know what she was thinking" or "It goes against what he believes"). These codings were only done on the first story, that is, the story told from the subject's own perspective.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perspective Taking and Guilt

There were two main hypotheses. The first was that guilt-proneness would predict perspective taking. Guilt-proneness did predict the ability to take the other's perspective as seen in a change of perspective in the second stories, $F(1, 34) = 3.74$, $p < .05$. Guilt-proneness was also positively related to actual perspective taking in the first story, as evidenced by references in the story itself to appreciating the other's views, $F(1, 34) = 5.76$, $p < .05$.

The second main hypothesis was that guilt feelings would be linked to both guilt-proneness and perspective taking. Consistent with this prediction, perspective taking was linked to much higher frequency of guilt in the stories (*M*s of 8.13 and 4.62 guilt characteristics), $F(1, 36) = 20.14$, $p < .001$. By the same token, guilt-proneness also predicted situational guilt when self-esteem was used as a covariate, $F(1, 34) = 3.82$, $p < .05$. More guilt-prone subjects indicated having felt more guilty than others.

Thus, guilt-proneness apparently led to a higher capacity to appreciate the other's perspective and a greater tendency to actually consider the other's perspective. This perspective taking in turn led to guilt feelings.

Perspective Taking and Shame

Unlike guilt, shame-proneness showed no relation to the ability to take the other's perspective in the second story, $F(1, 34) = 0.36$, *ns* (using self-esteem as covariate). Even more dramatic, shame-proneness was linked to fewer references to the other's perspective in the subject's own (first) story, $F(1, 34) = 42.92$, $p < .001$. Thus, the trait of shame-proneness seems to inhibit the actual consideration of the other's perspective, although it is irrelevant to the ability to do so on demand.

By the same token, people who showed a change in perspective between the two stories tended to have fewer shame indicators in their stories, $F(1, 36) = 7.65$, $p < .01$. Such indications of shame were positively linked to shame-proneness, $F(1, 34) = 6.77$, $p < .01$.

Thus, it appears that shame-proneness does not predict the capacity to take the other's perspective, but shame-proneness does deter people from actually taking it. Moreover, actual feelings of shame appear to be somewhat incompatible with this capacity to consider the other's perspective. Perspective taking appears to be relatively absent or rare in stories where conflicts lead to shame. Thus, to the extent that perspective taking may be desirable or helpful, shame may be counterproductive.

Relationship Outcome

Because of the greater homogeneity of the sample with regard to type of relationships, we were able to code relationship outcomes on a 4-point scale: 1 = dissolution, 2 = deterioration, 3 = status quo, and 4 = improvement. We then conducted a series of analyses similar to those of Study 2.

Mean guilt-proneness scores were significantly related to relationship outcome, $F(3, 37) = 38.50$, $p < .001$. The lowest mean guilt-proneness was found among the stories that indicated no change in the relationship status. Guilt-proneness was thus linked to changes in either direction (i.e., improvement, deterioration, or dissolution). Actual feelings of guilt in the story were also associated with relationship outcomes, $F(3, 36) = 2.78$, $p < .05$. More precisely, higher numbers of guilt characteristics in the story were linked to better relationship outcomes, mainly improvement

or status quo. These patterns are somewhat different, and we shall not put a strong theoretical interpretation on them. The simplest summary seems to be that guilt-proneness seems to predict relationship change as a result of conflict, and feeling guilty seems to benefit the relationship.

The effects of shame are easier to characterize. Shame-proneness had a significant impact on relationship outcome, $F(3, 36) = 6.99$, $p < .01$, such that higher shame-prone people were far more likely to report that the relationship deteriorated or broke up after the conflict (as opposed to remaining the same or improving). Evidence of feeling ashamed in the stories showed the same pattern, although the effect fell slightly short of significance, $F(3, 36) = 2.40$, $p = .06$. Taken together, these results suggest that shame predicts negative relationship outcomes of conflict.

Perspective taking did not predict relationship outcome at all. Neither actual perspective taking nor induced perspective change (i.e., ability) had any predictive impact.

Reanalysis of Subsample of Study 2

To check for converging evidence, we reanalyzed the data from Study 2 using only the stories that happened to refer to friendships and romantic relationships (thus, stories that fit the criteria specified in Study 3). Results were quite similar to those of Study 3. Trait guilt was positively associated with actual perspective taking, $F(1, 37) = 5.23$, $p < .05$. High levels of guilt in the story were associated with both status quo maintenance and improvement of the relationship, $F(2, 35) = 7.58$, $p < .01$. There was a trend linking spontaneous perspective taking to better relationship outcomes, $\chi^2(2, N = 38) = 3.89$, $p = .14$.

Meanwhile, shame-proneness had no relationship to spontaneous perspective-taking, $F < 1$, *ns*. Shame in the story was linked to poorer relationship outcomes, $F(2, 35) = 4.20$, $p < .05$.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present series of studies provided evidence of multiple links among guilt, shame, perspective taking, and relationship outcomes. The findings were generally consistent with our hypotheses, with one important exception that indicates how our initial theorizing needs to be revised. The main results and implications can be summarized as follows.

Studies 1 and 2 both found empathy to be linked to dispositional guilt-proneness. Important differences between guilt and shame were revealed by examining the separate (subscale) components of empathy. Guilt-proneness was positively correlated with perspective taking. Shame-proneness was mainly linked to personal distress. These relationships remained significant when self-esteem was held constant.

Study 2 provided the main test of our hypothesis. Participants furnished accounts of interpersonal conflict as they recalled it; then they were asked to furnish a second account of that same conflict from the other person's perspective. We found that the ability to appreciate the other person's perspective was linked to higher levels of guilt-proneness. Another analysis looked at spontaneous perspective taking in each participant's first story. Again, guilt-proneness was associated with a higher likelihood of such perspective taking.

These two measures of perspective taking complement each other: one focuses on the ability to take the other's perspective when instructed to do so, and the other focuses on spontaneous perspective taking. Neither measure provides any basis for making claims about the accuracy of empathic perspective taking, however. They reveal only whether people become aware that the other person's perspective is different from their own. Awareness of diverse perspectives is presumably necessary but not sufficient for a full, accurate appreciation of what someone else is thinking and feeling. In plainer terms, it is presumably just one big step in the right direction toward interpersonal understanding.

Thus, trait guilt-proneness was associated with both a higher ability to take the other's perspective and a higher willingness or tendency to do so. Evidence of actual guilt feelings within the (first) story of the conflict was likewise linked to both perspective-taking ability and spontaneous perspective taking. Guilt feelings were also linked to beneficial relationship outcomes, consistent with the general view in recent work suggesting that guilt is beneficial for relationships (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1994; Baumeister, Reis, & Delespaul, 1995; Jones et al., 1995; Tangney et al., 1992; Zahn-Waxler & Kochanska, 1990). Study 3 replicated these effects with a more homogeneous and useful sample of relationships.

So far, so good. Several other findings did not fit our hypotheses, however. Perhaps most surprisingly, we did not find that trait guilt-proneness was directly related to evidence of actual guilt feelings in the episode (except for a weak effect in Study 3). Also, neither guilt-proneness nor perspective taking was directly related to positive relationship outcomes.

Based on these findings and on the path analysis, we therefore must conclude that the best causal intepretation of our results is that trait guilt-proneness leads to increased perspective taking, which leads to higher actual feelings of guilt, which help produce the beneficial relationship outcomes. This differs from our original theory which involved trait guilt-proneness leading to situational guilt, leading to perspective taking, and that in turn leading directly to relationship benefits. In other words, the positions of situational guilt feelings and perspective taking were reversed in our findings as compared to our initial theorizing.

One implication is that feeling guilty seems to be the most important direct cause of positive interpersonal outcomes. The value of empathy is that it leads, as a mediating variable, from guilt-proneness to guilt feelings. The nature of guilt-proneness seems to involve an ability and a spontaneous tendency to take the other person's perspective. Consistent with Hoffman's (1982) theorizing, empathic perspective taking seems to be an important prerequisite for feeling guilty. Guilt-prone people, in other words, are those who tend to respond to conflicts by appreciating how the other has been affected by their actions. If the other has a legitimate point, they may feel guilty, which will help motivate them to rectify the problem and find a mutually satisfactory solution.

At the other extreme, someone who is unable or unwilling to appreciate a different point of view is likely to be rigid, judgmental, unwilling to compromise or accommodate, and perhaps indifferent to the concerns, needs, and problems of another person. Moreover, even if the person did want to repair the relationship after a conflict, his or her efforts might be inappropriate or ineffective given the lack of understanding that the other's point of view is different from one's own. According to the present results, the person who does not feel guilty is more likely to fit this pattern.

A vivid example of this possible link between low guilt and lack of empathic perspective taking was provided in Scully's (1990) study of convicted rapists. In that study, a large category of rape deniers consisted of men who seemed to feel no guilt or remorse about their crime. When she asked them how they thought their victims would describe them now, 45% said they had no idea, and 45% answered in terms of positive, admirable attributes! In reality, of course, nearly all rape victims retain quite negative memories of the men who violated them, and so the responses of these rapists suggest a remarkable lack of appreciation of their victims' perspectives.

Shame-proneness, in contrast, does not seem to promote perspective taking. If anything, it impairs it. This fits the finding from Study 1 (and previous work) suggesting that shame-proneness is linked to the personal distress component of empathy. In other words, shame seems to make people focus on their own distress rather than considering how their opponent or victim feels, and this self-focus seems to prevent the constructive resolution of conflicts. Shame and shame-proneness were linked in Studies 2 and 3 to a failure to consider the other's perspective spontaneously, sometimes perhaps with an inability to appreciate that perspective, and relatively poor and destructive relationship outcomes.

Limitations

Several limitations of our findings must be noted. First, the results are inherently correlational. The procedures and analyses of Study 1 were explicitly correlational, and even though Study 2 contained an experimental manipulation the main dependent variable was a within-subjects difference between the two instructional conditions. The results of Study 2 are therefore also correlational. Opinions among experts differ as to how effective path analytical techniques are for suggesting causal directionality. In short, although we think there are a priori theoretical grounds and some empirical justification for thinking that our results were produced by a particular pattern of causal relationships, one cannot regard the causality as proven by these studies. (To be sure, this problem is shared by nearly all work that relates individual differences to behavioral measures.)

CONCLUSION

Guilt and shame differ as to how they are related to empathy. Shame appears to be linked mainly to the affective dimensions of empathy and to personal distress. People who feel shame may become preoccupied with their own distress, and ultimately this may have little value for improving relationships or interactions.

Guilt, however, seems to be linked to the important cognitive components of empathy, particularly the ability to appreciate another person's perspective (or at least to recognize that the other's perspective differs from one's own). Guilt-proneness is linked to both the ability and the willingness to consider the other's perspective.

Our initial theory was that perspective taking might explain the interpersonal benefits of guilt. Instead, our results suggest that guilt feelings help explain the interpersonal benefits of empathic perspective taking. Perspective taking was, however, a crucial mediator between guilt-proneness and actual guilt feelings. Guilt-proneness does not seem to mean that one always feels guilty or that one's interpersonal conflicts will end well. Rather, guilt-proneness is linked to perspective taking, and that may lead to feeling guilty, which leads to the interpersonal benefits. To understand how interpersonal conflicts can be resolved in ways that protect the relationship from damage, it is apparently necessary to invoke the combination of personality traits (guilt-proneness vs. shame-proneness), empathic response (perspective taking vs. personal distress), and emotional effects (shame, guilt, and management responses).

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