WHEN GUILT LEADS TO OTHER ORIENTATION AND SHAME LEADS TO EGOCENTRIC SELF-FOCUS: EFFECTS OF DIFFERENTIAL PRIMING OF NEGATIVE AFFECTS ON PERSPECTIVE TAKING

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Previous researchers have pointed out that different negative affects with the same degree of negative valence may have distinct, yet predictable, influences on information processing. Based upon the perspective of “affect-as-information” and the mood repair hypothesis, we examined differences in individuals’ perspective taking arising when they felt either guilt or shame. Undergraduates (N = 114) were randomly assigned to 1 of 3 affect-inducing conditions. After receiving affect manipulation, they were asked to engage in a perspective-taking task and to make judgments about how other people thought. Compared with participants in a neutral mood, participants experiencing guilt showed better perspective taking, and participants experiencing shame showed worse perspective taking. In general, the results suggest that an individual’s inclination to take other persons’ perspectives into consideration has a differential effect on mood repair depending on whether behavior is motivated by shame or guilt.

Keywords: guilt, mood repair hypothesis, perspective taking, shame.

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Extant studies on the influence of affective states on decision-making processes have shown that different affects (even for the same negative moods) are likely to exert noticeably different impacts on individuals’ information processing and decision making (Pham, 1998; Pham, Cohen, Pracejus, & Hughes, 2001). From an affect-as-information perspective (Schwarz, 1990; Schwarz & Clore, 1996), people often rely on emotional data while processing information and making decisions because affects or moods can be considered valuable information for forming a judgment. However, different positive affects (e.g., pride versus cheerfulness) or negative affects (e.g., anger versus sadness) may activate different implicit goals (Raghunathan & Pham, 1999). Moreover, a pervasive motivational shift observed under negative affect is a heightened concern for elevating or repairing one’s mood (e.g., Morris & Reilly, 1987; Zillmann, 1988). This perspective has been supported by recent findings on the informational value of affective states (Yi & Baumgartner, 2004) and the cognitive determinants of affect (Roseman, Spindel, & Jose, 1990). For example, Raghunathan and Pham conducted a series of experiments based on the affect-as-information perspective and showed that anxious individuals were more risk-averse, whereas sad individuals were more likely to take risks (see also Raghunathan, Pham, & Corfman, 2006, for related findings). They argued that anxiety and sadness prime different goals for mood-repair purposes, and that these motivational influences seemed to operate through an active feeling-monitoring process.

The main hypothesis of the present research was that affective states such as guilt and shame would have distinct influences on social interaction because people experiencing them tend to make different motivational shifts to adjust for these negative experiences. As a result, individuals bring different implicit goals to their perspective taking.

According to the affect-as-information framework (Schwarz, 1990; Schwarz & Clore, 1996), people with negative affects tend to proactively adopt some strategic actions or decisions in order to amend or change their negative mood states. It has consistently been argued that, in comparison with guilt, feelings of shame are more likely to lead people to seek self-enhancement or achievement in order to save their self-esteem. In contrast, individuals who feel shamed tend to become more narcissistic, and their need for affiliation tends to decline (Frijda, 1986; Gilligan, 2003). On the other hand, people with guilty affect are more likely to emphasize sharing, cooperation, and sacrifice that requires highly affiliated interpersonal relations. Guilt makes it easier for people to engage in perspective taking in relationship to others and to be more interested in social sharing and cooperation, as well as in the improvement of human relationships (Leith & Baumeister, 1998).

Furthermore, Tangney (1995) proposed that people’s interpersonal focus was different when experiencing shame and guilt. This difference in egocentric versus
other-oriented concerns is consistent with Lewis’ (1971) observation that shame involves a focus on the self, whereas guilt involves a focus on a specific behavior. Moreover, people feeling shame often report a desire to flee from the shame-inducing situation, to “sink into the floor and disappear” (Tangney, 1995, p. 1137). In contrast, guilt keeps people constructively engaged in the interpersonal situation (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994).

The motivational inclination of individuals with guilty affect tends to generate a higher need for affiliation and therefore to motivate these people to engage in interpersonal interaction and perspective taking. On the other hand, shamed individuals tend to focus on self-enhancement activities in order to repair their injured self-image. Shame tends to motivate people to be egocentric, diminishes their confidence in their ability to implement social interaction (Covert, Tangney, Maddux, & Heleno, 2003), and weakens others-oriented concerns (Lewis, 1971). Therefore, it was predicted that, compared with individuals in a neutral mood, individuals with guilty affect would be more likely to exhibit better perspective taking, whereas individuals with shamed affect would be more likely to exhibit worse perspective taking.

**PRETEST**

We focused primarily on examining the differential impact of guilt and shame on perspective taking. The first step necessary was to be able to manipulate the two negative affective states independently. The emotional-event recollection technique developed by Leith and Baumeister (1996) was adopted. Participants recalled emotional events that had made a significant impact on their lives and vigorously reexperienced associated affects of guilt or shame.

**PARTICIPANTS AND DESIGN**

Fifty-one college students completed this pretest for course credit. The study had a between-subjects design. The participants were randomly assigned to one of three emotional-event recollection conditions (shame, guilt, or neutral).

**PROCEDURE**

Each session consisted of three participants arranged in separate cubicles. The emotional-event recollection procedure was disguised as a self-reflection study. Participants were informed that the major purpose of the research was to explore the relationship between self-reflection and decision making. Before starting to recall past emotional events, participants received a booklet describing self-reflection as the “ability to reexperience past events with significant meaning”. To increase engagement with the task, participants were further told, “people with better self-reflection have been found to be better parents, lovers, couples,
and managers, and they tend to learn lessons from experiences which enable them to avoid making the same mistakes.”

Next, participants were presented with an instruction allocating them to one of the three affect-manipulation conditions. For the conditions of guilt or shame, participants were asked to recall salient and impressive events that had made them feel a strong sense of guilt or shame. Instructions were designed to be semistructured, using a directed recollection procedure that is commonly used to investigate autobiographical memories (Bruhn, 1990; Singer & Salovey, 1993). Participants were asked to recall past emotional events as vividly as possible and reexperience the sense of guilt or shame following these guidelines: “What was the emotional event?” “Why did that happen?” “How did you feel then?” “What was the consequence of that event?” In the neutral-affect condition, participants read a series of commonplace events happening over the course of a day to a person named Sean. In order to induce the target affective states effectively, each participant was offered enough time to become involved in the emotional-events recollection procedure. A yoked-control method was used to control the duration of emotional recollection for each session. Therefore, the three participants in each session had a similar amount of time for their recollection of emotional events.

Following the recollection process, participants were required to carefully evaluate their affective states at that moment and to express their present feelings. This section of the questionnaire was focused mainly on subjective assessment of affective states and was intended to verify the effectiveness of the emotional-events recollection procedure. For this task, participants were presented with a scale consisting of six items, each phrased in the form I am feeling [affective term]. Participants were asked to rate how well each item described their present feelings on a scale from 1 (describes my current feelings very well) to 7 (does not describe my current feelings at all). The affective items which were selected from established scales (e.g., Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) covered the same range of valences for each emotion. To minimize demand characteristics, guilt and shame items were incorporated with – and interspersed among – other negative moods (fear, anger) and positive moods (relaxation, pleasure). Thus, participants had little opportunity to guess the real purpose of the experiment.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The guilt and shame felt scores (see Table 1) were submitted to a 2 (type of score) × 3 (affect manipulation) mixed ANOVA, treating the type of affective score (felt guilt and shame) as a within-subjects repeated factor and the affect manipulation (guilt, shame, or neutral) as a between-subjects factor. The analysis showed a significant two-way interaction, $F(2, 48) = 63.75, p < .01$, which
indicated that different types of affect manipulation induced different types of felt affect.

In subsequent planned contrasts, the guilt experienced under the guilt condition should have been significantly higher than that under either the shame or the neutral conditions, whereas the felt shame under the shame condition should have been significantly higher than that under either the guilt or the neutral conditions. Dunn’s multiple comparison procedure (Shaffer, 1995) was employed to conduct planned contrasts. In terms of guilt felt, a main effect of affect manipulation was significant, $F(2, 48) = 24.03$, $p < .01$, showing that the degree of felt guilt was significantly different among the three conditions. Planned contrast analyses showed that guilt felt under the guilt-induced condition ($M_{\text{guilt}} = 6.12$) was significantly higher than that experienced under the other two conditions ($M_{\text{shame}} = 2.65$; $M_{\text{neutral}} = 2.05$), $t(48) = 8.86$ and $t(48) = 10.36$ for the two contrasts, respectively, $p < .01$. In terms of shame felt, a significant main effect of affect manipulation was obtained, $F(2, 48) = 28.64$, $p < .01$. Planned contrast analyses showed that shame felt under the shame-induced condition ($M_{\text{shame}} = 5.65$) was significantly higher than that felt under the other two conditions ($M_{\text{guilt}} = 2.64$; $M_{\text{neutral}} = 2.22$), $t(48) = 6.10$ and $t(48) = 6.93$ for the two contrasts, respectively, $p < .01$.

### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affect scores</th>
<th>Induced guilt</th>
<th>Induced shame</th>
<th>Neutral affect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>6.12$^a$</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>2.65$^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>2.64$^b$</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>5.65$^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* $n = 17$ participants in each of the affect manipulation conditions; affects felt were rated on a 7-point scale. Numbers with different superscripts in a given row indicate significance, $p < .01$.

Finally, in order to rule out possible confounding effects of other affective states, we examined whether any significant differences in other positive (relaxation, pleasure) and negative moods (fear, anger) existed between the guilt and the shame conditions. It was expected that the irrelevant positive and negative affective states would not be different between the guilt and the shame conditions. An independent-sample $t$ test was conducted to examine the affect manipulation influence ratings of other affective states felt. Analyses revealed no significant differences between the guilt and the shame conditions with regard to
other affective states felt, $t(32) = -1.37$ for relaxation, $t(32) = -0.68$ for pleasure, $t(32) = 0.31$ for fear, and $t(32) = -0.46$ for anger, respectively. In summary, the emotional-events recollection procedure for manipulating negative affects successfully induced the two target affective states independently.

**FORMAL EXPERIMENT**

In this experiment we aimed to examine the hypothesis predicting specific effects of guilt and shame on perspective taking. After the affect manipulation (guilt, shame, and neutral), participants were asked to complete a perspective-taking task (Keysar, 1994).

**PARTICIPANTS AND DESIGN**

A total of 114 college students participated in this experiment to receive course credit. Target affects were manipulated as a between-subjects design (guilt, shame, or neutral), and participants were randomly assigned to one of the three affect-manipulation conditions.

**PROCEDURE**

The emotional-events recollection procedure was identical to that in the pretest. In contrast to the pretest, however, participants’ affective states were not measured, because previous studies have shown that such manipulation checks can reduce the impact of the manipulated affective states on judgment (e.g., Gorn, Goldberg, & Basu, 1993; Keltner, Ellsworth, & Edwards, 1993). Instead, participants were asked to complete a perspective-taking task. Following the recommendations made by Keysar (1994), we gave participants a message and asked them to interpret how a friend of the speaker might perceive the message. The message seemed sincere at face value, but privileged background knowledge about the speaker’s intentions suggested a possible sarcastic undertone. We predicted that shamed participants would be more likely than would guilty participants to assume that the friend understood the sarcasm, even though a sarcastic interpretation depended on privileged background knowledge that the friend did not possess. Finally, participants were provided with some background information in order to reduce any possible negative impact of the disguising technique.

**AFFECT MANIPULATION**

The affect manipulation was the same experiential prime used in the pretest. Under the guise of a self-reflection study, participants were asked to read the instructions designed to induce target affects.
DEPENDENT MEASURE

After completing the affect prime, participants read a scenario in which they and a colleague went to a fancy restaurant recommended by the colleague’s friend, but had a particularly poor dining experience. The next day, the colleague sent an email to the friend stating only, “about the restaurant, it was marvelous, just marvelous”. Participants were asked to respond to the question, “how do you think the colleague’s friend will interpret the comment?” Responses were made on a scale anchored by very sarcastic (1) and very sincere (9). No information was provided in the email itself to suggest anything other than sincerity. However, if participants called on their privileged knowledge of the speaker’s intention, they might think that the friend would interpret the message as sarcastic.

RESULTS

To evaluate participants’ perspective taking, ratings of sarcastic attribution were submitted to a one-way ANOVA. The analysis revealed a robust main effect of affective state, $F(2, 111) = 39.48, p < .001, \eta^2 = .42$, indicating that, overall, participants with shamed affect exhibited the highest degree of sarcastic interpretations ($M = 6.91, SD = 1.70$), whereas participants with guilty affect exhibited the lowest degree of sarcastic interpretations ($M = 3.69, SD = 1.41$), and those in a neutral mood were in between ($M = 4.82, SD = 1.68$). Follow-up planned contrasts revealed that participants under the induced guilt condition thought the message would be perceived as less sarcastic by the naive recipient than did participants under the neutral mood condition, $t(111) = 5.70, p < .001$. Furthermore, participants under the induced shame condition thought the message would be perceived as more sarcastic by the naive recipient than did participants under the neutral mood condition, $t(111) = -3.05, p < .01$.

DISCUSSION

According to the affect-as-information perspective, individuals experiencing different affective states tend to adopt different ways of coping and achieving mood-repair as a result of differences in their motivation. Thus, different negative affective states trigger varied implicit goals (Schwarz, 1990). The present study shows that two affect states, guilt and shame, having the same negative valence generated distinctive influences on individuals’ perspective taking, whereby guilty participants showed better perspective taking than did shamed participants. The findings support our prediction that shame leads individuals to rely too heavily on their own vantage point, insufficiently adjusting to other individuals’ perspectives, whereas guilt leads individuals to adopt an others-orientated stance. In addition, results in this research echoed the observed findings of Leith and...
Baumeister (1998) and indicated that guilt-prone people would be better at perspective taking. The practical aspects regarding enhancement of perspective taking are just as implicative as the theoretical.

With respect to limitations and future directions, participants’ perspective taking was measured using a specific scenario. A follow-up experiment involving a different scenario would help to rule out the possibility that the differential effects of guilt and shame simply influence attributions of sarcasm. In addition, future researchers might examine more closely the mood-repair tendency. If negative affects bias perceptions or decisions through an active process of feeling monitoring (Raghunathan & Pham, 1999), the differences in perspective taking found under guilt and shame conditions should depend on whether participants expect to experience the consequences of their actions. More specifically, the extent to which individuals perceive judgments or decisions to be self-related is critical. Hence, it would be interesting to investigate whether the differential effects of guilt and shame on perspective taking would be moderated by personal relevance. Besides guilt and shame, Chiou, Chang, and Chen (2009) demonstrated the contrasting effects of anxiety and sadness on perceived risk. An obvious extension of future research is to examine how different negative affects interact to influence decision processes. Because any given emotional event can induce more than one affect simultaneously, the comorbidity perspective (Krueger & Finger, 2001) may provide further insights for competing or compounding effects among affects. Finally, Keller et al. (2000) found that depression was associated with a relative decrease and anxiety with a relative increase in right-posterior brain activity, based upon a neuropsychological model of regional brain activity in emotion. In future studies an fMRI investigation of emotional engagement in the perspective-taking process could be adopted.

In conclusion, results of the present study showed that shame was associated with a reduced tendency to comprehend how other individuals think about the world. Induced shame led participants to be less likely to take into account the fact that another person did not possess their privileged knowledge. In contrast, guilt was associated with an increased tendency to engage in perspective taking. Because guilt may increase perspective taking and shame may decrease it, insight into the differential impacts of guilt and shame should improve individuals’ skillfulness in handling interpersonal relationships.

REFERENCES


