

## **Guilt and regret: The determining role of interpersonal and intrapersonal harm**

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The purpose of the present research was to examine which types of harm play a determining role in experiences of guilt and regret. In two studies it is shown that guilt results from interpersonal harm and regret from harm to oneself. Moreover, the second study showed that guilt generally increases as a function of the level of negative interpersonal consequences of one's behaviour. It was also demonstrated that regret increased as a function of the level of negative intrapersonal consequences but not as a function of the level of negative interpersonal consequences. Results are discussed in terms of theoretical dimensions underlying experiences of guilt and regret.

Guilt and regret are often conceptualised as related emotions. For instance, Gilovich and Medvec (1995) suggested that feelings of regret are “likely to be tinged with guilt...” (p.393). The following example nicely illustrates that regret can be akin to guilt: One of Gilovich and Medvec's respondents reported regretting not having paid more attention to his/her son's heart condition before he died of a heart attack. One might wonder if the parent felt regret, guilt, or both emotions. The purpose of the present research is to examine whether guilt and regret can be distinguished in terms of different types of harm. Based on empirical research, we propose that the distinction between *interpersonal* harm and *intrapersonal* harm is crucial to the distinction between *guilt* and *regret*.

As our main goal is to try to distinguish between guilt and regret, it is important to consider how these emotions are (traditionally) conceptualised. The economists Bell (1982) and Loomes and Sugden (1982) defined regret as a negative emotion due to a comparison between what is (the actual outcome of a

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decision) and what might have been if one had chosen differently (an imagined outcome). In line with this definition, Gilovich and Medvec (1995) specified two types of regret which are important for the present research: Regret can originate from failures of self-actualisation, for example, not completing school, and from moral transgressions involving doing harm to someone else. It seems that most research on regret focuses on intra-individual contexts in which the experienced regret originates from (possible) damage done to oneself. For example, people experience regret as a result of failed self-actualisation (Gilovich & Medvec, 1994, 1995), engaging in unsafe sex (Richard, Van der Pligt, & De Vries, 1996), making wrong decisions in lotteries (Bar-Hillel & Neter, 1996; Zeelenberg, Beattie, Van der Pligt, & De Vries, 1996), or switching from or staying with the original choice (Gilovich, Medvec, & Chen, 1995; Kahneman & Tversky, 1982; Landman, 1988).

One exception (as far as we know) is the research of Zeelenberg, Van der Pligt, and Manstead (1998) who showed that regret can occur as a consequence of hurting someone else. Gilovich and Medvec argued that regrettable actions are more *strongly* linked to these moral transgressions than to failures of self-actualisation. We will distinguish between the two types of regret by referring to them as “interpersonal regret” and “intrapersonal regret”, respectively. Interpersonal regret is likely to occur as a result of doing harm to someone else, whereas intrapersonal regret results from directly harming oneself.

Gilovich and Medvec’s (1995) notion of interpersonal regret is very similar to Baumeister’s (1998) definition of guilt, namely, that it “originates as an emotional response to hurting or harming someone with whom one has a positive social bond” (p.129). Conceptualising guilt as an interpersonal phenomenon arising from interactions in close relationships is different from traditional notions that consider guilt as a solitary (i.e., intra-individual) phenomenon by emphasising intrapsychic aspects based on self-judgement. According to this more traditional view, guilt is seen as a self-conscious emotion and is assumed to occur when actual behaviour is inconsistent with norms about how one should behave (Devine & Montheith, 1993; Higgins, 1987; Lewis, 1993; Tangney, 1992). Baumeister, Stillwell, and Heatherton’s (1994, 1995) concept of guilt as an interpersonal phenomenon (see also Tangney, 1992, 1995) does not imply that intrapsychic processes are *not* involved in guilt. Rather, the authors attempt to integrate interpersonal and intrapsychic processes (cf. Tetlock & Manstead, 1985) by suggesting that interpersonal factors may *cause* the intrapsychic experience.

Taken together, we argue that there are two types of regret. One refers to intrapersonal harm (e.g., failure of self-actualisation) and the other to interpersonal harm. The latter is similar to Baumeister and colleagues’ concept of guilt. The following example may clarify the distinction between intrapersonal and interpersonal harm, or regret and guilt. When someone regrets that he/she did not complete college and another person feels guilty about it, these two

emotions might arise from different perspectives. In the case of regret, one can think of intrapersonal appraisals, such as missed career opportunities (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995). Guilt, on the other hand, involves interpersonal appraisals, for example, the feeling of letting one's parents down (Baumeister et al., 1994).

Some support for the distinction between guilt and regret in terms of interpersonal and intrapersonal harm can be obtained from the findings of Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz (1994). They investigated the phenomenology of various emotions in terms of actions, action tendencies, "emotivational goals", feelings, and thoughts. The authors found that regret is an emotion in which people try to distance themselves from what they had done previously, for example, by doing something differently or by changing behaviour to improve past performance. Furthermore, they noticed that, compared to guilt, regret is more associated with the action tendencies "to cry out" and "to kick oneself". Guilt, on the other hand, seems to be an emotion in which people think about their transgressions, for example, by worrying about being rejected by others. We propose that these findings show that guilt is an emotional state in which one focuses on other people, whereas feelings of regret seem more directed at the individual self. In other words, guilt might be a product of interpersonal harm whereas regret might be a product of intrapersonal harm. The latter is in line with most research on regret, which has tended to emphasise that this emotion is a consequence of intrapersonal damage.

In the present research we investigate the relation between interpersonal versus intrapersonal harm, and guilt and regret. Our first hypothesis is that interpersonal harm produces more guilt than regret. Furthermore (hypothesis 2), we explore the possibility that intrapersonal harm produces more regret than does interpersonal harm. We will test these hypotheses in two studies.

## STUDY 1

The purpose of the first study is to investigate whether guilt and regret can be distinguished on the basis of interpersonal and intrapersonal harm. Participants in the present study were presented with four scenarios. Two scenarios described high interpersonal and low intrapersonal harm, and were intended primarily to induce feelings of guilt. The other two scenarios described high intrapersonal and low interpersonal harm, and were intended primarily to induce regret feelings. All respondents indicated how much guilt and regret they would experience in the depicted situation. We argued above that interpersonal aspects of the events would play a prevailing role in producing feelings of guilt, whereas regret would be primarily driven by intrapersonal aspects. We therefore predict more guilt than regret in scenarios describing high interpersonal harm. Related to this, our second prediction is that scenarios

describing high intrapersonal harm evoke more regret than do scenarios describing high interpersonal harm.

## Method

*Participants and design.* Participants were 23 students at the University of Amsterdam who participated for course credit. The design consisted of three within-subjects factors: emotion (guilt or regret), intensity of harm (low intra-/high interpersonal or high intra-/low interpersonal), and scenario content (two different contents within each level of intensity).

*Stimulus materials and procedure.* Participants were asked to complete a paper-and-pencil questionnaire in which they were presented with four scenarios tested in a pilot study, described below. The scenarios are shown in Appendix A. Two scenarios described high interpersonal and low intrapersonal harm. The other two scenarios described high intrapersonal and low interpersonal harm. For each scenario, participants were asked to indicate how much guilt and regret they would feel on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). The order of the scenarios and the order of the dependent variables guilt and regret were counterbalanced. Participants were debriefed at the end of the experimental session.

*Pilot study.* With regard to the definitions of guilt and regret, we first present the findings of a pilot study in which we assessed the degree of interpersonal and intrapersonal harm in four scenarios (Appendix A). The design of this pilot study consisted of three within-subjects factors: attributed harm (other person and oneself), intensity of harm (high inter-/low intrapersonal or low inter-/high intrapersonal) and scenario content (two different contents within each level of intensity). First year psychology students ( $N = 29$ ) were asked to indicate how much harm was done to the other person in the scenario and to oneself. They answered on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*). The harm scores are shown in Table 1. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed significant main effects of the three within-subjects factors<sup>1</sup> (all  $ps < .01$ ) and a significant interaction between attributed harm and intensity of harm,  $F(1, 28) = 127.94, p < .001$ . With respect to this interaction, further analyses supported our purpose involving the scenarios describing high interpersonal harm,  $F(1, 28) = 225.27, p < .001$ , showing that harm attributed to the other person was higher than the harm attributed to oneself. Furthermore, and as

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<sup>1</sup> The main effect of scenario content showed that the first scenario produced higher harm ratings than the second one, and that the third scenario elicited higher harm ratings than the fourth one. These differences in the harm ratings between scenarios in a condition are not central to our hypotheses and therefore of secondary importance.

TABLE 1  
Mean attributed harm scores for four scenarios (Study 1)

<i>Harm in scenarios</i>		<i>Attributed harm to:</i>	
<i>Interpersonal</i>	<i>Intrapersonal</i>	<i>Other person</i>	<i>Oneself</i>
1. High	Low	8.00	3.00
2. High	Low	5.90	1.90
3. Low	High	2.55	5.31
4. Low	High	1.52	4.76

*Note:* Scores could range from 1 to 9, with higher numbers indicating more harm.

intended for the scenario types with high intrapersonal harm,  $F(1, 28) = 33.94$ ,  $p < .001$ , the harm attributed to oneself was higher compared to the harm attributed to the other person. Thus, the manipulations of interpersonal and intrapersonal harm were successful in these scenarios, which will therefore be used to induce feelings of guilt and regret.

## Results and discussion

Our first prediction was that scenarios describing high interpersonal harm would produce more feelings of guilt than regret. The guilt and regret scores are shown in Table 2. The scores were subjected to an analysis of variance (ANOVA) with emotion, intensity of harm and scenario content as within-subjects factors. The analysis revealed a significant interaction between emotion and intensity of

TABLE 2  
Mean regret and guilt scores for four scenarios (Study 1)

<i>Harm in scenarios</i>		<i>Regret</i>	<i>Guilt</i>
<i>Interpersonal</i>	<i>Intrapersonal</i>	( <i>n</i> = 23)	( <i>n</i> = 23)
1. High	Low	5.57	6.78
2. High	Low	2.65	4.83
Overall <i>M</i> scenarios 1–2		4.11	5.81
3. Low	High	5.09	3.52
4. Low	High	6.00	3.87
Overall <i>M</i> scenarios 3–4		5.55	3.70

*Note:* Scores could range from 1 to 7, with higher numbers indicating more guilt or regret.

harm,  $F(1, 22) = 53.64, p < .001$ . With respect to this interaction, further analyses<sup>2</sup> supported our first prediction,  $F(1, 22) = 58.50, p < .001$ , showing stronger feelings of guilt compared to regret in cases of high inter-/low intrapersonal harm (scenarios 1 and 2). Feelings of guilt thus result from interpersonal harm.

Our second prediction was that intrapersonal harm produces more regret feelings than would interpersonal harm. An ANOVA revealed that the reported regret differed significantly,  $F(1, 22) = 20.56, p < .001$ , between scenarios describing high intrapersonal (scenarios 3 and 4) and high interpersonal harm (scenarios 1 and 2). This effect is mainly caused by the second scenario because the regret ratings for the first scenario are higher than we expected, and comparable to the regret ratings for the third and fourth scenarios. A possible explanation for this finding is that the opposite of regret is a positive affective state. That is, low or no regret is likely to be associated with experiences of intrapersonal benefit. Intrapersonal benefit seems higher in the second scenario than in the first one. This might be because the benefit of watching an exciting movie (scenario 1) is not as enduring as feeling happy about an interesting job (scenario 2). In sum, we found general support for the hypotheses that guilt is an interpersonal phenomenon and that regret is an intrapersonal one.

## STUDY 2

The purpose of this study was to refine the predictions from Study 1 based on suggestions of Baumeister et al. (1994, 1995) and Tangney (1991, 1995). Tangney distinguished between shame and guilt by arguing that in shame the focus is on the evaluation of the global self, whereas in guilt the focus is on the evaluation of behaviour. The prominent role of behaviour in producing guilt feelings is also central to Baumeister and colleagues' (1994, 1995) conceptualisation of guilt. However, there is a fundamental difference between these authors' ideas with respect to the importance of the role of the harmed person. For Tangney, the harmed person is not expected to influence feelings of guilt, because Tangney considers guilt to be a product of a negative evaluation of one's behaviour as compared with *one's own* moral standards of behaviour. In contrast, Baumeister et al. (1994) propose that guilt can arise as a function of *someone else's* evaluation of one's behaviour. They refer to an experiment of Okel and

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<sup>2</sup>Not surprisingly, the analysis also revealed stronger feelings of regret than of guilt,  $F(1, 22) = 36.59, p < .001$ , in scenarios describing intrapersonal harm. Furthermore, the analyses also revealed a significant three-way interaction between the within-subjects factors. This interaction was produced by significant difference in regret between the first two scenarios and the last two scenarios. Furthermore, there was a significant difference in guilt between the first two scenarios, but not for the last two scenarios. Again, these findings do not play a very important role in the present study, because we are more interested in the overall effects of the two scenarios within each type of harm, rather than in the effects of the individual scenarios (see footnote 1).

Mosher (1968, cited in Baumeister et al., 1994) in which participants who felt guilty reported that they would not have derogated a fellow student if they had known how distressed this student would become. In other words, one feels guilty when another person displays “suffering or misfortune and emphasizing the other’s responsibility for it” (Baumeister et al., 1995, p.263). This perspective stresses the impact of interpersonal factors to an even greater extent than in Study 1. There, guilt was defined as a product of doing harm to someone, which implies a focus on the interpersonal behaviour in general, rather than on someone else’s reaction to that behaviour. This latter feature is essential to the present definition: Guilt is a product of negative interpersonal consequences displayed by the reactions of other people. Thus, we believe that the negative evaluation of the other person is a necessary condition for guilt. For example, if you forget your mother’s birthday your guilt feelings should increase if she appears to be very disappointed. However, if she says something like “that can happen to the best of us”, or “it also happened to me once”, your guilt feelings should be much lower. Similarly, regret should vary as a function of the consequences for oneself. If you quit a course of study, you might feel strong regret if you then fail to get a job you like because you lack an appropriate qualification. However, if you do not want such a job, regret is likely to be much lower.

In the present study we designed scenarios in which both interpersonal and intrapersonal consequences of one’s behaviour were described in each scenario. Conditions differed with respect to the levels (high, moderate, or low) of these consequences. As in Study 1, participants indicated how much guilt and regret they would experience. The first prediction is that guilt should increase as a function of the level of negative interpersonal consequences. We also expected regret to increase as a function of the level of negative intrapersonal consequences.

## Method

*Participants and design.* Participants were 114 students from a college for communication studies in Rotterdam (The Netherlands) who participated voluntarily. The design consisted of one between-subjects factor: scenario type (different combinations of levels of negative interpersonal and intrapersonal consequences) and two within-subjects factors: emotion (guilt and regret) and scenario content (four different contents).

*Stimulus materials and procedure.* In each condition participants were presented with four scenarios tested in a pilot study, described below. The scenarios are shown in Appendix B. Unlike Study 1, they are not the actors in the scenarios but a named person is the target. Each of these scenarios was intended to induce a similar degree of guilt or regret. Between conditions, we manipulated the level of negative interpersonal and intrapersonal consequences

in the scenarios, such that these consequences were high, moderate, or low.<sup>3</sup> High levels were created by explicitly describing very negative (interpersonal or intrapersonal) consequences of one's behaviour. We intended to create moderate levels by omitting explicit descriptions of negative consequences. Such a situation should give participants the opportunity to indicate their own ideas about possible negative consequences of their behaviour. We expected that their ratings of guilt or regret would be lower than when the negative consequences were explicitly stated. On the other hand, we expected that their ratings would be higher than when the negative consequences were explicitly reduced. Taken together, we assumed that specifying no (interpersonal or intrapersonal) consequences would evoke moderate feelings of guilt or regret. Repair mechanisms that reduce potential regret or guilt feelings were used to create conditions with low negative (interpersonal or intrapersonal) consequences of one's behaviour. As in Study 1, participants were asked to indicate the extent of regret and guilt the target person would experience on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

*Pilot study.* We conducted a pilot study to assess the validity of the new definitions of guilt and regret in four scenarios (Appendix B). The design of this pilot study had one between-subjects factor: scenario type (different combinations of levels of negative interpersonal and intrapersonal consequences) and two within-subjects factors: attributed harm (other person and target) and scenario content (four different contents). First year psychology students ( $N = 103$ ) were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions. They were asked to indicate how much harm was done to the other person and to the target. They answered on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*). The harm scores are shown in Table 3. An ANOVA on the harm ratings resulted in significant main effects of the three factors, three significant two-way interactions and a significant three-way interaction (all  $ps < .001$ ). With respect to the manipulation of intrapersonal and interpersonal harm, the interactions with scenario content are not of primary importance because it was not our goal to test differences between the individual scenarios. The crucial interaction to check our manipulation therefore is between scenario type and attributed harm,  $F(3, 99) = 147.73$ ,  $p < .001$ . As intended, ratings involving harm done to the other person were higher than harm attributed to the target for the scenario types designed to elicit high interpersonal harm, and this was reversed (i.e., target harm is higher than other person harm) for the scenario types that should elicit high intrapersonal harm (all  $ps < .001$ ). This two-way pattern is present in every scenario. Special contrasts provided further support for the manipulations of

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<sup>3</sup>Combinations of the different levels resulted in four types of scenarios that are of theoretical interest. Other combinations were not of primary importance for our hypotheses.

TABLE 3  
Mean attributed harm scores as a function of scenario type (Study 2)

Scenario	Scenario type							
	High interpersonal		Moderate interpersonal		High interpersonal		Low interpersonal	
	Moderate intrapersonal (n = 23)	Low intrapersonal (n = 26)	Moderate interpersonal (n = 26)	High intrapersonal (n = 28)				
Attributed harm								
	Other	Target	Other	Target	Other	Target	Other	Target
1	6.04	4.96	6.15	3.00	5.62	7.23	4.93	6.61
2	6.56	3.78	6.46	2.69	5.23	6.77	2.64	5.64
3	8.65	3.17	8.92	1.54	6.27	6.89	2.71	4.93
4	5.65	3.26	6.04	1.96	4.96	5.81	3.04	5.43
Overall M	6.73	3.79	6.89	2.30	5.52	6.68	3.33	5.65

Note: Scores could range from 1 to 9, with higher numbers indicating more harm.

harm. The reported harm attributed to the other person was lower,  $F(1, 52) = 52.59, p < .001$ , for the scenario types with low interpersonal harm than for the scenario types with moderate interpersonal harm, which in turn were lower,  $F(1, 47) = 14.75, p < .001$  and  $F(1, 50) = 24.51, p < .001$ , than the scores for the scenario types with high interpersonal harm. With respect to the reported harm attributed to the target, the scores were lower,  $F(1, 47) = 29.35, p < .001$ , for the scenario types with low intrapersonal harm than for the scenario types with moderate intrapersonal harm, which in turn were lower,  $F(1, 47) = 88.20, p < .001$  and  $F(1, 49) = 24.60, p < .001$ , than the scores for the scenario types with high intrapersonal harm.

To summarise, interpersonal and intrapersonal harm were manipulated successfully in these scenarios, which will therefore be used to induce guilt emotions and regret.

## Results and discussion

We predicted that guilt would increase as a function of the level of negative interpersonal consequences (prediction 1) and that regret would increase as a function of the level of negative intrapersonal consequences (prediction 2). The guilt and regret scores are shown in Table 4. The scores were subjected to ANOVA with scenario type as a between-subjects factor, and emotion (guilt or regret) and scenario content as within-subjects factors. The analysis revealed a significant interaction between scenario type and emotion,  $F(3, 110) = 60.80, p < .001$ . As intended, guilt scores were higher than regret scores for the scenario

TABLE 4  
Mean guilt and regret scores as a function of scenario type (Study 2)

Scenario	Scenario type							
	High interpersonal		Moderate interpersonal		High intrapersonal		Low interpersonal	
	guilt	regret	guilt	regret	guilt	regret	guilt	regret
1	5.04	3.18	5.04	2.92	5.03	5.69	4.96	5.57
2	4.82	3.21	4.42	2.96	4.25	4.56	2.54	4.29
3	5.63	4.64	5.15	3.50	5.03	5.88	3.82	6.00
4	4.07	3.25	3.92	2.31	3.41	5.00	2.86	4.86
Overall <i>M</i>	4.89	3.57	4.63	2.92	4.43	5.28	3.55	5.18

Note: Scores could range from 1 to 7, with higher numbers indicating more guilt or regret.

types with high interpersonal harm, and this was reversed for the scenario types with high intrapersonal harm (all  $ps < .001$ ). With respect to the first prediction, further analyses showed that the experienced guilt was lower,  $F(1, 58) = 10.49$ ,  $p < .01$ , in the condition with low negative interpersonal consequences than in the condition with moderate negative interpersonal consequences. Interestingly, the reported guilt did not differ significantly between the conditions with high<sup>4</sup> and moderate negative interpersonal consequences,  $F(1, 84) = 2.71$ , n.s.<sup>5</sup> This is in contrast to the results of the pilot study where we found differences in the reported interpersonal harm between the conditions with high versus moderate interpersonal consequences. A possible explanation for these opposing findings is that guilt feelings may entail more than the observation of interpersonal harm, as measured in the pilot study. According to Baumeister et al. (1994) feelings of guilt can have two affective sources: empathic arousal and anxiety over social exclusion. Explicitly asking for the extent of interpersonal harm (as was done in the pilot study) would exclude threats of social exclusion in contrast to reporting

<sup>4</sup> There were two conditions with scenarios describing high negative interpersonal consequences. Because they did not differ in their guilt scores,  $F(1, 52) = 1.34$ , n.s. we computed mean guilt scores for the two conditions and entered these in the ANOVA.

<sup>5</sup> The analysis also revealed a significant interaction between scenario content and scenario type. The third scenario elicited the strongest feelings of guilt but only in versions with high interpersonal harm, and not when this harm was low or moderate. With respect to the degree of the reported regret, the scenarios with high intrapersonal harm are ordered as follows: 3, 1, 4, 2. When this harm was moderate or low, the order differed for the last three scenarios. Once again, these findings are not of primary relevance for the present study because it was not our purpose to find out which of the four scenarios elicited the most regret or guilt (see also footnotes 1 and 2).

guilt feelings. Thus, the experienced guilt in the condition with moderate interpersonal consequences might have been influenced by both affective sources because of respondents' assumptions about, or projections of, negative interpersonal consequences along with exclusion anxiety. That is, they might have concluded that the behaviours in the scenarios without explicit interpersonal consequences would have elicited highly negative consequences.

With respect to the second prediction, the analyses revealed that, as predicted, regret feelings were lower,  $F(1, 52) = 6.05$ ,  $p < .05$ , in the condition with low negative intrapersonal consequences than in the moderate condition, which in turn were lower,  $F(1, 86) = 54.33$ ,  $p < .001$ , than the regret scores in the condition with high negative intrapersonal consequences.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the pattern of ratings across combinations of intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences makes it clear that regret and guilt are distinct emotions. In particular, scenarios with low intrapersonal *and* high interpersonal consequences produced relatively low regret ratings and high guilt ratings. This was reversed for scenarios describing high intrapersonal and low interpersonal consequences, which led to relatively high ratings of regret and low ratings of guilt.

Taken together, the prediction that differences in the reactions of others to the same behaviour would result in different levels of guilt was partly supported. The prediction that the level of regret is a function of negative intrapersonal consequences and not a function of negative interpersonal consequences, was also supported.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present studies was to examine whether guilt and regret could be distinguished on the basis of interpersonal and intrapersonal harm. We found that guilt was primarily determined by interpersonal factors (see Baumeister, 1998; Baumeister et al., 1994, 1995), and that regret was primarily determined by intrapersonal factors. Scenarios with varying content were used in each study, which increases the external validity of the findings.

On the other hand, we need to add that our methods could affect the external validity of the findings. That is, the use of scenarios is based on the assumption that imagining the emotional situation is comparable to actual participation in events in real life. Parkinson and Manstead (1992) questioned the validity of this assumption. First, the structure of real emotional events might differ from that of the narrative representation in the scenarios. Second, when people read scenarios they are neutral observers, whereas they are involved participants in everyday life. Finally, in real life people's emotions are part of an ongoing dialogue rather

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<sup>6</sup> Because the two conditions with highly negative intrapersonal consequences did not differ in their regret scores,  $F(1, 58) < 1$ , we computed mean guilt scores for the two conditions and entered these in the ANOVA.

than an account of the experiences of a narrator. Another possible limitation of the present studies is that the data rely on self-reports. This raises concerns as to whether these reports reflect the “reality” of emotions, or notions of what one “ought” to experience, and/or generalised knowledge about emotions (Lazarus & Smith, 1988).

In the first study, guilt was conceptualised as a product of interpersonal harm. The second study extended this view by showing that the level of guilt is a product of (assumed) negative interpersonal consequences. In other words, the first study focused on the harm done to someone else, whereas the second study focused on how others reacted to the behaviour. Indeed, it was shown that the same behavioural description could elicit different levels of guilt as a function of other people’s reactions. Some researchers go even further by arguing that guilt can be experienced regardless of one’s causal role in the behaviour that elicits negative reactions from others. For example, Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, and Manstead (1998) showed that collective guilt can arise when one’s group has harmed others without one personally contributing to or being responsible for the behaviour in question.

Our results support Baumeister et al.’s (1994, 1995) conception of guilt as an interpersonal phenomenon. Furthermore, it is possible that our findings might extend their view because it seems that assumptions about negative interpersonal consequences can also produce guilt feelings. We found strong feelings of guilt if such consequences were explicitly stated. Interestingly, guilt remained high if these consequences were implicit. A similar effect did not emerge for experiences of regret: Implicit negative intrapersonal consequences resulted in lower regret than explicit ones. A possible explanation for these differential findings is that assumptions about negative consequences might play a more prominent role in a guilt context than in situations of regret. This is because the behaviours in our scenarios showed limited concern for other people (they can be described as ungrateful, egoistic, irresponsible, and selfish following the order of the scenarios in Appendix B). This can be viewed as deviating from norms about how one should behave, and such discrepancies will produce guilt feelings (see e.g., Devine & Monteith, 1993; Higgins, 1987; Tangney, 1992). We believe that these discrepancies play an important role when interpersonal consequences are implicit because such a situation would leave scope to *assume* that one’s behaviour had negative consequences. If such assumptions have an impact on guilt, it is more appropriate to say that the explicit or the assumed negative evaluation of the other person is a necessary condition for guilt.

Following Gilovich and Medvec’s (1995) notion that regret has an intrapersonal component, and parallel to our analysis of guilt, we argued that regret is primarily caused by intrapersonal factors. This prediction was supported in both studies, and the second study in particular showed that the level of regret is a product of negative intrapersonal consequences and not of negative interpersonal consequences. This is not to say that these different causes make it easy

to distinguish between guilt and regret in daily life. It seems that some situations elicit (intrapersonal) regret and others guilt, but that most situations that elicit guilt also evoke regret (Berndsen, Doosje, Van der Pligt, & Manstead, 2002; Landman, 1993). However, our research shows that the consequences of one's behaviour have an effect on whether guilt or regret is the prevailing emotion. More generally, we have shown that guilt is a more appropriate term than regret to describe feelings of emotional distress in situations of interpersonal harm. Similarly, regret seems a more appropriate term in situations of intrapersonal harm. We believe that such distinctions are important because establishing whether emotions are caused by interpersonal and/or intrapersonal factors can be helpful in coping adaptively with guilt and regret. Moreover, our approach might be fruitful to distinguish between other self-conscious emotions, which are generally considered as products of intrapsychic experiences. The present research showed that interpersonal factors could also cause these emotions, and it might be worthwhile to investigate whether related emotions can be distinguished on the basis of interpersonal and intrapersonal harm. For example, it is possible that these types of harm play a determining role in self-conscious emotions, such as embarrassment and shame, which share a number of similarities (Miller & Tangney, 1994). That is, shame could be primarily caused by intrapersonal factors such that the level of shame is a product of negative intrapersonal consequences, whereas the level of embarrassment could be primarily a product of negative interpersonal consequences such as concern over others' evaluation of oneself (Miller, 1995). Future research might provide more insight into this question.

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## APPENDIX A

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*Scenario 1:* Imagine that you are due to meet a good friend tonight in a café. Your friend has felt a bit depressed for a while and you know that he enjoys your company. That evening, you are watching an exciting movie on TV and you lose track of the time. The telephone rings: It is your friend. After waiting for half an hour, he went back home.

*Scenario 2:* Imagine that you have been offered an interesting job in the US and you decide to accept it. You are happy with it. Your parents are proud of you but also disappointed because they are not able to travel that far.

*Scenario 3:* Imagine that you have been dieting for a long time. It is a strict diet and you have lost some weight. Friends have invited you for a Christmas dinner. You do not want to offend them and accept the invitation. The next day you discover that you have put on quite a bit of weight.

*Scenario 4:* Imagine that you usually prepare for your exams together with friends. This time you do not want to do that. Your friends pass the exam, but you do not.

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## APPENDIX B

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Below each scenario, we presented the manipulations of the four scenario types as follows:

- A refers to the condition low negative intrapersonal/ high negative interpersonal consequences.
- B refers to the condition moderately negative intrapersonal/ high negative interpersonal consequences.
- C refers to the condition high negative intrapersonal/ low negative interpersonal consequences.
- D refers to the condition high negative intrapersonal/ moderately negative interpersonal consequences.

*Scenario 1*

Paul is studying and it will take about another year off for him to get his academic degree. His parents pay for his studies even though they are not rich. For some time, Paul has not enjoyed his course and he decides to stop.

- A. He thinks that he does not want a job that requires an academic degree. His parents are very disappointed.
- B. His parents are very disappointed.
- C. Later, Paul finds that he cannot get a job he likes because he did not complete his degree. His parents feel pity for him. They respect his decision to stop because they believe that one should not do things with which one feels uncomfortable.
- D. Later, Paul finds that he cannot get a job he likes because he did not complete his degree.

*Scenario 2*

Matthew's girlfriend managed to get a few days off in order to go on holiday with Matthew at the beginning of May. Both prefer a beach holiday. Unfortunately, all the attractive destinations are fully booked. The only one left is Portugal where it often rains in early spring. They decide to book Portugal. Soon after making the booking, Matthew realises that during the vacation his grandparents will have been married for 50 years, but he decides nonetheless to go on holiday.

- A. They have a great holiday and feel fully relaxed when they come back. Matthew's grandparents were very disappointed that he was not at their Golden Wedding, because he is their only grandchild.
- B. Matthew's grandparents were very disappointed that he was not at their Golden Wedding, because he is their only grandchild.
- C. The holiday works out badly: it rains the whole week. Matthew's grandparents did not mind that he preferred to go on holiday. They decided to celebrate their Golden Wedding after Matthew's return.
- D. The holiday works out badly: it rains the whole week.

*Scenario 3*

Sarah is sitting an exam. The questions are very complicated, which makes her feel uncertain. It is easy to copy the answers from her neighbour who does not notice this. The invigilator catches her and gives both Sarah and her neighbour a low grade.

- A. Sarah did not prepare for the exam at all. She is satisfied with the mark she received because it is higher than she expected given her lack of preparation. Her neighbour is fed up because he prepared very well for the exam.
- B. Sarah's neighbour is fed up with the mark received because he prepared very well for the exam.
- C. Sarah is fed up with the mark received because she prepared very well for the exam. Her neighbour did not prepare at all. He is satisfied with the mark because it is higher than he expected given his lack of preparation.
- D. Sarah is fed up with the mark received because she prepared very well for the exam.

*Scenario 4*

Mark likes his present job. Recently, he was offered an interesting job in the US that he decides to accept. His parents are very old and are not able to travel that far.

- A. After a while, it becomes clear that the new job matches Mark's expectations. Moreover, life in the US suits him very well. His parents feel abandoned by Mark.
  - B. They feel abandoned by Mark.
  - C. After a while, it becomes clear that the new job does not match Mark's expectations. Moreover, life in the US does not suit him very well. His parents feel pity for him. Although America is too far for them, they are happy that their son was offered such a job.
  - D. After a while, it becomes clear that the new job does not match Mark's expectations. Moreover, life in the US does not suit him very well.
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