Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 49 (2013) 643–650

Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Journal of Experimental Social Psychology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jesp

Body of guilt: Using embodied cognition to mitigate backlash to reminders of personal & ingroup wrongdoing☆

Katie N. Rotella *, Jennifer A. Richeson

Department of Psychology & Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University, USA

HIGHLIGHTS

- An investigation of the effect of embodied guilt on intergroup relations.
- Holding a prototypical guilt pose enhances feelings of personal & collective guilt.
- Embodied guilt leads to greater reparative intentions for personal/ingroup misdeeds.
- Expressed guilt mediates the relation between posture and reparative intentions.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 29 March 2012
Revised 31 December 2012
Available online 28 February 2013

Keywords:
Embodied cognition
Collective guilt
Guilt
Pride

ABSTRACT

Research demonstrates that people are sensitive to information that portrays either themselves or their ingroups in a negative light. Indeed, confronting individuals with their own past misdeeds or those committed by important ingroups can result in victim-blaming and refusals to apologize or make amends. Studies suggest that one reason why people demonstrate these backlash effects is that they immediately blunt the experience of guilt when confronted with either their own or group misdeeds from the past. The more individuals actually experience guilt, however, the more likely they are to respond to information about past wrongdoing with prosocial behavior (e.g., apologies, reparations, etc.). The present research sought to examine how subtle inductions of guilt shape responses to personal and group wrongdoing; namely, by manipulating individuals' body postures. Consistent with predictions, results suggest that embodiment-induced guilt reduces negative backlash and increases prosocial interpersonal and intergroup intentions.

© 2013 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Introduction

During a recent meeting between representatives of the Chinese city of Nanjing and the mayor of the Japanese city of Nagoya, Mayor Takashi Kawamura raised an international furor by making comments that denied the 1937 campaign of rape and murder known as the Rape of Nanjing (Armstrong, 2012). Kawamura's statements were remarkable in their explicit denial of his country's controversial wartime past. Social psychologists have found that reminders of negative behaviors by the self or members of shared, important socio-cultural groups frequently trigger forms of backlash, including victim-blaming, minimization of the harm done, and denial (e.g., Branscombe, 2004; Branscombe & Miron, 2004; Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998; Wohl, Branscombe, & Klar, 2006). Such reactions may buffer individuals from the aversive experience of guilt (see Branscombe & Doosje, 2004; Peetz, Gunn, & Wilson, 2010) while allowing them to maintain positive self and/or group esteem.

The potential for backlash presents a serious problem for efforts to educate people about negative aspects of their group's history and, further, for memorializing the victims of those events. Hence, it is important to identify ways to circumvent defensive reactions to personal and group misdeeds. The purpose of the present work is to examine whether subtle inductions of emotions can attenuate defensive backlash in response to reminders of past personal and/or group wrongdoing. Specifically, the present studies investigate the possibility that embodied guilt may mitigate defensive reactions to reminders of wrongdoing, by promoting feelings of guilt, which, in turn, increase downstream prosocial behaviors (e.g., reparative intentions).

Reactions to personal & collective wrongdoing

Following the committing of an offense, people can react in a multitude of ways, including feeling guilty. The experience of guilt, in turn, serves a prosocial purpose; it motivates people to make amends and repair damaged social relationships (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994). In order to experience guilt, however, individuals

☆ Portions of this research were presented at the 2012 meeting of the Society for Personality & Social Psychology. We thank Alexandra Lederhausen, Emily Sinclair, and Nathalie Rouzier for assistance with data collection.

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, Northwestern University, Swift Hall, 2029 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60208, USA.
E-mail address: katierotella2013@u.northwestern.edu (K.N. Rotella).

0022-1031/$ – see front matter © 2013 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2013.02.013

have to feel responsible for the offense (Fisher & Exline, 2006, 2010). Because accepting responsibility for wrongdoing can threaten an individual's self-image, rather than doing so and subsequently experiencing guilt, individuals sometimes deny their culpability (Ditto, Scepansky, Munro, Apanovitch, & Lockhart, 1998; see also Leary, 2007).

Because important socio-cultural groups are viewed as a part of the self, people are similarly motivated to perceive them as good, moral, and deserving (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Consequently, information that threatens individuals' beliefs in their groups' morality often prompts similarly defensive reactions (Doosje et al., 1998; Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe, & Rothschild, 2012). For instance, information suggesting the ingroup has been aggressive and has harmed outgroup members can lead to denial, minimization of harm done to victims, victim-blaming, and derogation of the victims (Bilali, Tropp, & Dasgupta, 2012; Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012; Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2004; Rotella & Richeson, in press). For example, White Americans reminded of their ingroup's mass-killing of American Indians tended to infra-humanize the injured outgroup—believing them less capable of "uniquely human" secondary emotions, such as humiliation and hope (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006).

Thus, research suggests that reminders of ingroup wrongdoing can result in particularly insidious forms of backlash. What, then, might attenuate individuals' defensive reactions? Some research suggests that feeling angry at one's ingroup over its wrongdoing promotes more prosocial responses, possibly because anger stimulates approach-motivations and, thus, proactive challenges to injustice (Iyer, Schmader, & Lickel, 2007; Leach, Iyer, & Pedersen, 2006). Iyer et al. (2007) found, for instance, that American and British students' ingroup-directed anger over their countries' aggression in Iraq predicted their desire to compensate, confront those responsible, and withdraw troops. Most research on the role of emotions in shaping prosocial responses to collective misdeeds, however, has investigated the potentially beneficial roles of collective shame and guilt.

Although closely related, guilt and shame differ in key regards. While both emotions are linked to increased desire to make reparations (Brown, Gonzalez, Zagefka, Manzi, & Cehajic, 2008; Iyer et al., 2007; Lickel, Schmader, Curtis, Scarnier, & Ames, 2005; McGarty et al., 2005; Peetz et al., 2010), the reasons for this differ. Shame is elicited by negative appraisals of the self or group that are global and stable, whereas guilt follows appraisals that are more specifically linked to controllable behaviors (Lickel, Steele, & Schmader, 2011; Robins, Noftle, & Tracy, 2007). As Lickel and colleagues explained, "you feel ashamed of who you are, but guilty for what you do," (2011, p. 154). Shame further derives from public exposure of wrongdoing and the subsequent negative implications for one's self- or group-concept, while guilt is focused on the wrongdoing itself and its consequences, promoting reparations through increased empathy for those harmed (Brown & Cehajic, 2008; Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Brown, Wohl, & Exline, 2008; Lickel et al., 2011; Smith, Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002). For these reasons, some researchers believe guilt is more likely to promote long-term prosociality. Indeed, in one study, Chileans' collective guilt toward the indigenous Mapuche predicted reparation attitudes longitudinally, while collective shame had little direct long-term effects (Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Brown, Wohl, et al., 2008).

Given collective guilt's role in promoting support for reparations, apology, and lasting intergroup reconciliation (Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Brown, Wohl, et al., 2008; Lickel et al., 2005; McGarty et al., 2005; Peetz et al., 2010), engendering feelings of collective guilt should facilitate prosocial rather than defensive responses to group wrongdoing. That said, collective guilt is aversive, easily undermined, and perhaps an uncommon experience (Wohl et al., 2006). In order to feel collective guilt, individuals must first categorize and identify themselves as members of the perpetrator group, and must also perceive the offense as illegitimate (Iyer & Leach, 2008; Wohl et al., 2006). However, if guilt could be activated even in the absence of strong group categorization and identification, or without clearly unjustified ingroup offenses, one may be able to sidestep such concerns. The present work investigates one possible method of subtly inducing collective guilt to examine this possibility—namely, embodied cognition.

Embodied cognition & emotions

Embodied cognition refers to the link between sensory or motor functions (i.e., physical properties) and more abstract concepts (Barsalou, 1999; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Meier & Robinson, 2004). Considerable research suggests, for instance, that feedback from bodily and facial behavior can impact emotions, evaluations, and how people process information. For example, Chandler and Schwarz (2009) found that people who were asked to raise their middle finger (i.e., "giving the finger") while reading about an ambiguously aggressive man evaluated him as more hostile than people who read the passage while raising their thumb (i.e., "thumbs up"). Another study found that placing people into prototypically "powerful" postures (e.g., expansive, upright) versus "weak" postures (e.g., constricted) caused them to have higher levels of circulating testosterone, feel more powerful, and to take more risks (Carney, Cuddy, & Yap, 2010).

The present research considers the possible effects of embodied self-conscious emotions. Considerable research suggests that human and non-human primates display fairly prototypical bodily postures when experiencing guilt/shame and pride. Pride is often displayed with an upright posture, raised head and gaze, and shoulders back, whereas shame is often displayed through a slouched body, lowered head and gaze, and shoulders drawn down (Robins, Noftle, & Tracy, 2007; Tracy & Matsumoto, 2008). We believe this description of shame posturing is also likely reflected in prototypical guilt postures, although past research has not examined such an alternative interpretation. However, the same facial expressions appear to be labeled as shame and guilt by lay observers (Keltner & Buswell, 1996), suggesting postures for the two emotions may overlap substantially. Theoretically, without an audience to signal damage to public reputation (see Lickel et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2002) this pose may be more likely to evoke guilt than shame. Regardless, the principles of embodied cognition suggest that holding any such prototypical postures may facilitate the experience of self-conscious emotions. Indeed, people experience greater feelings of pride after an accomplishment if they are sitting upright (i.e., in a prototypical pride posture) rather than slouching (Stepper & Strack, 1993) and they decrease the height of their posture more while generating disappointment-related words than pride-related words (Oosterwijk, Rotteveel, Fischer, & Hess, 2009).

This previous research suggests that embodying the prototypical pride posture can facilitate feelings of pride, but whether embodiment facilitates the experience of guilt and/or shame is not yet known.[1] If manipulating posture is indeed sufficient to induce the experience of guilt as well as pride, however, then it may reduce (or exaggerate) backlash to information that threatens the personal or collective self, given the role of guilt in shaping individuals' behavior in response to reminders of individual or ingroup wrongdoing (Brown, Wohl, et al., 2008; Doosje et al., 1998; Lickel et al., 2005).

Present research

Two studies investigate whether the subtle induction of guilt through embodiment can promote prosocial responses to past personal or group wrongdoing. Specifically, whether assuming prototypical

[1] Lee and Schwarz (2011) found, however, that guilt can be reduced through a different form of embodiment; namely, by cleansing one's hands, activating the metaphor of "wiping the slate clean."

دریافت فوری ← متن کامل مقاله

ISIArticles
مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات