

Guilty feelings we
tend to have



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Introduction:

Guilt can come from many different situations. The event or many events that I will be focusing in this paper is the guilt that comes with my obligations towards my family whether it's me volunteering to take care of my siblings, doing the small things, or helping maintain the house operative. Some humans feel the obligation to do certain things for others. They could do these things for the opportunity to make them feel good, or do them with the expectation that they will get something for their charitable actions. Throughout my life, I find myself stressing-out and feeling guilty because I feel this dissatisfaction with my ability to give back to my family.

So why do we feel guilt in certain situations of our lives? Does our identity contribute to how we feel and process guilt? Guilt can be a valuable emotion. At times, it can help us maintain the ties that we've created with other people in our community. It can provide a painful consequence for actions that would weaken or strengthen the groups that you belong to. Your own self-worth within that community can be affected by the feelings of guilt. For most the guilt of doing bad things keeps us from doing it again, and causes us to change our attitudes and behaviors, but for some, they might repress the guilt or let it take control.

Guilt can be an important social factor. It's heavily tied to social situations and a social critique of our character. Our ideas about guilt, what is right and wrong, comes from social situations. By differentiating between right and wrong, social situations regard what an actor may and may not do. Guilt can help prevent shame and its negative consequences while encouraging a

person to seek out what is right and change themselves. To approach this observation of a guilty conscience, I will use the sociological theories of Social Learning Theory and Contagion Theory, and apply to many events throughout my life in regards to my family.

First Theory:

Formulated by Albert Bandura, the Social Learning Theory implies people learn through observing others' behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviors. (*Brauer & Tittle. 2012*) Children go through observational learning which explains the nature of children learning behaviors by watching the behavior of the people around them. Eventually, they learn to imitate these behaviors. Guilt is a very important social factor for children to learn since it is heavy tied to social situations that are developed and generally agreed upon by many social institutions. Children's' ideas about guilt can come from the family, education, work, etc. (*Carroll. 1985*) As result, these social institutions can enforce what are right and wrong actions into the child's self-conscious by observing the people around them. If one commits a wrong act, one should feel guilt and shame for action.

Bandura determined three basic models of observational learning: live model, verbal instruction model, and symbolic model. The live model includes an actual person performing a behavior. A verbal instruction model involves the telling of details and descriptions of a behavior. Symbolic model involves a fictional or real person demonstrating behaviors through books, movies, radio, etc. (*Brauer & Tittle. 2012*) According to Bandura, that state of mind is crucial to a child's learning. While there is external reinforcement,

there is also what Bandura called intrinsic reinforcement. This reinforcement is a form of internal reward or sensation of feeling after performing the behavior. Bandura states that learning does mean that there will be change in a person's behavior.

Yet it is very likely that a person will absorb these observed behaviors from others and form attitudes toward something that can in turn influence behavior. The attitudes we require may sometimes be explicit or implicit. Depending on the social situation, the strength of these attitudes can result in behaviors about these situations. Our attitudes on opposing social situations can result in behavior that portrays the attitude of prejudice or distaste.

Now I will apply this theory to the process of feeling guilty. Guilt can be an attitude or behavior. Guilt can result in shame which is a negative emotion that can influence a person to behave in positive or negative outcomes. In my family, I learned that we all have certain obligations to fulfill. Failure to do so would cause more grief than good whether this was expressed through verbal disappointment or punishment. Eventually, as I grew older, my conscious grew to feel guilty when I wasn't doing the best I could do within the family. Guilt led to shameful feelings the more I felt like a burden towards my family. Guilt and shame emphasizes a wrong in our conscious and they can also lead to other types of behavior.

The first step that we all part take is paying attention. I paid attention to what my family wanted me to learn—what was right and wrong things to do. I observed other people's behaviors when they failed to fulfil their family

obligation in my household. I listened to the lectures my parents would give about responsibilities that I need to do. It's important to eliminate any opposing observations that could possibly catch the attention of the learning pupil.

The next step is retention which is necessary for newly learned behaviors. Without this, learning of behaviors would be established, and I would need to pay attention again since I failed to learn the right behaviors. After this, it's time for reproduction. When I successfully paid attention and retained enough relevant information, the next step would require that I demonstrate the behavior. Recently, my mother needed help with painting a large portion of the household. Instantly, I felt the tingle of obligation even though I had a paper that needed my attention. I was torn between two guilty feelings. One guilty feeling was towards even thinking of not helping my mother out, and the other was over my paper. The guilt over my need to fulfil my obligations won over.

Because I had practice the behavior of doing my family obligation it improved the quick sensation of guilt if I decided not, even for a brief moment of thought. The final step is motivation. Feeling motivated to repeat the behavior needed for a person to keep on performing. Reinforcement and punishment come into play. By doing helping out my mother out with painting, I was rewarded with positive reinforcement which involved praising words and a sense of self-worth.

To situate this theory and specific question about guilt as an experiment upon others, I would ask a serious of questions that dealt with their families.

Throughout this paper, I will focus on the research of method of mixed participation/observation. I wish to gain my subject's trust that they are willing to share their exact thoughts. I would decide to do random sampling for the effect of getting in hopes to get an unbiased representation of a group. Which parent do they feel was the most influence on their attitudes and behaviors about what are right and wrong? Which parent made them feel the most guilt? Which parent punished them the most when they did something wrong? After collecting the answer to question like previously mentioned, I would start to analysis the data. From my experiencing, I would say my mother held the most influence on my attitudes and behaviors on what is right and wrong. My father was the parent who made me feel the most guilt because he was the person who generally punished me harshly for doing wrong things.

The behavior of guilt I've formed can express my attitudes towards others who don't fulfil their family obligation. These attitudes can be negative such as thinking low of the person who doesn't help out their family when they need it, or can be wishful in the since that I would want to be more like them. This brings me to my next list of question which would involve how the subject felt about other types of family. Do you feel uncomfortable when you know a friend that feels no guilt for not doing their family obligation? The answers to these types of questions could possibly give me a better outlook on this individual's social group's influences on them. *Second Theory:*

Contagion Theory observes social events and conditions that make crowd behavior possible. Expanded from Park's work, Blumer applied the concept of contagion o to a broad range of group behaviors. He determined three

forms of Contagion theory which all shared the basic premise that people can be labeled negative labels within a crowd. Blumer believed that these believe would return to “ normal” as soon as they left the situation that labeled badly. *(Christakis & Fowler. 2013)*

Blumer introduced the term “ milling” which he explained that during milling, people became conscious and responded to each other avoiding the external aggravations. Groups can adopt negative attitudes towards other groups. Blumer explained further that groups can create prejudicial attitudes. He also discussed prosocial attitudes and behaviors. Prosocial behaviors are behaviors that help another without any immediate reward to them. The behavior Blumer explored was altruism which is the motivation to help others out. *(Christakis & Fowler. 2013)*

Guilt is tied to ideologies about what is moral and immoral. When a person violates one formed moral guideline, it can cause that person to feel guilty over their actions which they may seek to fix what they have done. Guilt is an important tool in maintaining the standards of moral and immoral within the individuals and their groups in society. On the other hand, shame that follows a guilty conscious can emphasizes what is immoral about ourselves. *(Carroll. 1985)* This is more of an inward focus that can lead to positive or negative behaviors and attitudes. A family can create prejudicial attitudes and support prosocial behaviors. These prejudicial attitudes can be towards groups of different systemic situation or towards moral ideologies that equally shared outside the family. The family creates accepted prosocial behaviors in ways that children seek rewards from their parents when they do certain actions. These rewards offered motivate children to do what their

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parents want. They avoid also get the rewards of avoiding guilt, shame, and punishment reinforcement.

Now I will apply this theory to the process of feeling guilty with my family obligations. This theory is different than social learning theory for the issues that contagion theory focuses on the group. Ideologies, attitudes, and behaviors can be infectious within groups. The family is the first and one of the most important social institutions that most of us face. The family's beliefs and behaviors can be infectious that the individual is eliminated. In my family, the obligations I hold are not simply about my needs but about the family's needs. At times it does feel that my identity orbits around how my family creates the situation. When I do go against my family's conditions, I feel that lost a part of my identity and personal responsibility to myself and this is when guilt is at its worse.

When I decided to assist my mother with painting the house, I avoided my personal responsibility of finishing a paper. My family as a crowd is something I can't separate from my thoughts and my actions. I feel a motivation to help them when they ask and even when they don't. This process of conditioning started when I was young—did the little things and paid attention to the attitudes and behaviors my parents gave off. The contagion theory claims that the crowd does not take on life as individuals and their independent thoughts and actions. Rather specific structures features are formed and held responsible by the crowd collectively doing the behavior. Behavior of working as a functioning family is important. When I feel guilt and act differently these actions disrupts the crowd collective mind created within the family institution.

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For experiment, I would ask the questions of how the individual's feels about their family as a group. Do they feel that there is a prejudicial attitude towards people or towards certain behaviors? Do they feel that they display prosocial behaviors with their family? Do they feel motivated to help their family? If they don't, do they feel guilt? How does their family feel about guilt as a collective mind? With these questions answered, I hope to get a visual understanding of the subject's family and their role in the family.

With the contagion theory, I can focus on the family as a group which formed this individual to mimic behaviors and attitudes that result in an individual that continues to spread these same ideas to others. How the family views guilt and shame will result in how the family deals with positive and negative reinforcement. If the family has prejudice views about individuals who feel guilt and shame, then the individual will pick this up and act.

I would give them scenarios of different groups and their beliefs. I could ask them which they group felt more relatable when it came to the family structure and how it deals with the guilty conscious. Does the family ignore the individual that displays guilt and shame? Do they feel that their guilt and shame disrupts the family group from functioning properly? From my experience, I do feel that my guilt and shame does disrupt the family functioning properly. When I express my guilt, it's tends to repressive at times but there are most when I do figuratively wear my heart on my shelves. I hostilely express my independent and personal views which disrupt the family's flow. For example, I felt guilty about not having the time to watch my siblings for a night. When my mother confronted me about this, I reacted in defensive mannerism which made me feel even more guilt.

Guilt and shame can be problematic when it comes to the family as a collective mind. It can lead to withdrawal from social obligations and results in the individual expressing aggressive attitudes and behaviors. These other behaviors can be less constructive with the family structure. Using this theory would be an interesting way to see how the family as a group structure fails and supports the individuals within the group. Is the family a good source to be the judge of guilt? On what is immoral and moral within society?

Conclusion:

References

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