

The Development of Reactions to Guilt-Producing Events

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INTRODUCTION

Serial killer Ted Bundy describes his first physical assault on a woman in the following way, using a third-person narrative (Michaud & Aynesworth, 1983).

He saw a woman park her car and walk up to her door and fumble for her keys. He walked up behind her and struck her with a piece of wood he was carrying. She fell down and began screaming. He panicked and ran. What he had done terrified him, purely terrified him. Full of remorse and remonstrating with himself for the suicidal nature of that activity, the ugliness of it all, he quickly sobered up. He was horrified by the recognition that he had the capacity to do such a thing. He was fearful, terribly fearful, that for some reason or another he might be apprehended. . . . [H]e sat back and swore to himself that he wouldn't do something like that again, or even anything that would lead to it. . . . For a period of months, the enormity of what he did stuck with him. . . . [B]ut . . . gradually. . . it would reemerge. This individual would say, "Well, just one trip to the bookstore. Just once around the neighborhood . . ." What happened was this entity inside him was not capable of being controlled any longer at least not for any considerable period of time. It began to try to justify itself, to create rationalizations for what it was doing. (p. 109-111)

Of his first rape and murder of a young woman abducted from her bedroom, Bundy states:

A normally normal individual who has become somewhat subordinate to bizarre desires and abducts a woman and kills her finds himself in a great deal of panic. In the days and weeks following the killing, there would be an undercurrent of anxiety that comes with wondering just what was seen . . . As far as remorse over the act, that would last for a period of time. But it could all be justified. He would say, "Well, listen, you f---ed up this time, but you're never gonna do it again." . . . The approach is, say, "Don't ever do it again." But as time passes, the emphasis is on "Don't get caught." (p. 116)

And from death row, after conviction in the brutal rape, mutilation, and slaying of a 12-year-old girl and the double murder of two sorority women as well as suspected involvement in at least 21 total killings, he reflects:

[Whatever I've done in the past—you know, the emotions of omission or commissions—doesn't bother me. Try to touch the past! Try to deal with the past. It's not real. It's just a dream. . . . I don't think I need to feel guilty anymore, because I try to do what's right, right now. . . . (p. 300)

People disappear every day. It happens all the time. . . . There are so many people. It shouldn't be a problem. What's one less person on the face of the earth, anyway? (p. 310–311)

Fear of punishment, recognition of wrongdoing, remorse, renunciation, justifications, excuses: we see all these reactions to guilt-producing events at play in the mind of a psychopath in these excerpts from interviews of Ted Bundy by Michaud and Aynsworth (1983). The absence of guilt is widely held to be a primary marker of the psychopath (Harper, Haksman, & Hare, 1988). But how does guilt become absent? Bundy repeatedly acknowledges feelings of remorse, especially when he first began assaulting, abducting, and murdering women. After countless hours of interviews with the killer, Michaud and Aynsworth conclude that one of the keys to understanding his entire mental edifice was that intellectually, he was profoundly dissociative, a compartmentalizer, and a superb rationalizer (p. 10). In short, what set Bundy apart were his *reactions* to guilt-producing events, his ability to neutralize feelings of guilt and remorse through intellectualizations.

What are normal reactions to guilt-producing events, how do reactions develop, and what purpose do they serve? We address these questions in the present chapter. We review, in turn, reconciliation and action tendencies, self-blame and intro-punitive responses, rationalizations, avoidance, detection and punishment concerns, and hedonistic responses.

Beyond providing insights into the roots of evil, examination of reactions to guilt-producing events and their development may help us to understand which reactions enable guilt to serve as a source of motivation and goal direction and which reactions prolong and aggravate feelings of guilt. Results may provide insights into how individuals can effectively manage guilt and prevent guilt from becoming chronic and injurious to mental health. We rely on original empirical data as well as a review of the literature to provide descriptions of responses and an account of

developmental changes. In the first study,¹ we ask 205 adolescents drawn from the 5th, 8th, and 11th grades to describe guilt-producing incidents and what happened afterward. We examine the prevalence of different reactions to guilt-producing events in the sample overall and changes across grade level in the percentage of students mentioning each event. Illustrative excerpts of these descriptions may be seen in Table 1. Descriptive statistics and analyses are presented in Tables II and III. Results are discussed section by section throughout the chapter. In Study 2, we examine the relationship of reliance on justifications and excuses to self-esteem, guilt alleviation, prosocial actions and aggression as reported by peers, self-reported racist attitudes, and depression among 109 college students. Results of this study are reported in Table IV and in the section on rationalizations. We now turn to the first major type of reaction to guilt-producing events: reconciliation and action tendencies.

RECONCILIATION AND ACTION TENDENCIES

Individuals experiencing shame report a concern with inadequacies of the self and a desire to run away, retreat, and shrink from the precipitating event (Fergusson & Stegge, 1995; Fergusson, Stegge, & Danhuis, 1991; Tangney, 1995; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, 1992a). In guilt, the concern is with the act and injury suffered by the victim. The individual experiences a pressing need to approach the situation, to confess, apologize, rectify, make reparation, and set things right (Fergusson & Stegge, 1995; Tangney, 1995). Many of these responses are intrinsically prosocial in nature. Other responses may prompt corrective and remedial behaviors that contain and control damage and prevent recurrences. Reconciliatory responses may help alleviate guilt and prevent feelings from becoming chronic (Bybee, Berliner, Zigler, & Merrica, 1996; Quiles & Bybee, 1997). We consider, in turn, the specific reactions reported by adolescents in the Study 1 sample.

¹We examined 70 fifth graders (33 male, 37 female), 72 eighth graders (38 male, 34 female), and 63 eleventh graders (38 male, 25 female). Students were ethnically diverse and attended urban public schools located in working or lower class neighborhoods in the Northeast. Students were asked to describe in writing three guilt-producing events. After they described each incident, they were asked to write down what they thought or did next. Reactions to the guilt-producing incidents were coded for content using the 26 categories presented in Table 2. (Categories mentioned one or more times in the student's descriptions received a score of 1, whereas categories not mentioned were scored as 0.) Total scores presented for each category then represent the percentage of students who mentioned that category in their descriptions. To assess the reliability of the classification system, responses from 25 randomly selected participants were coded again by a second rater who was unaware of subject's characteristics and experimental hypothesis. Ninety-eight percent of the content categories scored by the initial rater matched those scored by the second rater. We examined effects of grade level through use of logistic regressions using the CATALAN procedure in Statistical Analysis System (SAS).

TABLE 1 Excerpts of the Reactions of Adolescents to Child-Producing Events

Reconciliation/Action tendency responses
<p>Victim-oriented concern</p> <p>This girl was fat so I started making fun of her. I shouldn't have done it cause I made her feel bad. I took her aside and apologized. I told her they were just words and I know those words hurt. Me and my three cousins jumped this girl. It was wrong. I put myself in her place then I said sorry and it won't happen again.</p> <p>Confession</p> <p>When I was throwing my He-Man vehicle and it hit the window and broke and my sister got in trouble for it.</p> <p>I told my mother that I did it and said sorry. I broke an old lady's window when I was playing with a ball on a accident.</p> <p>Then I went to her house and told her the truth.</p> <p>Apologies</p> <p>During football practice I gave a guy a cheap shot (tackle).</p> <p>After practice I apologized to the guy and gave him a handshake.</p> <p>I threw my sister's Barbie doll head over the fence.</p> <p>I told her I was sorry. I cried half the day. Then I looked for the head.</p> <p>Reparation</p> <p>When I yelled at my niece. I think her feelings were hurt because of the expression on her face.</p> <p>So I told her I was sorry and try not to make me yell at her then I brought her some ice cream and let her play with my games and my dolls.</p> <p>I broke my aunt's drinking glass and put it in the garbage and said nothing.</p> <p>I told her the next day and I saved my money and bought her another set of glasses. I also apologized.</p> <p>Reestablish relationship</p> <p>I got into an argument with one of my friends.</p> <p>I talked to him and asked for a truce.</p> <p>I felt guilty about flirting with other boys while I had a boyfriend.</p> <p>I told my boyfriend what happen and why I flirted and we worked through it.</p>

(continues)

Victim-Oriented Concern

We might expect concern for the victim to rise with development as empathy and role-playing skills increase and the adolescent is better able to imagine themselves in the victim's place (Kohlberg, 1969; Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, & Chapman, 1992). Tangney, Marschall, Rosenberg, Barlow, and Wagner (1996) report that victim-oriented concern is one of the strongest distinguishing features of guilt as compared to shame during childhood. Tangney et al. (1996) also report that concern for the victim is more common among adults compared to children. Expressions of concern for the victim were infrequent in Study 1, however, and showed no changes with development during adolescence.

TABLE 1 (continued)

<p>Remuneration</p> <p>I felt really bad when I cheated other in school. It was on a test and I said I didn't. I got punished anyway. I cheated a few times since then, and I always felt terrible, because it was so dishonest. So I just stopped one day. I refuse to cheat now in any form. I even make a big deal when my friends do it. They think I'm too strict about cheating. I think eventually it'll catch up with them or their conscience.</p> <p>I feel guilty when I listen in on my mother's phone conversations and find out about stuff I'm not supposed to know about. And she gives me respect when I am on the phone.</p> <p>After I got caught and I got grounded I never EVER listen in on any of her conversations.</p> <p>Good intentions</p> <p>I misplaced my mother's gold ring.</p> <p>I thought of buying her one back but I couldn't do it without her size.</p> <p>Once I stole some candy out the store. I didn't want to, but peer pressure got to me.</p> <p>I thought about taking it back but I didn't. I just dropped those friends who made me do it.</p> <p>Self-blame and irruptive responses</p> <p>Recognition of wrongdoing</p> <p>Stole a remote control car from a store.</p> <p>I took the car back because I realized it was wrong to do it.</p> <p>In the second grade we had a methtron. I came in first and one of my friend came in fourth. I laughed at her.</p> <p>I knew that was wrong so I tried to apologize but she wouldn't speak to me.</p> <p>Transfusers</p> <p>Myself and all my other friends have always been mean to our so called friend P.... We always make fun of him and make him feel low.</p> <p>He has been doing pretty bad cards and we shouldn't do it. I feel sorry for him but I never stop bothering him. I really (feels) bad as I watch this happen, and I think I could stop it and then again I think I can't.</p> <p>I felt bad when my mother saw my report card which had mostly bad grades.</p> <p>I feel bad because all my other cousins are graduating from either the 8th or the 12th grade and then mothers are bragging and they are proud when there's nothing for my mother to brag or be proud about. I told her I had a feeling of how she felt and that I was sorry and would try to better next time (which I did).</p>

(continues)

Confession

Confession is an admission of wrongdoing. If the victim is unaware that a transgression has occurred, the transgressor may inform them of the wrongdoing. Children may confess to parents, teachers, and other authorities who were not directly victimized, but whose rules and regulations were broken (see C. Williams & Bybee, 1994b). Individuals may also confess to people such as classmates or political constituents who were not party to the act, but who might make judgments of blameworthiness. Confession may also be performed as a part of religious rituals. Certain religions (e.g., Catholicism) have formally institutionalized confession as a sacrament. In the

TABLE 1 (continued)

Self-harmed and self-punishment	I had a huge fight with my mother and I slammed my room door and walked out. <i>I was mad at myself and at her. I walked around and then I came back and apologized. I hated myself when I hit the baseball and the car window and my father had to pay for it. When I hit my girlfriend because she said I was cheating on her. I let her beat the crap out of me.</i> Getting down on myself too much for doing something wrong like after I don't do well in a sport and I lose. <i>I start hitting my head and kick the ground.</i>
Run-in	When I was involved in talking about someone. Then tried to ask like I wasn't in it. <i>I kept thinking why did I say or do that. It was on my mind for a while.</i> I called one of my friends a name and he didn't talk to me for a day. I felt bad. <i>I kept thinking about it.</i>
Remorse/regret	<i>I felt guilty about missing a shot in a basketball game because we were down by two points and I missed the shot. I feel bad when I don't call my mother for a couple of days and then I call her for money.</i>
Rationalization responses	Justification I felt guilty for when I hit my friend <i>I thought I was right he kept aggravating me.</i> Next store to my friend's house lives in old hag. She stores flower pots behind her garage. We threw bricks on them and they break. <i>I feel a little sorry for her but she is a hag. We took the remaining flower pots and took turns throwing a baseball at the flower pots.</i>
Excuse	I forgot my homework paper <i>I forgot my homework paper because my teacher told me to write it down on the back and I forgot to write it do and it was almost 8:30 A.M.</i> I felt bad about stealing a comic book as a kid. <i>I stole it because I thought I had enough money for our for me and one for my sister so I stole the one for me.</i>

(continues)

Study 1 sample, confession was one of the 10 most prevalent reactions to guilt-producing situations among adolescents.

Confession serves to reduce guilt. When secrets are shared, there may be an immediate sense of relief and if the secret is acceptingly received, the confessor may feel cleansed or refreshed, as if a great weight or burden has been put down (Sheep and, 1976). The time, energy, and concentration previously devoted to keeping the secret buried may be free to expend on other pursuits (Sheppard, 1976). Roman Catholics who attend sacramental confession report fewer guilt feelings than those who merely converse with the experimenter (Othenbacher & Munz, 1973). Induct

TABLE 1 (continued)

Avoidance responses	Distancing I always feel sorry when I get into arguments with my grandmother. <i>My go up to my room and watch TV.</i> I felt guilty when my mother gave me \$50.00 and I went out with my friends and boyfriend and I spent about \$30.00 on him for his birthday. I lied and told my mother I lost the money. <i>I went in my room closed & locked the door and put the music on full blast for about 10 minutes.</i>
Suppression	I called one of my friends a name, and he didn't talk to me for a day. I felt bad. I kept thinking about it. I was going to apologize, but when he started to talk to me again, I tried to forget it. I took part in jumping a few people in my time. I kept thinking about the person but then I tried to do things to get it off my mind.
Concern with detection/punishment responses	Preoccupation with punishment When I was smoking and my parents didn't know about it. <i>But I quit because I thought I would get caught.</i> One day I was combing my baby sister's hair and I had made a knot in it. I took the scissors and cut it and she (Mom) didn't notice. <i>I was so nervous. I thought my mother was going to kill me. But she never found out about what I did to my homiegirl (sister).</i>
Cover-up	I felt guilty for the time I shot a whole bunch of pigeons off my roof with my bb. gun. I thought I would get in trouble if they found them, so I thought I'd collect all of them threw them in a bag and hid them. I crashed our car, a minor crash that is. <i>Told my parents that I found it that way on the street where I parked it. I was a financial decision because I would have had to pay for the damages had I not lied. I felt guilty, but better off. I covered it up. That's what the situation called for.</i>

(continues)

evidence that confession lowers guilt is provided by J. W. Regan (1971), who reports that participants who are given an opportunity to talk with a third party after transgression are less likely to use other methods of guilt reduction. When confession is made to a third party, observers judge the confessor to be less blameworthy or guilty (Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Amundson, 1991b). Finally, Since (1992) provides direct evidence that confession reduces personal feelings of guilt. According to Fiddl (1985), the curative power of confession has been known for centuries. Public or group confession is used for its therapeutic value in Alcoholics Anonymous, in live-in programs for drug addicts, and in numerous self-help groups

TABLE I (continued)

Hedonistic responses	
Pleasure	One day I was mad at my mother for screaming at me, and then I got her lipstick and wasted it all!
	Then I went on <i>stiff</i> feel good about it.
	I burst a dog's head open with a brick.
	<i>I laughed.</i>
Lack of remorse	I once went berserk because somebody had kept calling me names and I kicked them in the face.
	<i>I felt no pity toward the person I kicked. I really hated him.</i>
	I punched my schoolmate because he got me in trouble with the teacher.
	<i>Not a bit sorry.</i>
Unresponsive action responses	
Did nothing	I felt real bad on January 26, 1985. Mrs. P—, my teacher, got mad at me and sent me to the office so as to call my mother to bring this schoolbook. I didn't call my mother, instead I ran around the school, came back to class, and said my mother was not home.
	<i>I didn't really do anything. Why should I tell my teacher about that?</i>
	I feel bad for not visiting my boyfriend's family while he's locked up.
	<i>I haven't done anything yet.</i>
Continuation	
	I feel responsible for the teacher's being stressed.
	<i>I kept on doing what I usually do. As I say, don't worry be happy.</i>
	I went skating once and this boy asked me if I had a boyfriend and I told him yes. And he left and later on I was skating with a boy named David (he was 22) and I saw the same boy sitting on the floor watching us skate and my friend brought him to my attention.
	<i>And I felt guilty. I looked at him and kept on skating.</i>

settings (Mowrer, 1976). Individuals who disclose traumatic, emotion-laden information show beneficial immediate as well as long-term physiological effects (Petric, Booth, Pennebaker, & Davidson, 1995). Individuals who write or talk about traumatic experiences show fewer physical illnesses, have better immune system functioning, and require fewer medical visits over the next year than do individuals who are not asked to disclose emotionally charged events (e.g., Berry & Pennebaker, 1993). Confession may be good for mental health as well as physical health. Bybee et al. (1996) report that women who tell others about guilt-producing incidents involving eating and exercise have fewer symptoms of eating disturbances.

Confession may also strengthen interpersonal bonds and mutual liking. Admissions of blame signal recognition that a moral rule has been violated and affirm that the guilty party values that rule (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Lindsay, Hartz, 1984). Confession is particularly beneficial when it is freely given rather than offered following an accusation and in ambiguous causal situations (Weiner et al., 1991b). Confession results in attributions that are more external, that assign more blame to

TABLE II Reactions to Guilt-Producing Events

Reaction	Students mentioning category (%) ^a
Remorse/regret	37.5
Apology	15.1
Preoccupation with punishment	13.9
Reputation	13.4
Renunciation	9.1
Confession	7.6
Suppression	6.1
Reestablish relationship	5.8
Justification	4.3
Cover-up	4.1
Remuneration	4.1
Continuation	4.0
Distancing	3.5
Did nothing	3.5
Recognition of wrongdoing	3.5
Excuse	3.3
Victim-oriented concern	2.7
Good intentions	1.7
Need to undo	1.3
Pleasure	1.3
Lack of remorse	1.2
Intensifier	0.7
Self-hatred	0.7
Sonnetization	0.5
Self-punishment	0.3
Miscellaneous	13.4

^aNumbers represent the percentage of students mentioning each reaction to self-described guilt-producing events.

uncontrollable factors, and that minimize negative dispositional or trait inferences (Weiner et al., 1991b). In a series of studies, Weiner et al. (1991b) demonstrate that individuals who confess are generally perceived more favorably by others and are more likely to be forgiven than individuals who do not confess.

Confession has downsides as well. Even under the most favorable of circumstances, individuals who confess a transgression are perceived less favorably than individuals who are innocent of wrongdoing (Weiner et al., 1991b). Indeed, confession may result in punishment for deeds that might otherwise have gone undetected. Whitesell and Harter (1989) report that young children in their study were afraid to confess because of fear of punishment.

Moreover, individuals who confess may be less likely to engage in reparative and prosocial behaviors. Participants who confess to a third party after transgression are less likely to engage in altruistic behaviors (J. W. Higgins, 1971). Men are less likely

TABLE III Differences across Grade Level in Reactions to Guilt-Producing Events

Reactions	Grade level				X ²
	5th	8th	11th	X ²	
Reconciliation/action tendency	2.9	1.4	3.8	2.09	
Victim-oriented concern	9.2	6.1	7.6	1.40	
Confession	16.5	11.3	17.8	3.71	
Apologies	14.1	10.8	15.7	2.07	
Reparation	1.0	1.4	1.6	.33	
Need to undo	3.9	2.8	11.4	13.48***	
Reestablish relationship	3.4	12.7	11.4	11.04***	
Renunciation	1.0	2.4	1.6	1.18	
Good intentions					
Self-blame/intropunitive responses					
Recognition/intensifier	1.5	3.8	7.0	6.90*	
Self-blame/self-punishment	1.0	0.5	1.6	1.21	
Reminiscence	3.4	5.2	3.8	.92	
Remorse/regret	27.2	36.8	49.7	20.75****	
Rationalization					
Justifications/excuses	5.8	6.6	10.3	3.07	
Avoidance					
Dismissing	2.4	4.2	3.8	1.08	
Suppression	2.9	7.1	8.6	5.60	
Detection and punishment preoccupation					
Punishment preoccupation	19.4	12.7	9.2	8.62**	
Cover-up	2.9	5.2	4.3	1.35	
Hedonistic responses					
Pleasure/lack of remorse	2.4	2.4	2.7	.05	
Unresponsiveness					
Did nothing/continuation	7.8	6.6	7.6	.24	
Miscellaneous	15.5	18.9	4.9	15.65***	

*Numbers represent the percentage of students at each grade level mentioning each reaction to self-described guilt-producing events.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, **** $p < .0001$

to donate money to a charitable cause after rather than before religious confession (the pattern is reversed for females; Harris, Benson, & Hall, 1975). Because confession alleviates guilt, it may reduce internal pressure for rectification or sublimation. Confession to peers who are overly accepting of wrongdoing, anonymous talk shows, or the like may do more harm than good. Confession may assuage the conscience of the guilty party and reduce their compulsion to talk about the incident to the party to the act or authority figures, thereby concealing involvement and reducing the chances for retribution.

Whitesell and Harter (1989) report that older children are more likely to confess than younger children. Older children place less importance on punishment concerns and put more emphasis on the relief that confession provides from agonizing feelings of guilt. In Study 1, we also find that punishment concerns diminish with age, but find no developmental differences in mentions of confession.

Apologies

Apologies are admissions of blameworthiness and regret for transgression. Apologies arise frequently in response to guilt-producing events. Among adolescents in Study 1, apologies are the second most common reaction to guilt-producing events and appear with similar frequency throughout adolescence. Indeed, apologies appear very early in development. Zahn-Waxler and Robinson (1995) report that children as young as 2 have developed a moral sense that is evident in behavior as well as language.

As Walster, Bersheid, and Walster (1973) point out, apologies may serve several functions: they may convince the victim that the harm-doer's justifications for the transgression are plausible; they may convey the harm-doer's remorse and suffering; or they may acknowledge the transgression but point out that it cannot be rectified and ask the victim to "forgive and forget." Apologies place a burden on the recipient to grant forgiveness. Individuals who do not accept apologies from others are not liked as well by observers (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994).

Apologies minimize wrath and retaliatory intentions of the victim (Bramel, Taub, & Blum, 1968; Goffman, 1971; Schlenker, 1980). Children as young as 3 judge actors in stories who apologize less harshly than actors who do not apologize (Irwin & Moore, 1971). Among kindergarteners, elaborate apologies produce less blame, more forgiveness, more liking, more positive evaluations, greater attributions of remorse and (usually) less punishment (Darby & Schlenker, 1982). With development from kindergarten to the fourth and seventh grades, judgments become even more affected by apologies (Darby & Schlenker, 1982).

Apologies may be perfunctory or elaborate. When the event is minor, simply saying, "sorry," or "pardon me," may suffice. As the consequences of events become more severe, apologies become more elaborate, incorporating expressions of remorse and offers of assistance (Schlenker & Darby, 1981). Indeed, when the harm is more severe, more extensive apologies may be needed to assuage the victim's anger and desires for retaliation (Ohbuch, Kamada, & Agrie, 1989). In addition, with development, apologies become less perfunctory and more elaborate (Sell & Rice, 1988).

As with confession, there may be a downside to apologies. Koseoff (1972) found that parole grants in a field study who do not help the confederate whose belongings they had knocked onto the sidewalk, instead offer profuse apologies. Confessions or apologies may be provided in the place of tangible assistance when the event has

minor consequences. When the ramifications are more severe, however, there is evidence that rather than showing one reaction, the transgressor may show multiple responses, such as apologizing, offering assistance, and expressing concern for the victim (Schlenker & Darby, 1981).

Reparation and Undoing

Reparation was among the five most commonly mentioned responses to guilt-producing events among adolescents in our sample and showed no effects of age level. Reparation may take a number of forms. Individuals may compensate the victim for injuries or harm by providing restitution. Adolescents in Study 1 describe financially reimbursing the victim, replacing a broken object with something comparable, and performing acts of kindness intended to make up for the wrongdoing. An indirect route to reparation involves engaging in compensation. Adolescents may try to make up for letting down their parents in one area by making them proud in another by, for example, getting good grades or following household rules. A rather odd "eye-for-an-eye" restitution appeared in adolescents' descriptions as well. Adolescents who had destroyed their siblings' property (e.g., breaking record albums) let the victim retaliate to make things even. Adolescents also reported letting peers and siblings hit them back or even beat them up to restore equity.

Another person need not be involved or mentioned for reparative acts to occur. Students who feel guilty about performing poorly on a test, for example, may compensate by studying harder for the next one. Dieters may atone for overeating by starvation, purging, or exercising. Athletes may compensate for missing a practice by putting in twice as much time the next day.

Participants in experimental settings often spontaneously attempt to compensate their victims after transgression (Bersheid & Walster, 1967; Brock & Becker, 1966; Konoske, Staple, & Graf, 1979; Walster & Pressholdt, 1966). The robustness of this finding in a number of studies indicates that wrongdoers commonly compensate their victims. Interestingly, studies indicate that participants are most likely to reimburse others to restore exact equity. When the cost is too high or too low, they are more likely to choose to do nothing rather than compensating the other party.

Individuals may also make up for transgressions by behaving in an altruistic manner. Atonement or sublimation may provide a way of giving meaning to a painful event, an opportunity to restore self-esteem or make peace with God, or a way to maintain a view of the world as just and oneself as a moral being. Experimental participants who have committed a transgression are more likely than control individuals to help a third party who was not victimized (Darlington & Macker, 1966; Rawlings, 1968; D. T. Keegan, M. Williams, & Spahr, 1972). A typical study demonstrating that atonement is a common method of coming to the guilt-producing events is that of Cabanah and Gross (1969). Participants in the

guilt condition administered shocks to a confederate as punishment for incorrect responses in a learning task. Those in the control condition observed but did not deliver the shocks. After the experiment was ostensibly over, participants in the experimental condition were three times more willing than those in the control condition to make telephone calls to line up support for a petition supporting an environmental cause and, among volunteers, offered to make twice as many calls. Results suggest that the need to behave altruistically after transgression may be even stronger than the need to compensate the victim. Konoske et al. (1979) report that although participants who were required to lie to the experimenter were more likely to make nondetractive telephone calls for the experimenter (e.g., the victim) than were members of the control group, they were less likely than the controls to make calls for the experimenter when these calls involve deception. In this case, the need to behave ethically to compensate for wrongdoing outweighed the need to provide direct restitution to the victim.

Reestablish Relationship

In some instances, the guilty party is unwilling to apologize or make reparation. Perhaps the other party is equally or more at fault. Perhaps the act in question is justifiable. Perhaps pride prevents admission of wrongdoing. Individuals may restore a damaged relationship by talking things through and explaining their viewpoint. They may agree to disagree or put events behind them by inviting the other person to join them in a mutually enjoyable activity such as playing tennis or shooting baskets. They may, without accepting blame, underscore the importance of the relationship and their affection for the other person. In Study 1, we find that reestablishing relationships in the absence of apologies or admission of wrongdoing is a relatively common reaction to guilt-producing events. This reaction becomes more prevalent with development during adolescence.

Remuniation

Descriptions of guilt-producing incidents occasionally contain events that happened quite a long time ago. Students will mention, for example, an incident of shoplifting that happened 5 or 10 years before that still torments them or persistently nags at their conscience. Students may write as if thinking aloud that they are not sure why this distant event still bothers them. The description may be offered almost apologetically with disclaimers. Adolescents may preface descriptions, for example, by acknowledging that the event happened long ago, then say they are going to describe it anyway because it keeps coming to mind. When asked to describe what happened after the event, students typically note they never again repeated that action or similar acts. With the *zeit* of the newly converted, some students mention

that not only have they foresworn the act, but they do not tolerate this type of behavior in others either. Although renunciation has received little attention in the literature, we find that it is among the five most frequently mentioned reactions to guilt-producing incidents. Moreover, with development during adolescence, mentions of renunciation rise sharply.

Good Intentions

In the aftermath of guilt-producing incidents, students may think about apologizing or making reparation or foreswearing an act, but fail to carry through. Good intentions were infrequently mentioned and did not show age-related changes.

SELF-BLAME AND INTROPNITIVE RESPONSES

The reactions covered in the last section involve a pattern of turning outward and toward others (e.g., by confessing, apologizing, and making reparation). The reactions covered in the present section, in contrast, involve a pattern of turning inward and against the self. Individuals faced with wrongdoing may look inside themselves, ruminating, brooding, searching for motives, trying to draw meaning from events. They may chastise themselves, saying that they should have known better, that they were clearly at fault. They may be devoured by self-hatred or consumed with sorrow or remorse. All of these reactions may serve to prolong and intensify feelings of self-hatred. Bybee et al. (1996) have linked intropunitive responses resulting from guilt-evoking events to an increased incidence of symptoms of depression and eating disorders.

Self-blame and intropunitive responses may play an adaptive role as well. Bybee and C. Williams (1996) report that higher guilt-as indexed by both reconciliatory and intropunitive responses—is related to goal-related strivings. In daily living, individuals may not have the time or inclination to scrutinize their every action in order to choose the morally principled path (Merisca & Bybee, 1994). Unpleasant pangs of conscience may play an adaptive role by interrupting an ongoing action sequence midstream and redirecting it (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994). Indeed, Merisca and Bybee (1994) find that it is guilt rather than level of moral reasoning that is more closely associated with prosocial actions. Intropunitive responses may also serve to punish the individual for transgressions, ensuring that lessons are remembered. Anticipation of self-punitive responses may serve as a deterrent, preventing the individual from imagining, planning, or committing transgressions. Reflection and introspection may result in a dawning awareness of personal shortcomings or an epiphany that leads the individual to reshape, rededicate, or reconceptualize their self. In and of themselves, righteous suffering and sorrow may add depth and dimension to character. Indeed, as discussed later, highly unfavorable

character assessments are given to individuals who do not suffer or feel remorse for wrongdoing.

Recognition of Wrongdoing and Intensifiers

Some students in Study 1 reported that following a guilt-producing incident, they came to realize that what they had done was wrong. Students catalogued the adverse ramifications of their actions, pointed out additional details that made their behavior even worse, and berated themselves by saying that they should have known better or that there was no excuse for their behavior. With development, improved cognitive reasoning abilities may increasingly enable individuals to marshal reasons why their behavior was contemptible. Indeed, the percentage of students who spontaneously disavowed their own behavior doubled from the 5th to the 8th grade, and doubled again from the 8th to the 11th grade.

Self-Hatred and Self-Punishment

Self-hatred is widely held to be a concomitant of guilt. This association is so well accepted that many of the most widely used guilt inventories for adults include self-hatred items (e.g., Kugler & Jones, 1992; Mosher, 1966). In the Study 1 sample, however, we find that adolescents rarely mention self-hatred or a desire for self-punishment after guilt-producing events. A scant 1% of our participants mentioned hating themselves or desiring punishment outside direct retribution to the victim. We found no significant age-related changes in this category.

Wallington (1973) demonstrates that adult harm-doers sometimes punish themselves for wrongdoings. In her study, participants were asked to administer electric shocks to themselves as part of a learning task. Participants who had been forced to lie to the experimenter, compared to controls, exhibited greater self-aggression, administering much more intense shocks to themselves.

Findings that self-hatred is a rare response to guilt-eliciting events among adolescents is not entirely discordant with theory. As Tangney, Burgetaf, and Wagner (1995) point out, in shame, attention is turned to the self and relatively stable negative attributions about the self may be made, whereas in guilt, the attention is turned to the wrongfulness of the act and attributions are less stable. Self-approbation in guilt may take the form of recognition of wrongdoing and self-castigation for allowing that act to occur, but this chastisement may not be converted into hatred or punishment of the self as it may in reactions involving shame. Even so, the very low incidence of self-hatred is quite remarkable in that guilt and shame often co-occur. The Study 1 results suggest that, at least prior to early adulthood, self-hatred is not a common reaction to guilt-provoking situations.

Rumination

When faced with a guilt-producing event, individuals may replay the event over and over again, thinking about how the event came about and how it could have been avoided. Individuals may engage in introspective thinking, searching deep inside for unconscious motives, for possible character flaws, or other unpleasant truths. They may look for deeper meaning by connecting the event to a pattern of similar events. They may become preoccupied with the pain, disappointment, or even heartbreak they may have caused others to feel. Individuals may not be able to stop thinking about the guilt-evoking event. Thoughts of the event may become intrusive, interrupting everyday functioning by undermining the ability to concentrate and continuing on into the night, leading to fitful sleep and rude or feverish awakenings.

At its best, rumination may help individuals learn a lesson from events and perhaps even reconstruct themselves or a part of their personality to become a more sensitive, caring, or responsible person. At its worst, rumination may give rise to psychopathology. Ruminative responses prolong and exacerbate depressed mood states (Nolen-Hoeksema, Morrow, & Fredrickson, 1993). Females compared to males are more likely to exhibit a ruminative coping style, and this gender difference appears to explain in part females' greater proclivity for depression (Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1993).

With development, symptoms of internalizing disorders increase, and thoughts become ever more abstract (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1981). Yet, in Study 1, grade level had no effect on mentions of rumination. Indeed, only 5% of the sample reported ruminating over the event (note that preoccupation with punishment, which was coded separately, fell with development). It is possible that rumination rises later in development, just as the incidence of depression increases after puberty (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1981), rumination might rise only as individuals approach or reach adulthood.

Remorse and Regret

Remorse and regret are often used in guilt inventories as operational indices of the emotion (Harder & Zahra, 1990; Kirgler & Jones, 1992; Mosher, 1966; Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, 1989). Among adolescents in the Study 1 sample, we find regret and remorse are the most common reactions to guilt-producing events overall and at each age level. Adolescents often experience wishes that they could do things over differently. Students report crying, feeling bad, terrible, or in pain, and wishing that the event had never happened. Reports of regret and remorse become more prevalent with age, more than doubling from the 5th to the 11th grade.

The anguish, remorse, and regret accompanying guilt can be exceedingly painful and emotionally devastating. Indeed, intense remorse and regret may adversely affect mental health and may even be a factor in suicidality. In one large-scale study

of female suicide attempters, females who later killed themselves compared to females who did not were more likely to have experienced severe feelings of remorse (Wanderl, 1985).

Remorse and regret, when appropriate to the situation, may be viewed by others as signs of a well-functioning conscience. Remorse may be seen as a step toward righting the injustice caused the victim and a form of punishment in its own right. Perpetrators who express remorse after an aggressive act are perceived more favorably; observers rated them as less aggressive and reduced the degree of intent attributed to them (Schwartz, Kane, Joseph, & Tedeschi, 1978). Wrongdoers who express remorse are seen as less likely to commit a similar act in the future and are given more lenient punishment (Rosen & Adams, 1974; Schwartz et al., 1978). Moreover, actual sentences given to criminal offenders convicted of murder and first-degree assault are less severe when offenders show remorse for their crimes rather than denying guilt (Felson & Ribner, 1981).

RATIONALIZATIONS

How can intelligent people perform unconscionable acts? How can Serb soldiers butcher Bosnian Muslim children in front of their parents, line up scores of men in a field and shoot them to death, and rape women as a matter of state policy? On a domestic level, how can spouses stand complacently by knowing that their partner is sexually abusing their child? How can family members silently pocket funds ill-begotten by siphoning off disabled seniors' pensions or gained when feeble elders are pressured to disinherit other relatives?

Rationalizations allow unconscionable acts to occur. The soldier in the field says he was only following orders. The terrorist points to the greater good served by advancing political causes (or some other idealistic goal). The spouse argues that looking the other way was necessary to keep the family together. Family members maintain they were entitled to the money or were taking the most straightforward course by following (and benefiting from) a recently and suspiciously changed will. Even though in each of the aforementioned cases, individuals may be well aware of societal and ethical mores and standards, and may be capable of rendering judgment against others who commit similar violations of ethical codes, they are able to assuage their own feelings of guilt by utilizing justifications and excuses.

Distinguishing Justifications and Excuses

According to S. Ott and Lyman (1968), individuals using justifications accept responsibility for the act in question, but deny the pejorative quality associated with it. Justifications represent an attempt to convince others that the offense was more or less inevitable, understandable, and less serious than it seems (Trenzler, Manning, & Hargen, 1993). In contrast, individuals using excuses admit that the act in question is

immoral or wrong, but deny full responsibility for the commission of the act. Individuals excuse their actions by highlighting or inventing external, uncontrollable, specific, and unintentional causes and withholding reasons for their behaviors that lead to less favorable attributions (Snyder & Higgins, 1988; Weiner, Amirkhan, Folkes, & Verette, 1987; Weiner, Figueroa-Munoz, & Kakihara, 1991a).

Justifications

There are a number of variants of justifications. An individual may deny that an injury occurred or claim that the effects of the injury were minimal or trifling. Evidence that individuals tend to minimize the suffering of their victims comes from Brock and Buss (1962). Participants who had previously indicated their opposition to electric shock read a communication stating that shock is harmful. Participants who administered electric shocks to others in a verbal learning task recalled significantly less of the communication than did controls. A second form of justification according to Scott and Lyman (1968) involves denial of victim. Transgressors may assert that their victims deserve their fate or search for some fault in the victim that might have contributed to their unfortunate situation and then weight its importance disproportionately. Harm-doers derogate their victims after transgression (Walster & Prestholdt, 1966), especially when they do not expect retaliation (Bersheid, Boye, & Walster, 1968) or when they perceive themselves to be responsible for the other's fate (Lerner & Matthews, 1967).

Another form of justification suggested by Scott and Lyman involves appeal to loyalties. Third parties may benefit from unconscionable acts and may even request that they be performed. Instead of questioning whether the act itself is wrong or right, the event may be construed as one of balancing obligations to the victim against an unbreakable allegiance or inalterable responsibility to follow the will, wishes, or orders of a relative, friend, or superior. Attention is thus drawn away from the morality or fairness of the act. A fourth form is the device of condemnation of the condemners where the transgressor admits performing the act, but asserts that others go unpunished or unnoticed for committing even worse acts (Scott & Lyman, 1968). Who has not observed a family member arguing, often indignantly, that their misdeeds pale in comparison with those of a sister or brother, as if this makes their own misdeed okay and the accuser a villain for daring to broach the issue?

Excuses

Individuals employing excuses deny full responsibility for their actions. Physical ailments, lack of sleep, impaired judgment as a result of alcohol or drug use, traffic jams, and other commitments are all commonly offered excuses that individuals offer for not doing what was expected of them or for declining invitations to missing, or being late to events (Weiner et al., 1987, 1991a). Individuals may deny intent and claim that they would not have acted in the way they did had they been fully informed or foreseen the results. They may point to accidents, blame the

actions on uncontrollable or external factors, and note that the lapse was specific and highly unusual. They may scapegoat someone else for lending them down the wrong path. An individual also might deny responsibility by claiming she was obligated to transgress by the experimental situation. Participants who commit acts involving higher levels of aggression report that they were under more obligation to administer these shocks than subjects in low aggression conditions (Brock & Buss, 1962).

Rationalizations and Adjustment

In justifying an immoral action, individuals show a disregard for the moral code, minimizing transgressions and denying the wrongfulness of unethical behavior. The individual making an excuse, in contrast, does acknowledge the wrongfulness of the act in question. Indeed, proliferate excuses may be seen as an expression of the individuals' need to convey to the listener that the lapse never would have occurred had it not been for extremely extenuating circumstances. Potentially more unfavorable attributions may be made about individuals offering justifications than individuals offering excuses as the former individuals may be seen as evil or wicked if their account is not believed, whereas the latter may be seen as only having been negligent or irresponsible. Numerous other divergent predictions might be made as well. In our own and others' research, differences between justifications and excuses are sometimes found in relations to mental health (e.g., Bybee et al., 1996). Common to both devices when used routinely, however, may be an underlying defense mechanism of intellectualization. We found, among a sample of 109 undergraduates in Study 2, that reliance on justifications was highly correlated ($r = .86$) with reliance on excuses and the two measures showed highly similar correlations with criterion measures. We combined the justification and excuse measures to form an index of reliance on rationalizations and examined correlations of this index with indicators of adjustment. Results of Study 2 are presented in Table 4 and discussed in the following sections.²

²Participants were provided with a series of vignettes describing events that had been determined in pretesting to be guilt-evoking among a high percentage of college undergraduates. The five events included lying to parents about college grades, not calling someone with whom they had made social plans, cheating on a boy- or girlfriend who was living out of town (e.g., over summer vacation), staying out all night with friends while living at parents' home, going to boss about having a family emergency so they could have time off work to socialize. The vignettes were repeated, appearing each time with a different rationalization (16 excuses, 16 justifications). The vignette describing lying to mother about grades, for example, was followed by the excuse, "I had just come back from a friend's graduation party and had had several glasses of champagne. I was in a great mood and I made things seem better than they were," and elsewhere by the justification, "I lie to I see, it is I am going to have the rest of my life to get serious and worry about my career, marriage, and other responsibilities. I'm only in college once and I should enjoy it and give my mother off my back." Justifications and excuses were designed to be recognizable to our target sample of 19-year students. Each vignette was called to rate the culpability of the individual responsible into a group of subjects provided. Assessment of higher culpability were said to reflect low functioning of rationalizations.

Self-esteem

Rationalizations preserve feelings of self-worth. Correlations of rationalizations to self-esteem, assessed globally and in specific content domains, are shown in Table 4. Individuals who use rationalizations to reduce their feelings of guilt have higher levels of self-esteem in the social confidence and physical appearance content domains. Perhaps not coincidentally, these are the two domains most closely associated with image and outward appearance. As discussed later, one of the primary functions of rationalizations is to help save face. As Baumeister (chapter 6, this volume) points out, the protection and maintenance of self-esteem is not always a laudable goal. People who commit unconscionable acts often believe themselves to be good, ethical people. Serial murderers and violent offenders, for example, often have inordinately high self-esteem (Baumeister, chapter 6, this volume). Indeed, the father who commits incest, the doctor who has sex with the babysitter, the uncle who pockets his niece's inheritance may see themselves as pillars of society; churchgoers, influential and well-respected members of their community.

Guilt Alienation

Rationalizations reduce guilt. Weiner (1985) reports that external attributions for failure minimize personal feelings of guilt. Conversely, individuals who are prone to guilt may recoil at the idea of using justifications and excuses rather than accepting responsibility for their actions. We find that a personality proclivity for guilt is inversely related to use of rationalizations (see Table IV).

Prosocial Actions

With feelings of guilt neutralized, individuals may no longer feel a pressing need to rectify the situation through reparative or prosocial actions. Indeed, as shown in Table 4, rationalizations are correlated with less prosocial behavior. Students who rationalize more are seen by their peers (roommates) as less caring, helpful, and thoughtful individuals.

Aggression

As shown in the table, rationalizations are associated with greater aggressiveness. Among the undergraduates we examined, those who relied more on rationalizations to assuage their feelings of guilt are, according to their peers, more rude, disruptive, and hostile. These findings are consistent with other research reports; justifications are used by individuals committing a host of immoral, violent, or unpalatable acts. Child molesters and convicted rapists commonly use justifications and excuses (see DeYoung, 1989; Sully & Marolla, 1984). Murderers as well com-

TABLE IV. Relationship of Rationalizations to Self-Esteem, Guilt, Depression, and Social Attitudes and Behaviors^a

Measures	Rationalizations
Self-esteem	
Social confidence	.33**
School abilities	.18
Physical abilities	.17
Physical appearance	.30***
General self-regard	.16
Guilt	-.49****
Racism	.26*
Peer ratings	
Prosocial behavior	-.28**
Aggressiveness	.25*
Depression	-.13

^aThe Self-Rating Scale (Fleming & Courtney, 1984), Moshier Forced-Choice Guilt Scale (Moshier, 1966, 1979), Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1972), Modern Racism Scale (modified from McConahay [1986] by Merisca & Bybee [1994]) and Peer Ratings of Prosocial Behavior and Aggressiveness (Merisca & Bybee, 1994) were used.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .0001$

monly proffer justifications and excuses for their violent behavior (Henderson & Hewstone, 1984).

Racist Attitudes

Rationalizations are related to racist attitudes as shown in Table 4. Deregation of the victim, minimization of others' suffering, and appeal to ingroup, family, or ethnic loyalties may all result in racism and ethnic hatred.

Mental Health

Intellectualizations may be helpful in preserving mental health. Benefits may be especially apparent when the rationalization is tailored to a particular distressing event. In the eating and exercise domain, for example, individuals may place unrealistically high expectations upon themselves to exercise vigorously for hour-long stretches daily, to never eat sweets, to avoid fats, to never overeat. Lapses may cause considerable and painful chronic feelings of guilt. Bybee et al. (1996) find that women who are better able to justify or excuse guilt over eating and exercise are less prone to eating disturbances and depression.

As shown in Table 4, however, we found no correlation between rationalizations and depression. Even though individuals who routinely use intellectualizations may feel good about themselves, their bad deeds may return to haunt them. Rationalizers, because they are less likely to engage in prosocial actions and are more prone to aggression, may build ill will and undermine their social support network. Benefits to mental health from a high sense of self-esteem may be offset by the adverse consequences of having poor interpersonal relationships.

Functions of Excuses in Communication

Weiner (et al., 1987, 1991a; Weiner & Handel, 1985) provides a riveting account of the role that excuses play in communication and causal perceptions. By proffering excuses that draw attention to external, unstable, and highly specific reasons for lapses, the communicator may avoid damaging the self-esteem of the rejected party, prevent the other party from becoming or remaining angry, and convince the other party that the act will not be repeated (Weiner et al., 1987, 1991a; Weiner & Handel, 1985). How might we reconcile these findings pointing to positive interpersonal functions of excuses with our own, underscoring negative interpersonal correlates of rationalizations? We suggest that excuses compared to justifications are less damaging to interpersonal relationships because the wrongfulness of the act is acknowledged. In addition, a one-time occurrence of excuse giving, such as that studied by Weiner and his colleagues, may be perceived more favorably than a characterological proclivity for rationalizing such as that assessed in Study 2.

Development of Rationalizations

Rationalizations appear very early in development. Children as young as 36 months commonly use justifications in disputes with their mothers and siblings (Dunn & Munn, 1987). Children aged 5–12, in providing accounts, withhold information in order to avoid attributing their behavior to controllable causes and likewise avoid explanations that would damage the other person's self-esteem (Weiner & Handel, 1985; Yirmiya & Weiner, 1986).

Returning to the first study of the present chapter, we find that reliance on justifications and excuses increases with grade level. Although the effect only approaches significance, the percentage of students who spontaneously mention rationalizations doubles from the fifth to the eighth grade.

Most theories of moral development offer an ontological model of development. According to Kohlberg (e.g., Kohlberg & Candee, 1984), for example, higher stages of moral reasoning necessarily involve more ethical modes of thought. Yet as Zahn-Waxler and Robinson (1995) note, "The notion of increased morality with age may reflect as much developmental myth as fact" (p. 163). Indeed, as Zahn-Waxler and Robinson observe, brutality, indifference, violence, and insensitivity are a part of the

man nature in both childhood and adulthood. C. Williams and Bybee (1994b) find that guilt declines markedly during adolescence. We maintain that the decrease in guilt goes hand in glove with increases in rationalizations. As individuals become better able to marshal intellectual defenses, they become better able to harden their hearts.

AVOIDANCE

Distancing

As mentioned earlier, shame is typically accompanied by a desire to shrink away, to hide, and to leave the situation, whereas guilt is typically accompanied by a desire to confess, approach, apologize, and set things right (e.g., Ferguson & Stregge, 1995; Tangney, 1995). Faced with feelings of guilt, some students do retreat. They take walks, turn on the stereo or television, or retire to their rooms. This is, however, a relatively infrequent response. Less than 5% of the adolescents in our sample report distancing themselves from guilt-producing situations, and developmental differences did not approach significance.

Suppression

With development, children are better able to regulate and control their emotions (Cole, Michel, & Teri, 1994). We found a grade-related trend: At higher grade levels, adolescents increasingly reported attempts to actively suppress guilt-producing thoughts. Mentions tripled from the 5th to the 11th grades.

DETECTION AND PUNISHMENT CONCERNS

Preoccupation with Punishment

When theorists describe phenomenological experiences of guilt, they sometimes describe a condition called guilty fear (Hoffman, 1985). Perpetrators of an act may worry feverishly that they will be uncovered, exposed, grilled with questions, and subjected to censure and disapproval. They may weigh possible punishments if they confess against living with a guilty conscience if they are not caught. When detection or confession is certain, the time that lapses between the deed and the arrival of the authority figure may be tense and painful. Individuals may mentally rehearse the moment of truth, imagining their own response, and those of their parent or teacher. The perpetrator may try to think of explanations and ways to lessen or avoid punishment and worry about exactly what form the punishment will take.

We find that preoccupation with punishment is extremely common among adolescents and, indeed, is the third most prevalent response to guilt-evoking situations.

In Study 1, preoccupation with punishment becomes much less prevalent with age, dropping significantly from the younger to the older age groups. This may reflect a developmental progression in moral reasoning away from preconventional concerns with punishment (Kohlberg, 1969). Older adolescents may also be less likely than younger adolescents to be formally punished.

Cover-up

When faced with a guilt-producing event, some participants try to cover their tracks, literally hide the evidence, and lie to protect themselves. Cover-ups were relatively infrequent and showed no age-related changes.

HEDONISTIC RESPONSES

Pleasure and Lack of Remorse

Perhaps the most chilling responses to guilt-evoking situations involve enjoyment over the deed. One adolescent male graphically described beating up another student, noting the satisfaction he drew from pummeling his enemy. Other students almost defiantly noted that they did not feel bad at all over the deed in question. Fortunately, few adolescents in our sample mentioned taking pleasure from hurting others or lack of remorse.

UNRESPONSIVENESS

Some children in Study 1 report doing nothing about the lapse or continuing to perform the same unoward act. All told, just under 10% of our sample highlighted their own unresponsiveness. There were no age-related changes in this category. This may reflect mindless, automated behavior. It may also be that children do not know what to do about their actions, how to rectify or make sense of the situation, so they take the course of least resistance and do nothing.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

In this volume, Baumeister (chapter 9) suggests that one of the most important tasks facing parents and caregivers is to induce, instill, and inculcate healthy feelings of guilt and personal responsibility in children. Of equal importance may be the task

of teaching children to deal effectively and ethically with feelings of guilt. The challenge is to encourage and reward a healthy predisposition for guilt. Responses that remove the onus of responsibility from the individual such as justifications and excuses hold the potential for extinguishing future as well as past guilt feelings. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the absence of guilt is closely associated with sociopathy. Indeed, in Study 2, we find rationalizations are associated with greater aggression and lowered prosocial behavior as reported by peers and more self-reported racist attitudes. At the other extreme, chronic feelings of guilt are associated with poor mental health (and apparently with antisocial behavior as well—see Bybee & Quiles, chapter 13, this volume). Reconciliatory reactions may help channel guilt into positive behaviors and prevent the feelings from becoming chronic.

Individuals typically do not show a single reaction to guilt-producing incidents. In our Study 1, we found that adolescents often reacted with two, three, or more responses. Perhaps the most healthy individuals tailor their reactions to the precipitating event and are flexible in the responses shown across different incidents. If used after minor incidents or after successful attempts at reparation, rationalizations may play a healthy role in preserving self-esteem. If one reaction is used predominantly and inflexibly, it may backfire. We might imagine that even reconciliatory responses would become harmful if used exclusively or inappropriately, triggering endless and fruitless attempts at appeasement. The well-adjusted person may have an arsenal of responses at their disposal and the wisdom and character to apply them in a flexible and appropriate manner.

The present findings have implications for the assessment of guilt. Certain reactions, such as self-hatred, regret, remorse, concern for the victim, need for reparation, and apologies, are so closely associated with guilt that they are used as operational indicators in the most widely used measures for adults (Harder & Zalma, 1990; Kugler & Jones, 1992; Mosher, 1966; Tangney et al., 1989). Our findings suggest that some of the reactions such as self-hatred do not appear to characterize responses of children. Other common reactions to guilt-producing situations are largely absent from major guilt inventories and have received far less attention in theoretical and empirical work. Children often may react to guilt-producing events by renouncing or forswearing the act in question, by engaging in rationalizations, or by becoming preoccupied with possible discovery and punishment. These reactions have received little attention in studies of guilt in children, and items have not made their way into guilt inventories.

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