

Documents

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A study of memory, evaluation, and choice with an (un)clean conscience

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Abstract

Objective: The aim of the present research was to examine whether heartfelt guilt could influence not only memory of threat words, but also evaluation and actual choice of products that could remove metaphorically one's moral impurity. Method: Guilt, a threat to one's moral purity, was elicited by asking participants to remember personal actions that resulted in harm to others and that had yet to be repaired. Results: When the experience of guilt was accompanied by enhanced arousal (as measured by both self-reports and skin conductance responses), greater recall of threat words, and biased evaluation of cleansing products, but not effects on choice behaviour, were observed. Conclusions: These results suggest that heartfelt guilt may activate concepts describing both hazards (as illustrated by the recall of threat words) and defensive reactions (as illustrated by the evaluation of cleansing products), but that the latter may be limited to stated preferences rather than actual choices. © 2018 The Australian Psychological Society

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