

The recent high-profile cases of corporate corruption have been amplifying the risk of deception, especially in terms of its severity and pervasiveness (Fleming & Zyglidopoulos, 2007). Ethical decisions are often thought of as those that reduce the risk of deception. This study investigates how individuals make ethical decisions from an emotional perspective. In particular, we extend previous research on moral emotion to probe how guilt affects people's moral conflicts. As one of the most important moral emotions (Hoffman, 1998, Eisenberg, 2000), guilt is typically a specific regret over wrongdoing (Eisenberg, 2000). Thus, feelings of guilt are positively related to moral behavior and moral character (Hoffman, 1998; Walker & Pitts, 1998). However, we suggest in this research that guilt can also be driven by egoism: when individuals' prior wrongdoings or mistakes create feelings of guilt in moral conflict situations, they are very likely to make reparations and even punish themselves. These reactions, paradoxically, may reduce fairness and justice. Thus, we propose two experimental studies to investigate the negative effects that can result from guilt.