

A Qualitative Investigation of a Guilt Trip

Courtney Humeny (courtney_humeny@carleton.ca)

Institute of Cognitive Science, Carleton University
1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, K1S 5B6, Canada

Abstract

Research consistently indicates guilt is adaptive in relationships. Yet, guilt can also be used as a manipulative tactic. Little is known about the nature of a guilt trip, which is when someone imposes guilt onto someone else. Six participants were recruited via convenience sampling to be interviewed on their experience of guilt tripping someone and being a victim of a guilt trip. Thematic analysis established a definition of a guilt trip and types of guilt trip (“tongue and cheek”, moral education, and side effect). The findings suggest that, while guilt can be adaptive, it was viewed as an unhealthy relationship tactic when imposed on by someone else. Further research should explore the complexity of guilt in relationships.

Keywords: guilt; relationships; emotional abuse; emotional intelligence

Introduction

Guilt is an aversive state associated with the self-appraisal that one is responsible for engaging in a wrongful behaviour (Leith & Baumeister, 2008). Guilt is conceptualized as anxiety over a possible loss of a social bond, which may lead to rejection from others (Leith & Baumeister, 2008). People are motivated to relieve guilty feelings by engaging in reparative action, such as apologizing or making amends (Tangney, 1994; Leith & Baumeister, 2008). This response involves stepping outside one’s concerns to appreciate another person’s perspective, reflecting how the transgression affected them, and how the reparative action will restore the social bond (Leith & Baumeister, 2008).

In contrast to guilt, shame centers on one’s identity, as opposed to their behaviour: ‘I am inherently flawed’ versus ‘I did something wrong’. Shame is associated with feeling inferior and social withdrawal (Tangney, 1994).

Guilt is either elicited through committing a wrongful behaviour, or having the emotion imposed on by an external source (Price, 1990). The latter is termed a guilt trip: the act of making someone else feel guilty. The purpose of inducing guilt in another person is to persuade them to change future behaviours.

Guilt is found to be adaptive and strengthens relationships. It triggers empathy in the observer, reduces conflict, encourages moral behaviours, interpersonal sensitivity, and good social adjustment (Leith & Baumeister, 2008; Tangney, 1994). However, guilt can also be associated with rumination and punishing oneself over the transgression (Silfver, 2007). There are mixed results

about the relation between guilt and psychopathology (Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

In the domestic abuse literature, guilt-induction can be used to gain control and evoke distress in the victim. The perpetrator can deny responsibility for this abuse through denial, projection, and rationalization. As a result, the victim may feel it is their behaviour that caused the perpetrator’s actions (Price, 1990). Beck and colleagues (2011) examined guilt and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in women who experienced domestic abuse. Guilt was positively associated with PTSD severity. Higher rates of guilt-related cognitions were related to more emotional and verbal abuse, along with domination and isolation by the perpetrator.

There are limited studies examining guilt trips and those studies tend to focus on guilt trips in parent-child relationships (Mandara & Pikes 2008; Shoham & Dalakas, 2006). While guilt trips have been used in parenting tactics, to aid in socializing children to obey norms and treat people in socially desirable ways, they are related to children’s depressive symptoms and low self-esteem (Leith & Baumeister, 2008; Mandara & Pikes, 2008). Mandara and Pikes (2008) consider guilt trips among manipulative tactics, which fall under forms of psychological control. The authors state parents’ use of these tactics dampens their child’s agency, self-control, and can lead to behavioural problems. Research is limited in addressing how and when inducing guilt can be healthy for individual well-being and to strengthen a relationship.

Current Study

The current study examines the nature and process of carrying out a guilt trip and whether there are different types of guilt trips. It is an exploratory study to look into when guilt trips can be maladaptive or adaptive in relationships by examining their function. The aim is to gain insight into under what conditions guilt is adaptive or unhealthy to address the discrepancy in research between the adaptive features of guilt with the domestic abuse literature.

Method

Interviews were carried out by the author and two graduate students as part of a qualitative methods seminar. The author is a cognitive science PhD student who researches emotion in domestic abuse. The author’s knowledge assisted in the interpretation of narratives, helping to recognize signs of features that are adaptive (i.e., perspective taking) or maladaptive (i.e., lack of validation of the victim’s feelings).

Qualitative methods built on the limited research on guilt trips by examining the question: ‘what is a guilt trip?’ These

methods flesh out participants' experience to learn how guilt is experienced differently when it is imposed on by someone else.

According to post-positivism, the truth about a phenomenon can only be approximated. This approach helped to interpret complex phenomenon by using participants' perspectives and how they were created, along with applying the researcher's values and theoretical background. A semi-structured interview captured a holistic view of the phenomenon, gaining insight into the motive, reactions, intent, and emotions associated with receiving and engaging in a guilt trip. Probing and questions helped to construct a narrative to activate the core of a guilt trip.

Participants

Participants were six Caucasian females ($n = 3$, 50%) and males ($n = 3$, 50%) with ages ranging from 21 to 32 ($M = 26$, $SD = 3.63$ years), who were recruited via convenience sampling in Ontario. Three participants were students, two were government employees, and one worked in finance. Fifty percent had graduate degrees while the remaining had an undergraduate degree. See Table 1 for types of relationships involved in the guilt trip experiences.

Table 1: Types of relationships.

Variable	<i>N</i>
Relationship participant guilt tripped ($N = 6$)	
Romantic	2
Friend	2
Sibling	2
Relationship who guilt tripped participant ($N = 6$)	
Romantic	2
Parent	2
Friend	2

The interviewers aimed to have a set sample size that was achievable to interview for the time constraints of the class that lasted a semester. In order to maximize variation in the sample, each interviewer recruited a male and female they knew to participate. Participants were contacted via email by the interviewers and asked if they wanted to volunteer to be interviewed for a study about guilt trips. The interviewers interviewed two participants they did not know. The inclusion criterion was having experienced a guilt trip both as a recipient and as a perpetrator of a guilt trip.

Prior to the interview, participants provided consent and filled out a face sheet on demographics. The face to face semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and carried out in a quiet space of the interviewer's or participant's place of work. The interviews ranged from 13 min to 35 min. The interviewer used the interview questions to help participants understand that they were the experts in providing information about the core features of a guilt trip. If the level of specificity required was not met during the

construction of the narrative then probes were used. The end of the interview was left open for participants to provide any input before they were provided the Debriefing Form.

The predetermined sample size interfered with reaching theoretical saturation. The original six questions focused on the definition of a guilt trip, guilt trip experiences, reactions (i.e., what were your feelings immediately before the guilt trip?), intent (i.e., when did you realize it was a guilt trip?), and impact on relationships. An iterative process was carried out, where the interviewers debriefed after each interview. Questions were revised to examine the above areas and expanded to twenty one, with recommendations for probing for the next set of participants. Interviewers also brainstormed possible codes, integration of their perspectives, and any biases, assumptions, and expectations to increase self-awareness.

Data Analysis

Interviewers transcribed the interviews they conducted. The six interviews were coded line by line and analyzed by the author. Thematic analysis procedure of Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to identify distinct themes consistent across the data to construct a story of the phenomenon. Themes reflect similarities (i.e., consensus on features of a guilt trip) and differences (i.e., types of guilt trips).

A methodological journal was used to keep track of the research process. In the analysis, the author included post-interview comments from the interview she conducted, which addressed strengths and weaknesses, and the author's and participant's reactions throughout the interview.

Memoing was used to identify and record initial codes, and when codes did or did not apply to the data. The content of codes was recorded, including interpretation, their importance to understanding the phenomenon, and evidence from chunks of data.

Sets of codes were then grouped according to patterned responses and meaning in the data. A limited number of themes were generated encompassing new knowledge of the phenomenon. Themes were checked against each other, using extracted chunks of data and the original interviews. Themes centered around defining distinct features of a guilt trip and types of guilt trips based on emotional reactions, strategies, and intention. Themes were organized, defined, and supported with evidence from interview quotes that encompassed the theme.

Bias was controlled for by having an equal female to male ratio, a variety of relationships, and gaining two perspectives of a guilt trip. This allowed for an active search for negative cases, where probing was used to explore the feelings, intentions, and thoughts surrounding the guilt trip experiences. Negative cases were analyzed by possible moderators. Low level coding was used (i.e., inVivo codes). This aided in establishing themes and subthemes, which were provided with evidence, interpretation, and was contextualized in participant's relationships. A member check was carried out with one participant who agreed on the definition of a guilt trip and a type of guilt trip.

Results

Guilt trips were a “*natural*”¹ occurrence in a wide array of relationships. The behaviours targeted by the perpetrator for a guilt trip had an aspect of triviality, including: a girlfriend not keeping her phone charged during work trips, not being excited about getting socks for Christmas as a child, and an adult not wanting to be alone while her boyfriend was at work. JJ described how, when he was at work: “*she would cry on the phone to get me to come home*”. There was also a university student who was guilt tripped for dating her friend’s ex boyfriend: “*she dated the person for one month when she was in elementary school*”.

A guilt trip was defined as “*manipulating the way a person feels to get a certain outcome*” by “*coercing them into doing something that they don’t want to do*”. Guilt trips were a superficial and easy way to gain control of another person. They can appear under the guise of good intentions but were inherently self-focused. SS’s boyfriend would say he was concerned about her when he was unable to contact her due to her uncharged phone: “*...that’s why it’s a guilt trip as opposed to real concern is because he wants me accessible but he wants it on his terms*”. During a guilt trip, SS described how there is little concern for outside factors:

It is easy and it tends to be effective. . . I probably just learn things that work well and then, without necessarily thinking of the negative impact and not caring about them, um I had no reason not to do it.

Luke stated the perpetrators of guilt trips react to emotions, do not engage in emotional intelligence, and are not open to communication:

Directly talking about a problem is a lot harder than just manipulating somebody... talking sort of meta-analyzing your own emotions and other people’s emotions is a difficult thing to do and so I think a lot of people, when they get worked up, the emotions take over and they can’t really think sort of they just sort of use guilt trip.

It seemed ineffective to reason with the perpetrator as the victim is often met with a defensive attitude, or in the case of SS, who had her views deflected:

Yea well, I fake it because I know what he wants to hear, like at first I would try to defend myself and explain ...but I felt as though that wasn’t really getting me anywhere so now I say ‘I’m sorry’.

There were mixed results to whether guilt trips were intentional. Will described the discrepancy between his definition of a guilt trip and his guilt trip of someone:

I think that guilt trips must be planned in advance but probably, when I’m actually in the process of doing it, it’s not, I’m not intentionally trying to make her feel badly to do something, it’s probably much more sort of a subconscious level.

The perpetrators appeared to wear blinders to outside factors, even if, as Holly stated, the victim’s “*reasons were completely legitimate*” for not wanting to change their

behaviour. The core of a guilt trip is summarized by the theme of ‘wearing blinders to get what you want’, which is captured by JJ:

I want this and it was not even really reasonable that I wanted it anymore, I just like, I just want this cause it is what I want and uh [laughs] I was like I’m gonna get it.

To achieve what they want, perpetrators targeted vulnerable areas to the victim, such as relationship obligations (“*this is partner girlfriend duties*”), past behaviours (“*I brought up situations of things I had done for her*”), emotions, like shame, and character (“*She’d be a bad person [if the behaviour was not changed] so targeting regret and remorse in the guilt trip*”).

Impact on Relationships

Guilt trips were viewed as “*not a healthy relationship technique*” and are “*not going to improve your relationship*”. Participants expressed more effective strategies to obtain the desired result, such as being direct about one’s feelings, while being considerate of the other’s perspective, and regulating one’s emotions. JJ discussed his guilt trip of a love interest who rejected him:

I don’t really think they’re [guilt trips] worth it, I mean I could have saved myself a few months of time if, when she said she wasn’t interested, I just, you know, packed it in and said ‘ok’ and moved on.

Victims could interpret positive aspects. Will felt the outcome of his mother’s guilt trip to visit more often helped “*nurture the relationship*” and JJ found that his ex girlfriend helped him realize “*what I don’t want*” in dating. Guilt trips generally “*didn’t affect the relationship*”. However, there was a negative case of a participant who perceived their relationship to erode because of guilt trips.

Guilt versus Guilt trips

Guilt trips did not genuinely convince people to change their behaviors, as JJ stated: “*I was doing things because she wanted me to do them and not because I wanted to do them*”. Rather, victims felt obligated to change their behaviors against their will (“*You’re not getting people to do that happily, right? So there’s a lack of authenticity*”). Although some victims felt guilty, the guilt was not about their behavior but about making the perpetrator feel bad:

Guilt can be good because it has to come from within yourself though, sounds so cheesy, but I think that you have to um, you have to be the one that sees the wrong in what you did in order to change. Someone saying: ‘hey what you did was really shitty’ and then you just kind of feel bad that you hurt the person but you don’t feel bad about the action, but if I realize what I did was shitty I probably will learn more from that so I think guilt is valuable but its pretty distinct from a guilt trip.

Guilt trips were more about manipulation than eliciting guilt. Victims felt regret, uncomfortable, annoyed, and powerless. Perpetrators either felt happy or distressed. There was one negative case of someone who experienced guilt

¹ All italicized quotes are from transcribed interviews.

because they guilt tripped someone else: *"I just felt um guilty myself for making her feel guilty"*.

Types of Guilt Trips

"Tongue in cheek" SS described her guilt trip as *"...a little bit tongue-in-cheek you know, to do it this way"*. She would not charge her phone while on work trips. Through a guilt trip her boyfriend expressed his concern that he would be unable to contact her if there was an emergency:

He's always exaggerated. I end up feeling frustrated and I also feel sort of this sense of 'oh my gosh we're going through this same thing again, how annoying'. You know, we all have our quirks [laughs]. I know it [not charging phone] annoys him so I do it anyway, he knows its going to annoy me so he guilt trips.

The "tongue and cheek" occurred in long-term, close relationships, such as between parent-child, siblings, and common law couples. They were part of the relationship dynamic and were repetitive; as Will noted: *"my parents do it all the time"*. They were part of the communicative style and were expected, such as in the case of SS: *"I kind of have a reputation [to guilt trip] in my family"*. This type was not taken seriously by either parties and had a blatant superficial aspect to them marked by transparency. SS and Stewart described the case of their brothers where *"he kind of saw through it"* and that *"he knows just because our dynamic, like how he knows I'm up to something"*.

The "tongue and cheek" appeared intentional. It was strategic, exaggerated, and demanding. SS described her strategy to guilt trip her brother to attend her graduation:

I was trying to um anticipate what his reasons for not doing what I wanted would be and um sort of pre-empt them by including them in the guilt trip.

The perpetrator felt a positive emotion. Stewart talked about how *"I try to excite them too kind of, trying to guilt them into excitement"*. Victims were annoyed due to the frequency of guilt trips. Will stated: *"it happened so frequently, it's normally frustration because I'm like I'm hearing this again"*. The "tongue and cheek" was under the guise of sarcasm, light-heartedness, and playfulness. There was a self-serving motive that was clear to both parties but it was not taken personally nor did it impact the relationship.

Moral Education Centered on the belief that the perpetrator had an obligation to help the victim understand the right course of action (*"I guilt trip them so they do something else that I feel is more in line with the right thing to do"*). This can take the form of helping the victim understand the effect their behaviour had on others, and how changing their behaviour would be beneficial to all parties involved. Luke described how being guilt tripped *"made me realize how my actions can impact other people's feelings"*, and how the perpetrator *"was trying to correct the situation"*. There was a normative code (what one should and should not do). Holly' thought *"I should have known better"* than to date

her ex boyfriend. Holly was unsure about *"whether that [dating the ex boyfriend] was the right decision"*. The core aspect of this type was that it was *"a learning experience"* and *"meant to show you something you are not aware of"*.

Perpetrators evaded responsibility by citing a sense of duty to guilt trip. Luke described how he knew *"I had to guilt trip her"* because *"I didn't want her to be seen in a bad light"*. These guilt trips appeared to be intentional but did not appear to be primarily self-motivated. They did not encompass the relationship. They were viewed as justified as the perpetrator was helping the victim. The term guilt trip was applied to these situations as the victim reacted negatively. Luke stated how he *"was just trying to help her make the right decision"* and that: *"I wanted to make her feel not bad necessarily but I wanted her to understand the full consequences of her behaviour"*.

There did not appear to be a specific relationship as data was drawn from friendships and a parent-child relationship. The core feature of the relationship dynamic was a power differential: the victim appeared inferior and was sympathetic to the duty of the perpetrator who guilt tripped for the victim's sake. Luke described how his dad guilt tripped him as part of a parenting technique:

I don't know if it was really guilt tripping... he wasn't meaning to guilt trip me he was just trying to inform me of the situation ... you end up feeling guilty about it and change your behaviour. I don't know.

The target of the moral education was the victim's character (*"She was a bad friend you know a bad person"*) or duty in the relationship (*"I played up the role of the importance of friendship"*). Distress over the wrong doing was common for both the victim and perpetrator. At first glance the moral education did not appear to be a guilt trip as it was focused on education and building awareness of one's actions. Although victims did not describe experiencing guilt, this guilt trip appeared to be the closest type of guilt trip that involved the victim internalizing a wrong doing.

Side Effect Closely resembled emotional abuse. This type of guilt trip elicited sympathy from others superficially through self-pity or the use of crocodile tears (an insincere display of sadness), and/or playing the role of the victim. This type appeared as a negative side effect when the perpetrator projected their negative emotional experience onto someone else (*"...happens in the heat of the moment when your emotions are going"*). One participant expressed this type during romantic relationships. The side effect encompasses the relationship and is mentally destructive, as it occurred in close, trusting relationships, where both parties had a large investment (i.e., time, emotions). Compared to the other guilt trip types, it had the largest impact on individual well-being and the relationship.

The side effect did not appear at conscious awareness. JJ explained how his now ex girlfriend would *"cry on the phone"* while he was at work *"because she wanted like a ride home"* and how *"I don't really think she thought about what she was doing as she was doing it she just knew how to"*

get what she wanted". JJ felt guilty because she was upset and he felt obligated to make her feel better by giving her what she wanted: "*I had to do certain things or I wasn't a good person in her eyes and of course like you know I cared a lot about her so it mattered to me what she thought*".

The side effect was self-focused and involved wearing the 'biggest blinders'. There was a lack of self-control and validation of the victim's feelings. JJ guilt tripped a love interest who rejected him and was overwhelmed with not getting the relationship he wanted: "*I couldn't be around her without thinking about it [what he wanted]*" and "*I was just not enjoying time with her at all so I was just making her life difficult*".

The victim felt they hurt the perpetrator. JJ stated his ex girlfriend was "*very good at twisting things*" and if he did not give her what she wanted it was "*a show of me not caring enough about her*". The victim felt angry, unhappy, and guilty. When guilt tripping a love interest JJ described how: "*I was distressed, I was very confused about what was going on because I couldn't get what I wanted*".

The side effect had a theme of estrangement. JJ did not want to see his ex girlfriend who guilt tripped him because "*I was going to be uncomfortable the whole time*" and how he "*... estranged her [his love interest] in the [guilt trip] process, like it was hard to be friends again*". The victim withdraws from the relationship due to aversive reactions to the guilt trip. JJ and his ex girlfriend were the only relationship that eroded because of guilt trips.

There was a contradiction in JJ's narrative between what he wanted and his intentions for the guilt trip. This demonstrated a lack of awareness, even in hindsight. Initially, JJ described his reason for the guilt trip: "*what I wanted was a relationship um which she didn't want*" and how she "*obviously didn't*" want a relationship but he:

...kept pushing for it anyways and I was like bringing it up more and more often and it finally got to, like the breaking point, like I was like, actually like rude about it.

As the narrative continued JJ referred to his love interest as, instead, being indecisive: "*she was very on the fence*" and "*my end goal [of the guilt trip] was more just trying to get her to make up her mind rather than actually like end up being with her*". JJ's lack of awareness into what he wanted may be due to the distress he felt from being rejected.

The perpetrator did not feel responsible because the distress they felt justified their actions. JJ described how "*I still don't feel like I was entirely in the wrong*" when he guilt tripped his love interest. The unwillingness to take accountability can be to the extent of putting onus on the victim: "*she owes me an apology ... her lack of wanting to deal with a problem that was bothering me*". JJ appeared to be in denial of being rejected and instead views the victim at fault for being evasive to his feelings.

JJ described how his love interest made him feel "*scared*" and "*insecure*" about losing the person who "*made him happy*", yet, he estranged her with the guilt trip when she did not want more than a friendship. JJ summarized the theme of insecurity:

They are a very insecure person. They are trying to like get you to do something you don't want to do, they require you to do this it becomes more about making you do this thing then the thing you're going to do.

In sum, the core of the side effect was that an individual attempted to control someone with the hope of diminishing their own insecurity. However, this led to an unhealthy relationship that was one sided and invalidated the victim.

Moderators

Moderators of the negative cases and why some people engage in certain types of guilt trips include: personality ("*I'm pretty easy going so I just kind of let things slide*"; "*I'm someone not to forget things*"), length and closeness of relationship (i.e., family versus friend), and frequency of guilt trips. The frequency of guilt trips SS received dissipated its impact; the frequency in JJ's case amplified their negative effects and eroded the relationship. Empathy could be a moderator, as seen in the moral education, where the victim empathized with the perpetrator.

Discussion

Guilt harmonizes relationships by bringing together individuals with varying expectations, standards, and perspectives (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995). At first glance a guilt trip could be used to trigger the victim to be more appreciative of the perpetrator and to align expectations in the relationship. However, guilt trips do not appear to be about maintaining a social bond. The perpetrator attempts to use the victim's desire for social cohesion and to relieve aversive feelings to motivate them to change their behaviour to something the perpetrator wants. A guilt trip imposes aversive states associated with guilt, along with feelings of resentment from feeling manipulated.

Guilt maintains relationships, whereas a guilt trip is 'wearing blinders to get what you want'. The perpetrator does not appear to step outside their desires and emotions to take the victim into consideration. A guilt trip does not appear to induce the benefits of guilt, such as making amends, honesty, and mutual understanding (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995). However, the phenomenon is complex. Guilt trips naturally occur in close relationships as no stranger encounters or acquaintances were used. According to the type, guilt trips serve different functions, vary in intensity, and have indirect positive outcomes.

The "tongue in cheek" is part of the dynamic of long term relationships. The self-serving aspect is intentional and strategic, which is blatantly superficial and transparent to those involved. The guilt trip is playful and not taken seriously. It was evident; by guilt tripping someone to visit them more, could offer positive opportunities for the relationship even if the process was annoying for the victim.

The moral education involves helping the victim learn how their actions affect others. The victim understands the guilt trip is done for their sake and they are able, to an extent, to internalize their wrong doing. The moral education parallels research on guilt and parenting tactics.

The elicitation of guilt occurs more naturally than other guilt trips. Due to the focus on education and enhancing awareness of one's action, it has potential for social adjustment and to learn social norms. It encourages emotional intelligence through perspective taking and could be beneficial for social interactions in the long term.

It is ironic to feel guilty as a result of guilt tripping someone else. This experience was evident in a negative case and is termed metaguilt (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995). Individuals lack awareness into whether they consciously chose to guilt trip. The majority of participants did not think their actions were wrong or were willing to take accountability for the guilt trip. A guilt trip may mark a discrepancy between two varying internal standards. Individuals may feel the aversive feeling of being guilt tripped is justified in helping shape the way people should treat each other. Those who recognize they are intentionally guilt tripping someone can see there are more effective means to communicating their relationship desires.

The side effect is intense. It is evident in relationships where there is a large investment, where feelings, such as love, are expected to be expressed regularly. It involves the perpetrator evading responsibility by playing the role of the victim. The guilt trip is a side effect of expressing overwhelming distress. The perpetrator uses the sense of control from the guilt trip to try to mend an underlying insecurity, while estranging the victim from the relationship. The side effect has the most negative impact. It includes a negative case of an eroded relationship, due to the frequency of intense aversive feelings of guilt and resentment (from feeling manipulated), and expectation for the victim to change their behaviours to maintain the relationship.

The findings are limited as saturation was not met. The set sample sized interfered with testing the themes against additional uncoded data. Participants explicitly stated guilt trips to be unhealthy yet stated that there had been no significant impact on relationships. However, the analysis indicates mixed results on it harming and nurturing the relationship across the types of guilt trip.

Due to convenience sampling, social desirability bias may result in participants not being honest, as they knew an interviewer who would read the transcripts. The analysis of interviews the author was acquainted with allowed for filling in gaps in the narrative, such as imposing meaning from their own experiences with the participant. The use of peer reviewers during analysis would help gain additional perspectives of the themes and interpretations of the data. Additional member checks and a stronger theoretical background would be useful to analyze the negative cases.

Other potential impacts of guilt trips were not explored (i.e., health or work). Perspectives of people the participants experienced their guilt trip with were not obtained. This could match what it is like to be guilt tripped by X and what it is like to guilt trip Y from X's perspective and vice versa. Victims and perpetrators lacked some awareness into their experiences, such as if the guilt trip was a conscious choice. Religious or cultural background was not controlled.

Future research may use purpose and then theoretical sampling to provide 1) more concrete definitions and credibility of the features of each type and, 2) a criteria of what a guilt trip is. The side effect may fit into some people's perception of a guilt trip more than the moral education. Research is needed to help people recognize the signs of a guilt trip (i.e., for a sign of an abusive relationship) and gain insight into their own guilt trip behaviours to improve communication. There is an overreaching idea that a guilt trip is (i.e., manipulation) distinct from guilt (i.e., social cohesion). The definitions become blurred when looking at different types of guilt trips. Due to contradictions in narratives it is difficult to decipher participants' perception of their experiences. Depending on the context, some types of guilt trips are more intense than others. The present study should be taken as an initial exploration of a guilt trip and further research should investigate the complexity of guilt in relationships.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Connie Kristianson for her guidance and comments on a prior draft, and Nathalie Gillen and Terri- Lynne Scott for their help with data collection.

References

- Baumeister, R., Stillwell, A., & Heatherton, T. (1995). Personal narratives about guilt: role in action control and interpersonal relationships, *Basic and applied psychology*, 17, 173- 98
- Beck, G., McNiff, J., Capp, J., Olsen, S., Avery, M., & Hagewood, J. (2011). Exploring negative emotion in women experiencing intimate partner violence: shame, guilt, and PTSD, *Behaviour Therapy*, 42, 740-750
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101
- Leith, K., Baumeister, R. (2008). Empathy, shame, guilt, and narratives of interpersonal conflict: guilt-prone people are better at perspective taking, *Journal of Personality*, 66, 1-37
- Mandara, J., & Pikes, C. (2008). Guilt trips and love withdrawal: does mother's use of psychological control predict depressive symptoms among African American adolescents, *Family Relations*, 57, 602- 612
- Price, G. (1990). Non-rational guilt in victims, *Dissociation*, 3, 160-164
- Shoham, A., & Dalakas, V. (2006). How our adolescent children influence us as parents yield to their purchase requests, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 23, 344-350
- Silfver, M. (2007). Coping with guilt and shame: a narrative approach, *Journal of Moral Education*, 36, 169-183
- Tangney, J. (1994). The mixed legacy of the superego: adaptive and maladaptive aspects of shame and guilt. In Masling, J., Bomstein, F. (Eds.). *Empirical perspectives on object relations theory* (pp.1-28). Washington: American Psychological Association
- Tangney, J., & Dearing, R. (2002). *Shame and guilt*. New York. The Guilford Press