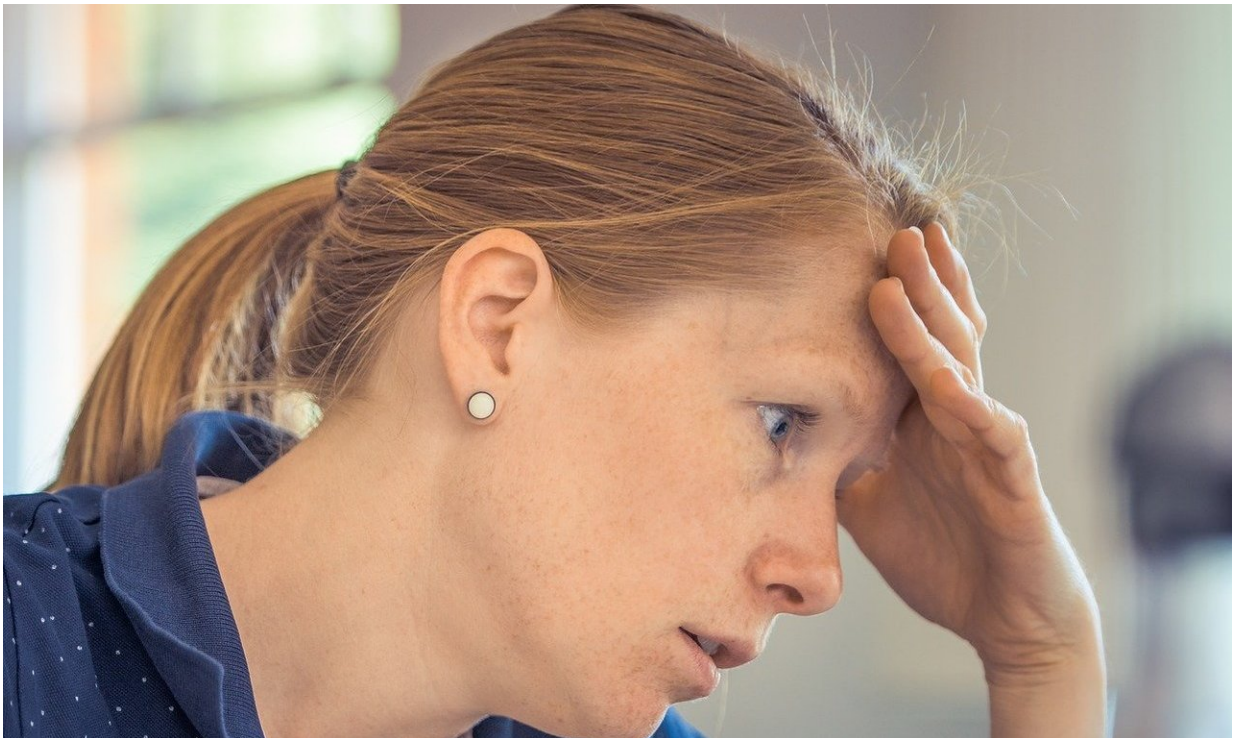


Study examines how heartfelt guilt affects individuals

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For thousands of years, people have closely associated moral cleanliness with acts of physical cleanliness. A recent study published in the *Australian Journal of Psychology* explored this association by eliciting guilt, a threat to one's moral purity.

In the study, guilt was elicited by asking participants to remember personal actions that resulted in harm to others and that had yet to be repaired. Participants were then shown threat words intermixed with negative, positive, and neutral words followed by a surprise recall test. Participants were also asked to select a parting gift from several products or rate the desirability of such products. These included cleansing items ([hand sanitizer](#) and mouthwash) and merchandise neutral to the concept of cleansing (pencil and notepad).

Heartfelt [guilt](#) led to elevated arousal, enhanced memory of threat words, and biased preferences towards cleansing products.

"Guilt is a complex experience involving at least two chronologically ordered components: the experience of a threat to [moral purity](#), which is likely to make people think of dangers, and one's defensive response to the [threat](#), which is likely to activate the desire to cleanse," said co-author Dr. Maura A. E. Pilotti, of Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University, in Saudi Arabia.

More information: *Australian Journal of Psychology*, [DOI: 10.1111/ajpy.12223](#)

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