

The Role of Moral Emotions in Interpersonal Repair: Implications for Education and Social Context

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Abstract. The role of moral emotions in repairing interpersonal relationships is one of the most important research topics. Based on existing studies, researchers have systematically explained the role of moral emotions in interpersonal relationship repair. However, there are still some gaps in these studies, such as deeply relying on a single situation and not elaborating on the chain role of different moral emotions. Therefore, the research theme of this thesis is the role of three moral emotions (guilt, embarrassment, and compassion) in interpersonal repair and their application in educational situations. In general, this article adopts the evaluation literature review method to objectively review the existing research and add further discussion. The results show that guilt can stimulate the motivation of individuals to take recovery actions. Embarrassment as a signal of willingness to repair. Empathy stimulates the ability of transpositional consideration and tolerance. The chain interaction between them can be summarized as embarrassment causes individuals to 'want to repair', guilt causes individuals to 'make behaviors of repair', and empathy causes repair to be 'accepted'. This mechanism is also applicable in the education scenario, and specific practical measures include empathy training, teachers' apology guidance, etc. In general, this paper further analyzes the chain role of three kinds of moral emotions and proposes reasonable practical measures for repairing interpersonal conflicts at the educational level. However, there are also shortcomings, such as the neglect of longitudinal research and cross-cultural research, which provide a direction for future research.

Keywords: moral emotions, relationship repair, guilt, embarrassment, empathy.

1. Introduction

Interpersonal conflict is common in daily lives. Reference further noted that interpersonal conflicts among students are very serious [1], especially in universities. Students who lack conflict management skills often have a negative impact on their academic and social functioning [2]. Thus, the timely repair of conflicts is essential for maintaining healthy interpersonal networks. Moral emotions are an important psychological mechanism for promoting the repair of interpersonal relationships. Existing studies mostly focus on the mechanism of single moral emotions (guilt, compassion, embarrassment) in specific situations such as the workplace [3-5]. However, these studies have neglected the interaction between different moral emotions and the effect of moral emotions on interpersonal relationship repair at the educational level. To fill this gap, this study aims

to review the existing studies, discuss the roles of guilt, embarrassment, and compassion in interpersonal relationship repair. Specifically, it will focus on three questions: (1) What role do different moral emotions play in repairing relationships, and how do these emotions interact? (2) What are the effects of these moral emotions on the role of resolving interpersonal conflict at the educational level, and how are these emotions represented differently than in other social contexts? (3) What interventions or educational strategies are available to promote effective resolution of interpersonal conflict in education? Based on these questions, this study aims to offer guidance for educators, parents, and peers to promote conflict resolution through moral emotion.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical framework

One of the previous research defines “Moral emotions represent a key element of human moral apparatus, influencing the link between moral standards and moral behavior.” What’s more, reference divides moral emotions into four families: the other-condemning family (contempt, anger, and disgust), the self-conscious family (shame, embarrassment, and guilt), the other-suffering family (compassion), and the other-praising family (gratitude and elevation) [3]. Durkheim propose that the interrelated parts of society have specific needs, and the division of labor under these needs produces organic solidarity [6]. Moral emotions can be seen as a mechanism to promote interpersonal relationships and resolve conflicts, thus contributing to organic solidarity in society at a certain level. In this sense, moral emotion can be considered as one of these divisions of labor. Interpersonal repair is seen as an important practical application of moral emotion in social interaction.

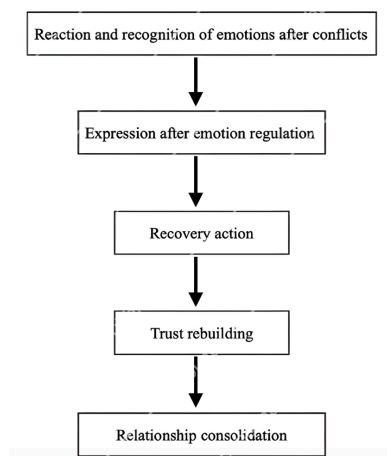


Figure 1. A process model of relationship repair model [4,7]

Figure 1 concludes the relationship repair model as five stages. The first stage is the reaction and recognition of emotions after conflict. Reference mentioned that when adolescents face their mother's anger [8], their inner defense and confrontation behaviors are an immediate emotional response; at the same time, adolescents' recognition of their mothers' anger is a kind of emotion recognition in conflict. The second stage is the expression after emotion regulation. For example, after a conflict between siblings, the smile of one of them can lead to more rational analysis and less resistance [8]. This serves as a transitional platform of reconciliation. And laying the ground for Stage 3- Recovery Action stage, which includes behaviors such as apology, explanation, the action

of concern, and so on. If these recovery actions can be recognized, the relationship between the two sides will enter Stage 4 - Trust rebuilding. Figure 2 shows the whole process of trust rebuilding. After the initial reception of the other side's recovery action. Because verbal recovery actions such as apologies and explanations require little additional cost, exploitative deception cannot be prevented [9]. The wronged partner will assess the other's motives. Studies have shown that sincere apologies are more helpful in rebuilding trust [7]. Thus, if the wronged partner believes that the other side's apology is sincere after evaluating the other party's motivation, it will show emotional relief, which is a signal of trust rebuilding. After Stage 4 - trust reconstruction, the whole relationship repair model goes to the last stage- relationship consolidation. However, it is a complex process from rebuilding trust to a more consolidated relationship. One of the previous research concludes that after the initial rebuilding of trust between the two sides [10], there is a need for some practice of mechanism such as 'proactive transparency, remorse and accountability, explaining reasons for betrayal' and other practice actions to further consolidate the relationship. In conclusion, the whole relationship repair model is a step-by-step process. In this model, moral emotion is not only an important mechanism to maintain the organic unity of society, but also an indispensable part of promoting the repair of relations. Therefore, the important role of three moral emotions - guilt, compassion, and embarrassment in relationship repair will be deeply analyzed in the next section.

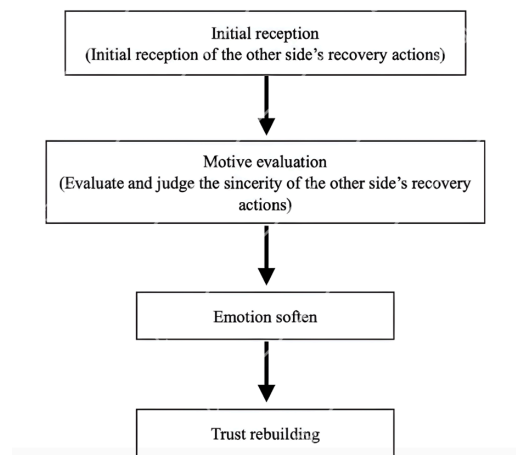


Figure 2. A process model of trust rebuilding [11, 12]

2.2. Moral emotions in relationship repair

This section will discuss three specific moral emotions: guilt, empathy, and embarrassment. The main framework includes the definition, characteristics, and role of emotions in interpersonal conflict repair. In addition to this, because of the large research gap, this section will only briefly mention the role of moral emotion in interpersonal conflict repair at the education level. Further analysis and summary will be provided in the next section.

Guilt is considered a more 'personal' experience caused by self-generated conscience pain [4]. The characteristics of guilt can be divided into three aspects. The first is cognitive characteristics. Guilt is aimed at the individual's behavior rather than the whole individual itself [13]. More specifically, guilt only makes a person feel bad about their actions rather than that they are bad. However, do not confuse guilt with shame. Haidt mentions that 'shame is elicited by the appraisal that there is something wrong or defective with one's core self' [3]. Thus, when a person feels shame, it involves a loss of self-worth, a total denial of who they are. The second is emotional characteristics. Reference described that the negative emotions caused by guilt are less destructive

because the focus is only on individual behavior rather than the whole individual [4]. The main emotional experiences included nervousness, remorse, and regret for 'doing bad things' [4]. The source of these negative emotions is mainly the sense of responsibility to the victim aroused by the individual after the bad deed. The third is behavioral characteristics. This again has a lot to do with previous cognitive characteristics. Since guilt focuses on behavior, individuals develop the mindset that things will get better if they do their best to fix them. Therefore, guilt usually corresponds to compensatory actions such as repentance, apology, and other recovery actions [4]. Moreover, guilt can also stimulate prosocial behaviors and reduce the likelihood of making mistakes by encouraging individuals to consider the impact of their actions on others [12]. However, at the same time, it is important to note that this reparative behavior is often directional. Which means that the interests of third parties may be harmed [12]. For example, individuals feel guilty for causing losses to one customer and thus divert the resources of other customers to compensate for this customer. In this recovery action, the interests of third-party customers will be harmed. Taken together, the analysis of the three characteristics of guilt has allowed the repair of guilt in interpersonal relationships to have a prototype. More deeply, because guilt can make individuals feel a sense of responsibility for the victim and realize that their behavior is 'bad', individuals want to take a series of restorative actions. Thus, the role of guilt in relationship repair can be summarized as the psychological driving force behind the behavior. This driving force is also critical in interpersonal conflict repair at the education level, allowing students to realize the harm of their actions to others and stimulate restorative actions.

There are two dimensions of empathy. Reference mentioned that emotional empathy is the ability to share the emotions of others [14]. This is usually manifested as being able to empathize with the emotions of others. Cognitive empathy, on the other hand, refers to the ability to infer or understand the feelings of others, merely at the level of understanding [14]. Since empathy is talked about as a moral emotion in this study, emotional empathy will be favored, which has the emotional characteristics of resonating with the emotional experience of others. One of the previous research also found that empathy has characteristics of regulation by studying the role and influence of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression on emotional empathy [15]. In other words, through emotion regulation, individuals can reduce negative emotions and thus be more rational in dealing with problems. However, it is important to mention that although empathy can induce individuals to become rational through emotional regulation, this is only in the ideal state. If an individual is in a state of imbalance, such as excessive involvement in the painful emotions of others, this will lead to emotional regulation difficulties like anxiety and helplessness [14]. Emphasis on trust is built on empathic relation [16]. This means that when an individual has the emotion of empathy, he or she has taken the initiative to see the other person as a good person, thus prompting the individual to take further restorative actions. From the perspective of psychological mechanisms, the reason is that after the individual shows compassion, the other party will think that he or she is understood and cared for, thus lowering the psychological defense line and triggering the cooperation psychology. The role in repairing relationships becomes clear as the three characteristics of empathy are combined. When there is a conflict between the two parties, the behavior of understanding each other's emotions as well as showing concern and empathy can make the other party feel understood. At the same time, the regulatory characteristics of empathy are very important, which can make individuals not overly involved in the negative emotions of the other party and make more rational repair behaviors. These recovery behaviors can signal to the other person that 'individual want to make peace with you', making both sides more decent in this conflict, and then rebuild trust. The same is true of interpersonal relationship repair at the education

level with empathy, which can promote both sides of the conflict to understand each other and make more rational and constructive repair strategies.

An individual who experiences a difficult situation in a public environment usually expresses a state of humiliation, shame and regret, which is a typical manifestation of embarrassment [17]. One of the previous research showed that embarrassment is often accompanied by physiological changes [18]. Typical behavioral features are a blush in response to embarrassment, changes in pronunciation and rate of speech, and avoidance movements [18]. However, this behavioral feature is also influenced by culture norms. For example, tongue biting is a signal indicating embarrassment in Southeast Asian people, but not in the United States [19]. Embarrassment is also closely related to social order, which is the social characteristic of embarrassment. Specifically, when a person's social image is damaged due to some uncontrollable events in the interaction, it will cause embarrassment [3]. So, embarrassment can also be seen as a regulatory mechanism to maintain social order. Because embarrassment often comes from the loss of self-esteem, individuals will enter a temporary negative state of self-repression and extreme disappointment [20]. This is manifested by feelings of incompetence, insignificance, and frustration [11]. These feelings are the emotional characteristics of embarrassment, which reflect the subjective feelings of individuals. Based on the analysis of the characteristics, the role of embarrassment in interpersonal relationship repair can be drawn. An uncontrollable physiological reaction, such as blushing when an individual feels embarrassed, will reduce hostility and increase tolerance and understanding. Keltner and Buswell mentioned that embarrassment will cause individuals to have a temporary lack of self-esteem [20]. This motivates the individual to take remedial measures, such as explanation and reparation, to restore self-esteem. Such restorative actions are the key to easing the conflict between the two sides. Third, embarrassment as a means of maintaining social order can send a signal to others that 'I know I'm being rude'. To achieve the effect of easing the atmosphere. Embarrassment as a moral emotion is also useful for interpersonal conflict repair at the educational level. However, unlike guilt and empathy, embarrassment plays a role in reinforcing the awareness of educational norms and fundamentally resolving interpersonal conflicts.

However, most of the existing studies tend to discuss the role of a single moral emotion in interpersonal repair but ignore the chain role of different moral emotions in resolving interpersonal conflicts. For the three moral emotions mentioned above, a reasonable psychological chain model can be that embarrassment causes individuals to 'want to repair', guilt causes individuals to 'make behaviors of repair', and empathy causes repair to be 'accepted'. In other words, embarrassment can release signals of a desire for repair, guilt sets off behavioral motivation, and empathy builds emotional bridges. For example, when a student disturbed the order of the class because of his naughty behavior, he would feel embarrassed about the teacher-student interaction if he did not get the desired effect of 'sensational atmosphere'. Because embarrassment can cause a transient loss of self-esteem. Individuals who feel that their self-image is damaged will be inspired to take remedial measures to restore their self-esteem. In this process, individuals will make attributions and further reflect on their own behavior. Individuals will feel guilty when they perceive that their actions have embarrassed others. Guilt is often accompanied by restorative actions such as apologizing. When the teacher sees the student's sincere remedy, he or she will sympathies. For example, put yourself in the child's shoes and think that children at this age are just being naughty because of their nature. In this two-way emotional interaction, the process of teacher-student relationship repair was promoted. Thus, the chain action of these three moral emotions explains the mechanism of action of interpersonal relationship repair at educational level. This lays the foundation for the intervention and application of interpersonal conflict in education in the next section.

3. Discussion

3.1. Implication for education practice

Based on the analysis of the mechanisms of action of the three moral emotions (guilt, embarrassment, and empathy), practical measures to resolve interpersonal conflicts at the educational level can be derived.

As a kind of moral emotion, guilt not only motivates individuals to reflect on their self-behavior but also prompts them to take restorative actions. This is a crucial stage in the educational scenario for cultivating individual responsibility. School and related leaders need to use the motivation of guilt to motivate individuals to take recovery actions and provide reasonable guidelines for the compensation process. For example, structure the process of apologizing into three steps. First, let individuals admit their mistakes and encourage students to clarify their mistakes concretely and avoid equivocating. The second is to express regret, which needs to consider both responsibility and emotion. In other words, expressing an apology expresses both regret for one's actions and a sense of responsibility. Teachers can also provide appropriate supporting tools, such as apology cards, to strengthen the ritual sense of relationship repair. Third, asking individuals to come up with practical actions, such as 'I can help you organize notes for today's class'. Thus, turn emotions into actions to show students' sincerity.

Empathy mainly plays a role in regulating emotions and understanding others in interpersonal relationship repair [14,15]. It can not only help individuals to think in others' shoes but also regulate individual emotions to make more rational repair behavior. First, based on this mechanism of action, schools and their relevant personnel can set up empathy training courses. For example, carry out a 'Switch-Side Debate' in the course. Students will be asked to defend their own position first, and then the two sides will exchange and defend the other side's position. In this process, students need to suppress their original 'hostile psychology' after transposition and defend each other more rationally. Help students practice suppressing negative emotion and learn to regulate. In addition to this, students need to re-understand the logic of the other party after transposition to construct a more convincing argument. This promotes students' cognitive transposition, which is the ability to think in other people's shoes. Second, schools and their relevant personnel need to set up more group works or activities. Because group work is the product of the cooperation of group members, which means the dependence between each other is strong. Therefore, in teamwork, students are more aware of the efforts of others and promote mutual understanding and tolerance. In addition, conflicts inevitably arise in collaboration, but the nature of teamwork can prompt students to take compromise or restorative actions to continue to cooperate in the future. This provides a platform for students to 'exercise interpersonal relationship repair skills'.

When embarrassing emotions occur, individuals will experience a temporary loss of self-esteem and can't control some physiological manifestations such as blushness. This set of physiological manifestations can send a nonverbal signal to the other person that 'I have recognized that the behavior is wrong,' which reduces hostility and stimulates a willingness to repair. Based on the mechanism of embarrassment, teachers need to ingeniously use embarrassment as a transition tool for relationship repair. When two students have a conflict in class and one of them shows embarrassment, the teacher needs to give guidance in time. The first thing to do is to give students a step down and draw the attention of other students back into the teaching knowledge instead of focusing on both sides of the conflict. This was to avoid feelings of embarrassment rising to shame, and a repair window was reserved for the two students. After class, the teacher needs to identify the injured party and guide the students to take recovery actions such as apologizing. Some language

skills are necessary. For instance, teachers can say 'You give each other a chance and this conflict is over' rather than saying a sentence that 'Why was that done? Apologies have to be made'. This can encourage students who feel embarrassed to express their intention to repair with actions and provide both sides with an opportunity to repair. In general, embarrassment itself is a kind of repair signal, and the teacher's ingenious guidance will make the relationship repair easier.

Thus, guilt mainly stimulates the individual's sense of responsibility and repair motivation. Empathy promotes individual empathy and tolerance. Embarrassment serves as a signal of willingness to repair. These three moral emotions interact to improve the relationship repair mechanism in the educational scenario.

However, after analyzing the repairing effect of the three moral emotions on interpersonal conflict in the educational scene, paying attention to the risk points brought by them is necessary. For guilt-based practices, if structured apology processes evolve into mechanization, it will make apologies too superficial and insincere. Second, if schools instill too much role of empathy, such as putting yourself in the other's shoes, there may be 'empathic manipulation'. This means that individuals may use empathy as a means of gaining forgiveness and avoiding responsibility. In the long run, it may promote an unfair education atmosphere rather than promoting students' moral responsibility or relationship repair ability. Third, teachers' guidance to repair after students feel embarrassed may lead to over-intervention. Deep down, students may see this as a forced repair rather than a voluntary one. In addition, teachers' guidance will also have improper timing. For example, choosing to deal with this matter after class may lead to intervention too late, so that the embarrassing signal disappears and the opportunity to repair is missed. Therefore, the application of moral emotion in interpersonal relationship repair in the educational scene needs to be flexible to improve and balance according to the actual situation. Thus, moral emotions become an important resource for repairing interpersonal relationships at the educational level. Future research is needed to discuss how to balance the positive and negative effects of moral emotions in educational settings, to ensure the most equitable and responsible action mechanism and practice measures in campus.

3.2. Gaps in literature and direction for future research

The chain role of moral emotions in interpersonal relationship repair has been limited, and there is a lack of research in educational settings. In addition, the action mechanism of moral emotion is out of touch with reality. This paper addresses these research gaps by discussing the chain effects of three moral emotions (guilt, embarrassment, and empathy) in interpersonal repair and analyzing their action mechanism and practical applications in educational settings. However, the existing studies also have methodological deficiencies. Such as the lack of longitudinal studies and comparative cultural studies. Based on this gap, this paper fails to make a corresponding in-depth discussion, which provides a direction for future research. They can continue to conduct longitudinal studies in the context of educational scenarios to analyze the long-term effects of the practical measures proposed in this paper on relationship repair at the educational level. In addition, future studies should also focus on cross-cultural comparison to internationalize the role of moral emotions in repairing interpersonal relationships. Specific research methods can be mixed methods, combining quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research usually uses questionnaires, scales, statistics and other methods to directly show the relationship between variables with data. Qualitative research through focus interviews, such as direct interviews with students from different countries, on whether they voluntarily engage in such recovery actions when teachers provide individual with a structured apology. The combination of the two can not only show the differences

in the role of moral emotions on interpersonal repair in educational settings under different cultures but also explain why these differences exist.

4. Conclusion

In summary, based on the existing research, this paper summarizes the role and related theoretical framework of guilt, embarrassment, and empathy in interpersonal repair, and extends their application in educational settings. Existing studies generally show that guilt stimulates an individual's recovery actions to promote repair. Empathy promotes individuals to enhance tolerance and understanding. And embarrassment, as a key signal of relationship repair intention, can alleviate the atmosphere. On this basis, this paper further refers to the chain role of three moral emotions in interpersonal relationship repair, highlighting the complementary dynamic relationship of moral emotions in the repair process. In addition, this paper puts forward the action mechanism and corresponding practical measures for the repair of interpersonal relationships based on the educational situation. Such as structured apology instruction, empathy training courses, and so on. However, this paper also adds to the counteractions that these practical measures may bring. This reminds educators that they need to make improvements according to the actual situation to maximize the role of moral emotion. In conclusion, this paper not only summarizes the role of three moral emotions in the repair of interpersonal relationships but also puts forward reasonable practical measures in the context of education. This makes the role of moral emotion in interpersonal repair not only stay at the theoretical level but also in real situations. At the same time, the research gaps left by this paper also provide enlightenment for future longitudinal and cross-cultural research.

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