

The value of regret: Violations of the values hierarchy and the experience of regret

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Abstract (297 words)

Values are individual beliefs that are considered important or necessary (Schwartz, 1992). Prior research on values has established that individuals have a personal hierarchy of values (Schwartz, 2012), where certain values are more important to us than others; this relative importance of values may change for an individual over time (Bardi et al., 2014). Our values influence our attitudes and guide our behaviors (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003), and when we behave in a way that is incongruent with our value system, we are likely to experience negative emotions. Regret occurs when a person experiences a significant level of despondency concerning past events that the individual feels responsible for creating (Kahneman & Miller, 1986). While the experience of regret is often negative, the cognitive and emotional consequences of regret (e.g. guilt, sense of betrayal of the self or others) serve as an internal guidance system, and may be adaptive (Saffrey et al., 2008). We posit that an individual's hierarchy of values plays a role in the experience of regret. Participants will complete a measure assessing their current hierarchy of values (Schwartz, 1992), respond to an open-ended question regarding an intense experience of regret (modified from Zeelenberg et al., 1998), and lastly, report the endorsement of the values held at the time of the regretted experience. It is expected that regret will be associated with a focus on self-enhancing values (e.g., achievement, power), as opposed to values focused on self-transcendence (e.g., benevolence, universalism). We also hypothesize that regret will be associated with a violation of the values hierarchy, such that the values held at the time of the event do not align with current value systems. Discussion will focus on the antecedents of regret (i.e., where regret originates from) as well as its functions and consequences (i.e., what regret does).

Key Words: regret, values, self-enhancement, self-transcendence, hierarchy violation