Uneasy Lies the Head That Wears the Crown: The Link Between Guilt Proneness and Leadership

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We propose that guilt proneness is a critical characteristic of leaders and find support for this hypothesis across 3 studies. Participants in the first study rated a set of guilt-prone behaviors as more indicative of leadership potential than a set of less guilt-prone behaviors. In a follow-up study, guilt-prone participants in a leaderless group task engaged in more leadership behaviors than did less guilt-prone participants. In a third, and final, study, we move to the field and analyze 360° feedback from a group of young managers working in a range of industries. The results indicate that highly guilt-prone individuals were rated as more capable leaders than less guilt-prone individuals and that a sense of responsibility for others underlies the positive relationship between guilt proneness and leadership evaluations.

Keywords: guilt, guilt proneness, leadership, personality, negative affectivity

Leadership scholars have long been interested in identifying individual characteristics that distinguish successful leaders (Antonakis, 2011; Bass, 1990; Cowley, 1931; Smith & Foti, 1998; Terman, 1904). Their interest in identifying key leadership traits has never waned, in part because the critical need for strong leadership remains. As societies struggle through global economic crises, violent social uprisings, and devastating natural disasters, leaders will be sought to revitalize business enterprises, implement political reforms, and rebuild antiquated infrastructure. Who will meet this challenge? In the present research, we propose that people who are predisposed to experience specific forms of negative, rather than positive, affect (cf. Engle & Lord, 1997; George, 1995; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005) may be judged as better candidates for leadership roles. In particular, we suggest that a tendency to experience guilt may be an important antecedent of leadership emergence and effectiveness.

Individuals vary in the extent to which they are “prone” to experience guilt within and across situations (e.g., Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Such differences in guilt proneness have been linked to “prosocial action tendencies” that make guilt integral to social functioning (e.g., Baumsteiger, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994; Haidt, Rosenberg, & Hom, 2003; Tett, Jackson, & Rothstein, 1991). People who are highly guilt prone tend to be more empathic, better at resolving conflicts, and less likely to engage in negative behaviors such as lying and drug use (Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011; Covert, Tangney, Maddux, & Heleno, 2003; Dearing, Stuewig, & Tangney, 2005; Leith & Baumsteiger, 1998; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005; Tangney, 1990, 1991). However, the benefits of guilt proneness may extend beyond encouraging prosocial behaviors and inhibiting antisocial ones; guilt proneness may also propel people to positions of greater social influence. Put differently, individuals who are guilt prone may not only be better friends and colleagues but also better leaders.

Guilt proneness may be positively related to leadership effectiveness because it engenders a strong sense of responsibility for others. Successful leaders are highly attuned to the needs of their followers, prioritizing their group’s interests ahead of their own (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998; Conger & Kanungo, 1987). They hold a collective focus and accept accountability for the groups’ successes and failures (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993). Past research has identified a similar link between guilt and feelings of responsibility. Indeed, according to some theoretical perspectives, a sense of responsibility for one’s actions is a necessary antecedent of guilt. We suggest that the sense of responsibility associated with guilt proneness might extend beyond the negative events that often elicit guilt (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, 1992). Even when guilt-prone individuals have committed no harm, they may emerge and succeed as leaders because they feel a keen sense of responsibility for their social groups.

If supported, these ideas extend theory and research on guilt proneness and the study of leadership in several important ways. First, the finding that guilt proneness positively relates to leadership reveals an important exception to the seeming rule that negative affectivity undermines leadership effectiveness. Second, the idea that people prefer guilt-prone individuals as leaders adds a new element to the “social” aspect of guilt: guilt proneness can facilitate the emergence of social hierarchy as well as the development of social harmony. Finally, the notion that having a sense of responsibility for others mediates the relationship between guilt proneness and leadership suggests that responsibility is not only a precursor to guilt, or a mechanism for conflict resolution, but also a means by which guilt-prone individuals can demonstrate their leadership potential.

The Trait Approach to Leadership

The most common approach that social, personality, and organizational psychologists have taken to studying the antecedents of
leadership is identifying the particular characteristics or dispositions that leaders possess (e.g., Antonakis, 2011; Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994). The trait approach to leadership averts that some individuals are endowed with traits, temperaments, and personality types that predispose them to be effective in a leadership role. Despite critics’ assertions that leadership cannot be distilled to a certain collection of traits (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; House & Aditya, 1997; Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1948), the trait approach to leadership has experienced a renaissance in recent years, owing in part to the predictive validity of the Big Five personality factors in accounting for leadership emergence and effectiveness and a growing recognition of dispositional affectivity as a key piece of the leadership experience (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Barsade & Gibson, 2007; Gooty, Connelly, Griffith, & Gupta, 2010; Judge & Bono, 2000; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002).

Several Big Five traits have consistently shown correlations with leadership emergence and effectiveness (Judge & Bono, 2000; Judge et al., 2002). Individuals who high in extraversion, openness to experience, emotional stability, and conscientiousness emerge more frequently as leaders and tend to be more effective in their leadership roles (Judge et al., 2002). In the case of emergent leadership, the Big Five personality traits (as a whole) account for over half of the variance in leadership ratings (Judge et al., 2002). Beyond the Big Five, traits that help individuals excel at their tasks (e.g., competence and intelligence) and to manage the socioemotional needs of those around them (e.g., empathy and emotional intelligence) have also emerged as reliable, positive predictors of leadership (Kellett, Humphrey, & Sleeth, 2002; Lord, De Vader, & Alliger, 1986; Offermann, Bailey, Vasilopoulous, Seal, & Sass, 2004; Taggar, Hackett, & Saha, 1999; Wolff, Pesesolido, & Druskat, 2002).

Affect and Leadership

An individual’s general affectivity has been shown to be a reliable predictor of leadership evaluations (Barsade & Gibson, 2007; Gooty et al., 2010). In particular, individuals who are prone to experience positive affect are preferred as leaders and judged to be more effective in their leadership roles relative to individuals who are prone to experience negative affect (Bono & Ilies, 2006; Rubin, Munz, & Bommer, 2005; Staw & Barsade, 1993). Subordinates and objective observers regard leaders who express positive affect to be more capable, more transformational, and more charismatic than leaders who express negative affect (Bono & Ilies, 2006; Rubin et al., 2005; Staw & Barsade, 1993). Moreover, subordinates prefer to work for leaders who are high in positive affectivity than for leaders low in positive affectivity (George & Bettenhausen, 1990).

One of the major themes to emerge recently from the leadership literature is the influence of leaders’ general affectivity on the behavior of their followers (e.g., Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Mumford, 2011). The general conclusion from this line of research is that a leader’s tendency to experience positive affect can improve group outcomes whereas a leader’s tendency to experience negative affect can impair the same outcomes (Gooty et al., 2010). Specifically, groups perform better, act more prosocially, and show higher levels of loyalty to their group when their group leaders feel and demonstrate positive affect than when their group leaders feel and demonstrate negative affect (Erez, Misangyi, Johnson, LePine, & Halverson, 2008; George, 1995; George & Bettenhausen, 1990; Sy, Cote, & Saavedra, 2005).

Whereas the benefits of positive affect for leadership are clear, the drawbacks of negative affect are more mixed. Although negative affectivity, in general, reduces a leader’s perceived and actual effectiveness, the expression of certain types of negative affect can, in some cases, enhance a leader’s performance (Van Kleef et al., 2009). In fact, observers perceive leaders who express anger to be more competent than leaders who express sadness (Tiedens, 2001). Further, leaders’ expressions of anger can prompt their groups to exert greater effort and perform better (Connelly & Ruark, 2010; Sy et al., 2005; Van Kleef et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the benefits of negative emotions, such as anger, might be outweighed by their drawbacks. Individuals whose leaders express negative emotions or moods exhibit lower levels of coordination, higher levels of stress, and more negative beliefs about their leader than individuals whose leaders refrain from expressing negative emotions and moods (Glomb & Hulin, 1997; K. M. Lewis, 2000; Sy et al., 2005). Although the expression of negative emotions can benefit leaders, the tendency to experience negative emotions seems to hinder evaluations of a leader’s effectiveness.

Guilt Proneness

Given the strong association between positive affectivity and effective leadership, it may seem unlikely that guilt-proneness would make someone a more capable leader. Guilt is a negative emotion that produces a state of psychological discomfort—one that individuals seek to avoid and alleviate (H. B. Lewis, 1971; Tangney, 1989; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Guilt is classified as a self-conscious emotion—a category that also includes shame, embarrassment, and pride—because it provides information about the social and moral appropriateness of one’s behaviors (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney, Mashek, & Stuewig, 2007). However, unlike similar self-conscious emotions, like shame and embarrassment, guilt propels individuals to amend past wrongs and to avoid future mistakes (Tangney, 1991; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Whereas feelings of shame lead people to shrink away from problems (hoping they will just go away), feelings of guilt prompt people to engage problems (hoping they can be solved; M. Lewis, 1993; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007; Tracy & Robbins, 2006). Guilt can be further distinguished from other self-conscious emotions, such as shame, in that it corresponds to a negative evaluation of a particular action (e.g., “That was wrong of me to do”) and not a negative evaluation of the self (e.g., “I am bad because I did that”); M. Lewis, 1993; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney, Stuewig, et al., 2007; Tracy & Robbins, 2006).

Although guilt produces a state of psychological discomfort, feelings of guilt have been shown to foster adaptive interpersonal interactions. Guilt is associated with higher levels of empathy and perspective taking, as well as constructive responses to anger and interpersonal conflict (Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Tangney, 1991; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney & Fischer, 1995). Many of these positive consequences of guilt derive from a strong sense of responsibility for one’s actions (Basil, Ridgeway, & Basil, 2006; Tangney, Mashek, et al., 2007; Zeelenberg & Breugelmans, 2008). Guilt-proneness attunes people to the effects of their actions on others (especially the negative effects), which prompts them to act in more socially sensitive ways (Tangney, Stuewig, et al., 2007;
Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall, & Gramzow, 1996). Thus, guilt-prone individuals may feel compelled to “take the lead” in group settings because failing to contribute their fair share, to fulfill their obligations to others, or to achieve the group’s objectives would likely engender guilty feelings.

Guilt Proneness and Leadership

We posit that guilt-proneness may be a positive driver of leadership evaluations because it bolsters an individual’s sense of responsibility for the welfare and socioemotional needs of others. One of the defining features of leadership is the willingness to sacrifice one’s self-interest for achievement of the collective goal (De Cremer, 2002; De Cremer, Mayer, van Dijke, & Schouten, 2009; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). In addition, effective leaders support the interests of their fellow group members—making sure everyone’s voice is heard and contributions appreciated (Bales, 1950; Lord, 1977; Taggar et al., 1999). They also tend to be highly socially sensitive—recognizing and addressing the emotional needs of fellow group members (Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000). Whereas feelings of responsibility often diffuse across members of large groups (Darley & Latane, 1968), they appear to concentrate in a successful leader, compelling him or her to take action in overseeing the successful completion of tasks (Choi & Mai-Dulan, 1998).

Feelings of guilt are associated with a strong sense of personal responsibility (Tangney, 1991). This link between guilt and responsibility has been characterized as one in which a sense of responsibility is a necessary condition for guilt to emerge, or one that can help facilitate reconciliation (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Guilt proneness, however, may also heighten people’s general sense of responsibility for others. Indeed, past research has shown that guilt is positively related to charitable giving, collective action, and volunteering (Basil et al., 2006; Basil, Ridgway, & Basil, 2008; Freedman, Wallington, & Bless, 1967; Ketelaar & Au, 2003). In social situations, individuals who feel highly responsible for those around them may feel compelled to assert themselves as a leader of the group—acting on the group’s needs and interests rather than their own personal needs and interests. Indeed, we suggest that this sense of responsibility for others is what predisposes guilt-prone individuals to be better leaders than their guilt-free counterparts.

Overview of Studies

Research on trait-based determinants of leadership can be conceived as addressing three similar, but distinct, questions. The first concerns whom people see as good leaders. According to past research on perceptions of leadership, people possess prototypes of the characteristics and behaviors that are indicative of good leaders (Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984; Lord, Foti, & Phillips, 1982; Lord & Maher, 1991). The second question concerns who emerges as leaders. Research on emergent leadership is generally conducted in the context of small, leaderless groups of equal-status peers and is focused on identifying who ends up leading the group and why that individual ends up in the leadership position (Bales, 1950; de Souza & Klein, 1995; Pescosolido, 2002). The third question asks what makes a leader effective and is often concerned with the dispositions, characteristics, and situational factors that make individuals more or less successful in their leadership positions (Fiedler, 1964; Hogan et al., 1994; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003).

We suggest that individuals who are guilt prone are more likely to be perceived as leaders, to emerge as leaders, and to be seen as more effective leaders. We further propose that a sense of responsibility underlies the positive relationship between guilt proneness and leadership effectiveness. We tested these predictions in three studies. In Study 1, we examined the relationship between guilt proneness and perceptions of leadership. We predicted that observers would perceive more guilt-prone targets as having relatively higher levels of leadership ability. In Study 2, we relied on a standard method for assessing emergent leadership to capture the link between guilt proneness and leader emergence in the context of small, leaderless groups (see Brunell et al., 2008; de Souza & Klein, 1995; Wolff et al., 2002, for similar approaches). We predicted that guilt proneness would be a positive predictor of emergent leadership behavior. Finally, in Study 3, we looked at whether guilt proneness is a positive antecedent of leader effectiveness by using leadership assessments of young managers. In this study, we also assessed the participants’ sense of responsibility for others to test our hypothesis that feelings of responsibility to others mediate the positive relationship between guilt proneness and subjective assessments of leadership effectiveness.

Study 1: Guilt Proneness and Perceptions of Leadership Ability

In Study 1, we investigated whether observers would perceive more guilt-prone individuals as having greater leadership ability than their less guilt-prone peers. We also examined the relationship between shame proneness and perceptions of leadership to show that the positive relationship between guilt proneness and perceptions of leadership ability is due to targets’ guilt proneness specifically and not to their strong personal responses to transgressions more generally. To test these ideas, we manipulated hypothetical targets’ levels of guilt proneness and shame proneness by varying their purported responses to well-established measure of guilt and shame proneness (i.e., the Test of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA–3) (Tangney, 1990; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney et al., 1992). We then embedded these manipulated responses among the targets’ purported responses to other personality measures. Participants reviewed these materials and then rated the target’s leadership ability.

Method

Participants. Two hundred forty-three participants (123 women, 120 men; M<sub>age</sub> = 34.07 years) from across the United States were recruited from a listserv of individuals interested in participating in research studies. Participants completed the study in exchange for a $3.00 gift card (U.S. currency) to an online retailer.

Procedure. Participants received an e-mail that invited them to participate in a study on personality assessment and hiring decisions. We told participants that we were interested in the validity of a variety of personality measures. Participants learned that individuals from a previous study had completed the measures and that the participants would be asked to review the responses of
one of these individuals. In fact, there was no previous study; we generated the responses to the personality measures on our own.

Participants were asked to review the target individual’s responses to the TOSCA–3. The TOSCA–3 is a scenario-based survey that measures an individual’s levels of guilt proneness and shame proneness. The 16 scenarios on the TOSCA–3 are based on everyday experiences that likely elicit feelings of guilt and shame. For example, in one scenario, respondents are told, “You are driving down the road, and you hit a small animal.” Each scenario is then accompanied by two potential responses—a guilt-prone response (e.g., “You’d feel bad you hadn’t been more alert driving down the road”) and a shame-prone response (e.g., “You would think, ‘I’m terrible’”). For each of the two responses, respondents indicate the likelihood that they would respond in that particular way on a 5-point scale (1 = not likely and 5 = very likely).

Because we were interested in the unique influence of guilt proneness and shame proneness, we randomly assigned participants to either a guilt-proneness or shame-proneness condition. Participants in the guilt-proneness condition reviewed a target’s hypothetical responses to only guilt-prone items, whereas participants in the shame-proneness condition reviewed a target’s hypothetical responses to only shame-prone items. Each participant saw the target’s purported responses to a random selection of eight of the possible 16 scenarios. We manipulated the magnitude of the hypothetical target’s levels of guilt proneness and shame proneness by varying their purported responses to the TOSCA–3 items. We generated five different sets of responses to reflect five different levels of guilt proneness and shame proneness: 1, very low proneness; 2, low proneness; 3, moderate proneness; 4, high proneness; and 5, very high proneness. We randomly assigned participants to one of these five conditions. Participants in the very-low-proneness condition saw that the target responded to each of the items with a 1 or a 2, for an average guilt- or shame-proneness score of 1.25. Participants in the low-proneness condition saw that the target responded to each of the items with a 1, 2, or 3, for an average guilt- or shame-proneness score of 2.13. Participants in the moderate-proneness condition saw that the target responded to each of the items with a 2, 3, or 4, for an average guilt- or shame-proneness score of 3.00. Participants in the high-proneness condition saw that the target responded to each of the items with a 3 or 4, for an average guilt- or shame-proneness score of 3.88. Finally, participants in the very-high-proneness condition saw that the target responded to each of the items with a 4 or 5, for an average guilt- or shame-proneness score of 4.75.

To make our interest in the relationships between the targets’ levels of guilt proneness (and shame proneness) and leadership ability more opaque, we embedded the targets’ responses to the TOSCA–3 among their purported responses to other personality measures. Specifically, participants also viewed the target’s hypothetical responses to the Big Five Inventory (BFI, John & Srivastava, 1999) and to a trait regret scale (Regret Scale; Schwartz et al., 2002). The BFI consists of five 8-item subscales that measure each of the Big Five personality traits: conscientiousness, extraversion, emotional stability, openness, and agreeableness. Participants are asked to respond to each item using a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

The Regret Scale consists of five items that assess an individual’s tendency to experience regret (see Schwartz et al., 2002). A sample item from the scale is, “If I make a choice and it turns out well, I still feel like something of a failure if I find out that another choice would have turned out better.” Participants are asked to respond to each item using a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree).

We held constant across conditions the target’s purported responses to the BFI and trait regret scales. After reviewing the full set of responses to the various personality measures, participants were instructed to answer several questions about the target’s leadership ability.

**Measure of leadership ability.** We generated four items to assess participants’ perceptions of the target’s leadership ability based on items used previously in research on perceived leadership ability (see Hogg, Hains, & Mason, 1988). Specifically, we asked participants to rate the extent to which the individual they reviewed (a) would be a good leader; (b) has the qualities that would make him or her a good leader; and (c) has clear leadership potential. We also asked participants (d) to what extent they would want this individual to be their boss or supervisor at work. Participants responded to each question on a 5-point scale (1 = not at all and 5 = extremely). We averaged participants’ responses to the four items to create an overall measure of perceived leadership ability (Cronbach’s α = .94).²

**Results**

To test the prediction that guilt proneness and perceptions of leadership would be positively related, whereas shame proneness and perceptions of leadership would not, we conducted a 2 (type of emotional disposition: guilt prone, shame prone) × 5 (degree of proneness: very low, low, moderate, high, very high) between-subjects analysis of variance with perceptions of leadership ability as the dependent variable. There was neither a main effect of type of emotional disposition, $F(1, 233) = 0.42$, $p = .52$, nor a main effect of degree of proneness, $F(4, 233) = 2.06$, $p = .087$. However, as predicted, a significant interaction between these two variables emerged, $F(4, 233) = 3.02$, $p = .022$ (see Figure 1).

We performed two contrast analyses to test the linear effect of the degree of proneness (from low to high proneness) for each type of emotional disposition (guilt and shame prone). We found a significant positive relationship between targets’ levels of guilt proneness and participants’ ratings of their leadership ability, $t(233) = 3.74$, $p < .001$. Participants perceived targets high in

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1 For an assessment of the relationship between the TOSCA and an alternative assessment of the Five-Factors model, see Abe (2004).

2 A factor analysis confirmed that the four items loaded on one factor with an eigenvalue of 3.41 that accounted for 85.24% of the variance. Although the scale is unidimensional, the high alpha coefficient indicates a degree of item redundancy, which may limit the validity of the measure (see Boyle, 1991). A maximum scale validity is obtained when there is no item intercorrelation, but each item correlates with the latent factor that the scale is designed to measure (Boyle, 1991; Cattell, 1978; Kline, 1986). Although across the three studies, each measure of leadership has an alpha coefficient greater than .90, we used different measures of leadership across the three studies. The fact that guilt proneness positively and significantly relates to all three measures of leadership suggests the relationship between guilt proneness and leadership is not limited to one conceptualization of leadership.
guilt proneness to be more capable leaders than targets low in guilt proneness. Conversely, there was no linear relationship between targets’ levels of shame proneness and participants’ ratings of their leadership ability, \( t(233) = -0.07, p = .94 \). That is, participants did not perceive targets high in shame proneness to be more or less capable leaders than targets low in shame proneness.\(^3\) These findings support our contention that it is individuals’ levels of guilt proneness, specifically, and not their proneness to have a strong personal response to transgressions more generally that elicit positive leadership attributions.

**Discussion**

The results of Study 1 support the prediction that more guilt-prone individuals are perceived as having greater leadership ability than their less guilt-prone peers. We observed a strong linear trend such that targets higher in guilt proneness were seen as having greater leadership ability than targets lower in guilt proneness. We observed no effect of shame proneness on perceptions of leadership ability. Therefore, guilt-prone targets appear to be perceived as better leaders not because they generally have a strong response to wrongdoing but because they specifically have a guilt-prone response. Moreover, the evidence that guilt proneness, but not shame proneness, influenced perceptions of leadership ability minimizes possible concerns about demand effects. If participants were picking up on, and responding to, our interest in the relationship between targets’ responses to the TOSCA–3 and judgments of their leadership ability, then a relationship between shame proneness and perceptions of a target’s leadership ability would likely have emerged.

Although the results from this study show that guilt proneness is positively related to perceptions of leadership, they do not show whether the guilt-prone actually emerge as leaders. In particular, it is not clear whether guilt proneness would relate to leader emergence when observers do not directly witness a guilt-prone person’s reaction to a transgression. In Study 2, we had participants interact during a leaderless group task and examined which group members demonstrated more leadership behavior during the task and were evaluated as having more leadership potential after the study session.

**Study 2: Guilt Proneness and Leader Emergence**

In Study 2, we investigated whether guilt-prone individuals are more likely to emerge as leaders. Participants completed two group tasks with three or four other individuals and then rated the extent to which each group member acted as a leader during the tasks.

**Method**

**Participants.** One hundred forty-four students and staff members (78 women, 65 men, one unreported; \( M_{age} = 21.26 \) years) from a major university on the West Coast of the United States participated in the study in exchange for $20 (U.S. currency).\(^4\) Participants were recruited from a listserv of university affiliates who had expressed interest in completing paid research studies on campus.

**Procedure.** Participants were recruited to participate in a two-part study on group processes and decision making. In the first part of the study, participants completed an online survey that contained measures of dispositional self-conscious affect (e.g., guilt proneness), conscientiousness, extraversion, emotional stability, openness, and agreeableness. Participants also completed a short questionnaire containing several questions about their demographic characteristics. Participants completed these materials online before they were scheduled to complete the second part of the study, which was conducted in the lab.

In the second part of the study, participants arrived at the laboratory in groups of four or five to participate in two group exercises that (combined) took 45–60 min to complete. An experimenter welcomed participants and explained that they would participate in two group exercises during the study session. The experimenter also told participants that they would be asked to provide feedback about their fellow group members at the end of the group exercises. To protect confidentiality and to make participants feel more comfortable evaluating each other, participants wore name tags with a number. This number was used to identify each group member during the study session.

Each group began by completing a “product pitch” exercise, in which they developed a marketing campaign for a product development agency, Innovate. The experimenter explained that Innovate had hired the group to determine which of three recent product ideas would be most successful in mass-market production and to outline a set of ideas to help market the product. Participants received pictures and short descriptions of the products that were based on products selected from the As Seen on TV website. After choosing the best product for mass-market production, the group had to generate at least five potential product names, create at least three different taglines for the product, and prepare a short pitch that included the group’s favorite name and tagline.

After completing the product pitch exercise, participants completed an abridged version of the “Lost in the Desert” exercise. The experimenter informed participants that while flying across the country for a meeting, the group’s plane had crashed somewhere in the Sonoran Desert. Participants learned that their group had survived unharmed, but everyone else on the plane had died. Participants received a list of eight items recovered from the plane that might aid in their survival. Participants first worked by themselves to determine their survival strategy (i.e., whether they would try to walk to find help or to stay by the plane) and to rank the eight items in order of their importance for the group’s survival. After participants privately completed the rankings, the group then engaged in an extended discussion to reach a consensus about its survival strategy and rankings of the eight items.

Once the two group exercises were completed, the experimenter led participants to another experiment room that contained several

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\(^3\) We also conducted contrast analyses to test the potential quadratic effect of strength of emotional response for each type of emotion. There was a nonsignificant quadratic relationship between targets’ levels of guilt proneness and participants’ perceptions of their leadership ability, \( t(233) = 1.73, p = .09 \). There was also a nonsignificant relationship between targets’ levels of shame proneness and participants’ perceptions of their leadership ability, \( t(233) = -0.04, p = .97 \).

\(^4\) We excluded one group of four participants from the analyses because their study session had to be cut short due to a personal tragedy experienced by the experimenter.
private cubicles. Participants completed a separate evaluation form for each group member as well as a self-evaluation form. The order in which participants rated their fellow group members was randomized, but participants always completed the self-evaluation form last. After completing the evaluations, participants were thanked, debriefed, and paid.

**Measures.**

**Independent variables.** We included two measures of guilt proneness to ensure that the results would generalize across alternative measures of the construct.

**Test of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA–3).** We used the TOSCA–3 (which we described in greater detail in the Study 1 section) as one measure of participants’ tendency to experience guilt (as well as their tendency to experience shame). Unlike in Study 1, participants completed the 16-scenario version of the TOSCA–3 rather than review someone else’s purported responses to it. To calculate an overall score for guilt proneness, we followed the guidelines provided by Tangney and Dearing (2002), which involved averaging the guilt-prone responses across all 16 scenarios (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$).

Because guilt-proneness and shame-proneness scores tend to be correlated, Tangney and colleagues advised controlling for shame proneness in order to distinguish the unique effects of guilt proneness (Tangney et al., 1992, 1996). Therefore, we averaged the shame-prone responses from the TOSCA–3 to create an overall measure of shame proneness (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .83$), which we included as a control variable in our analyses.

**The Guilt- and Shame-Proneness Scale (GASP).** Similar to the TOSCA–3, the GASP is a scenario-based measure (Cohen et al., 2011) that consists of four 4-item subscales—two guilt-proneness subscales and two shame-proneness subscales. One criticism of the TOSCA–3 is that it confounds emotional and behavioral responses to wrongdoing (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, individuals have the potential to score high on the TOSCA–3 if they tend to feel bad about their negative behavior or if they seek to amend their wrongdoings rather than to avoid acknowledging them. The GASP disambiguates the emotional and behavioral components of guilt proneness by providing two subscales for guilt proneness. The Guilt: Negative Behavior Evaluation subscale captures the affective component of guilt proneness, whereas the Guilt: Repair subscale captures the behavioral component of guilt proneness. The GASP also includes two shame-proneness subscales. The Shame: Negative Self Evaluation subscale captures the affective component of shame proneness, whereas the Shame: Withdrawal subscale captures the behavioral component of shame proneness.

For each item of the GASP, participants read about a situation and a common response to it. The situation and responses that an item describes vary depending on which of the four subscales the item is designed to capture. For instance, for one of the Guilt: Negative Behavior Evaluation items, participants read, “You lie to people, but they never find out about it.” Participants are then asked, “What is the likelihood that you would feel terrible about the lies you told?” As another example, for one of the Guilt: Repair items, participants read, “You reveal a friend’s secret, though your friend never finds out.” Participants are then asked, “What is the likelihood that your failure to keep the secret would lead you to exert extra effort to keep secrets in the future?” Participants responded to each item on a 7-point scale (1 = very unlikely and 7 = very likely). Following the guidelines set forth by Cohen et al. (2011), we averaged participants’ responses to the four items in each of the four subscales to create overall measures of Guilt: Negative Behavior Evaluation (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$), Guilt: Repair (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .70$), Shame: Negative Self-Evaluation (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .68$), and Shame: Withdrawal (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .70$).

Although the correlation between the Guilt: Negative Behavior Evaluation subscale and the Guilt: Repair subscale tends to be high, Cohen et al. (2011) recommended keeping the subscales separate instead of combining them. This is because the Guilt: Negative Behavior Evaluation subscale captures peoples’ emotional disposition and the Guilt: Repair subscale captures individ-
uals’ behavior tendencies. Similarly, Cohen et al. (2011) recommended treating the Shame: Negative Self-Evaluation and Shame: Withdrawal subscales as two separate scales. Cohen et al. (2011) did not recommend controlling for the two shame-proneness subscales when assessing the relationships among an outcome variable and the two guilt-proneness subscales, and vice versa. Therefore, we separately analyzed the relationship between leader emergence and the two guilt-proneness subscales and leader emergence and the two shame-proneness subscales.

**Dependent variable: Leadership emergence.** To measure leadership emergence, we asked each participant to rate each member in the group on the extent to which he or she engaged in leadership behaviors during the task. Previous research on emergent leadership has shown that leaders and nonleaders are identified by their behavior in groups (Cronshaw & Lord, 1987; Kellett et al., 2002; Lord et al., 1984). According to this perspective, the extent to which an individual engages in task-focused behaviors such as coordinating the group’s activities, synthesizing the group’s ideas, and directing the group’s goals determines whether an individual emerges as an informal leader of a group (Cronshaw & Lord, 1987; Kellett et al., 2002; Lord et al., 1984). Following this characterization of emergent leadership, we generated several items to assess the extent to which an individual engaged in emergent leadership behaviors. Specifically, participants indicated the extent to which each of their fellow group members: (a) assumed a leadership role; (b) influenced the group’s decisions; (c) led the conversation in the group; (d) engaged in the task; (e) facilitated conversation in the group; and (f) took charge of the task. We also asked participants to indicate the extent to which each group member was (g) someone they would want to lead their group. Participants responded to each item using a 5-point scale (1 = not at all and 5 = extremely, Cronbach’s α = .96).

Given our round-robin design (every member of the group rated all the other members of the group), we created a social relations model (SRM) using the Triple R software program for R (Schönbrodt, Back, & Schmukle, in press, see Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006, for similar approaches). An SRM allowed us to determine the extent to which groups were in agreement about which members engaged (and did not engage) in emergent leadership behaviors (see Kenny & La Voie, 1984). An SRM takes into account the interdependent nature of social relations and breaks down the variance of dyadic and intergroup judgments into three different components. That is, an SRM accounts for three types of effects that could influence participants’ ratings of their group members’ emergent leadership behaviors: (a) perceiver effects: the tendency for a rater to see (or not see) others as engaging in leadership behaviors; (b) target effects: the tendency for a target to be seen by his or her group members as engaging (or not engaging) in emergent leadership behaviors; (c) relationship effects: the tendency for two raters to influence each other’s ratings.

Target effects measure the extent to which groups agreed about which group members engaged in emergent leadership behaviors and which group members did not. The target effect accounted for 32% of the variance in judgments of emergent leadership, which was highly significant (p < .001). Thus, there was significant agreement among group members about which group members engaged in emergent leadership behaviors and which group members did not (see Kenny & La Voie, 1984).

An SRM also calculates a relative target score for each participant, which indicates the extent to which the participant was seen as having engaged in emergent leadership behaviors. Higher relative target scores indicate that the participant was seen as having strongly engaged in emergent leadership behaviors whereas lower relative target scores indicate the participant was seen as having weakly engaged in emergent leadership behaviors. These relative target scores served as our measure of emergent leadership.

**Control variables.** We included several control variables that could provide alternative accounts of the proposed relationship between guilt proneness and leader emergence. We controlled for participants’ Big Five personality traits (i.e., conscientiousness, extraversion, emotional stability, openness, and agreeableness) because these traits have been linked to leadership behaviors in previous research (see Judge et al., 2002). We assessed each of the Big Five personality traits with its eight-item subscale from the BFI that we described in Study 1 (John & Srivastava, 1999). The overall reliability for each of the five subscales was acceptable (see Table 1).

We also controlled for whether participants were nonnative English speakers as well as participants’ gender and familiarity with others in the group (i.e., the extent to which their fellow group members knew them prior to the study session). Participants reported how well they knew each of their fellow group members using a 5-point scale (1 = not at all and 5 = extremely). We averaged the familiarity ratings each participant received to create an overall measure of his or her familiarity in the group.

**Results**

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables are presented in Table 1.

We conducted a series of hierarchical regression analyses to test the prediction that guilt proneness would be positively related to emergent leadership. Because the relative target scores that Triple R calculated for our emergent leadership variable are statistically independent of group membership, they are acceptable to use for linear regression (see Kenny & La Voie, 1984). Our first analysis tested the relationship between emergent leadership and the TOSCA–3’s measure of guilt proneness. Our second analysis assessed the relation between emergent leadership and the Guilt: Negative Behavior Evaluation and Guilt: Repair subscales of the GASP. In each analysis, we first mean-centered the continuous variables. We then entered the control variables on the first step and the guilt-proneness measure(s) on the second step. Results from these analyses are presented in Table 2.

As can be seen in Model 2 in Table 2, TOSCA–3 guilt proneness was positively and significantly related to emergent leadership. That is, the greater a participant’s proneness to feel guilt, the more
Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability Coefficients, and Correlations Among Study Variables (Study 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Emergent leadership behaviors</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>.96</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Extraversion</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Emotional stability</td>
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<td>0.80</td>
<td>.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Gender</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Nonnative English speaker</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Familiarity in group</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.40</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Shame proneness (TOSCA)</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Guilt proneness (TOSCA)</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Guilt: Negative behavior evaluation (GASP)</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Shame: Negative behavior evaluation (GASP)</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 144 (listwise deletion). Emergent leadership behaviors variable is the relative target variance from the SRM, which is mean-centered. Gender: 0 = man, 1 = woman. Nonnative English speaker: 0 = native English speaker, 1 = nonnative English speaker. TOSCA = Test of Self-Conscious Affect; GASP = Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale.

likely he or she was to emerge as a leader in the eyes of his or her fellow group members.7

A similar finding emerges with the Guilt: Negative Behavior Evaluation subscale of the GASP. The greater participants’ tendency to feel bad about their negative behaviors, the more they were perceived by other group members to have engaged in emergent leadership behaviors during the tasks (see Model 3, Table 2).

Whereas the Guilt: Negative Behavior Evaluation subscale of the GASP was positively and significantly related to emergent leadership, the Guilt: Repair subscale of the GASP was not (see Model 3, Table 2). Thus, it seems that the affective component of guilt (i.e., the tendency to feel bad about one’s negative actions) relates more strongly to leadership emergence than does the behavioral component (i.e., the tendency to take reparative action).

We found a marginally significant negative relationship between emergent leadership behaviors and the TOSCA–3 measure of shame proneness (see Model 2, Table 2) and no relationship between emergent leadership behaviors and either of the GASP shame-proneness subscales (see Model 4, Table 2). The lack of a positive relationship between shame proneness and emergent leadership further supports our contention that leadership is positively related to guilt proneness specifically and not a more general propensity to have a strong emotional reaction to personal transgressions.

Discussion

The results of Study 2 show a positive relationship between guilt proneness and leadership emergence. Across two different measures of guilt proneness, we found that participants who were highly guilt prone were more likely than participants who were slightly guilt prone to engage in emergent leadership behaviors such as taking charge of the task and leading the group’s conversation. Moreover, we found that it is the affective component of guilt proneness (i.e., the tendency for individuals to feel bad about their negative behavior) and not the behavioral component of guilt proneness that relates positively to emergent leadership. Thus, it is not simply the behavioral approach tendencies of guilt proneness that account for the positive relationship between guilt proneness and leadership.

The results of the first two studies show that guilt-prone individuals are seen as good leaders and emerge more frequently as leaders, but do they also have the potential to be more effective leaders? We addressed this question in Study 3 by examining the relationship between guilt proneness and judgments of leadership effectiveness using a sample of young managers. We also tested our prediction that

7 We again tested whether there was a significant quadratic relationship between guilt proneness and leadership. We regressed participants’ relative target score on the emergent leadership variable on the control variables, guilt proneness, and a quadratic guilt-proneness term. No significant quadratic relationship emerged between the TOSCA–3 measure of guilt proneness (B = 0.11, SE = 0.09, t(117) = 1.30, p = .20); the Guilt: Negative Behavior Evaluation subscale of the GASP (B = 0.01, SE = 0.02), t(117) = 0.40, p = .69; or the Guilt: Repair subscale of the GASP (B = 0.01, SE = 0.03), t(117) = .31, p = .76. As a note, the results remain materially unchanged when k – 1 dummy variables for group membership are included in the regression analysis.
Table 2  
Hierarchical Linear Regression Analyses Predicting Emergent Leadership Behaviors (Study 2)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional stability</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonnative English speaker</td>
<td>-.32**</td>
<td>-.32**</td>
<td>-.34**</td>
<td>-.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity in group</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame proneness (TOSCA)</td>
<td>-.21†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt proneness (TOSCA)</td>
<td>.26†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt: Negative behavior evaluation (GASP)</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt: Repair (GASP)</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame: Negative self-evaluation (GASP)</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame: Withdrawal (GASP)</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F statistic (adjusted)</td>
<td>2.28†</td>
<td>2.44†</td>
<td>2.60**</td>
<td>1.922†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R² (adjusted)</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 144 (listwise deletion). Values represent standardized beta coefficients. Gender: 0 = man, 1 = woman. Nonnative English speaker: 0 = native English speaker, 1 = nonnative English speaker. TOSCA = Test of Self-Conscious Affect; GASP = Guilt- and Shame-Proneness Scale.

Study 3

In Study 3, we examined the relationship between guilt proneness and leader effectiveness using a sample of students who were pursuing a master’s degree in business administration (M.B.A.) and who were rated by their supervisors, direct reports, peers, and clients on their leadership effectiveness prior to starting their M.B.A. program. We separately surveyed this group of individuals about their guilt proneness and other personality traits and then used these responses to predict ratings of their leadership effectiveness. Further, we investigated the possible mediating role of sense of responsibility for others in the relationship between guilt proneness and leader effectiveness.

Method

Participants. Our sample consisted of first-year M.B.A. students enrolled in a major U.S. business school. We contacted 194 students via e-mail. Of these students, 141 agreed to participate for an overall response rate of 73%. Two participants had not received any ratings from their supervisors, co-workers, clients, and peers and so were omitted from the analysis. Thus, the overall sample consisted of 139 individuals (89 men, 50 women; Mъage = 26.89). Participants were not paid for their participation. However, as an incentive, we entered participants into a drawing from which three individuals were selected at random to receive a 16GB Apple iPad.

Procedure. To test our hypotheses, we developed a web-based survey that included measures of dispositional self-conscious affect, sense of responsibility to others, and Big Five personality traits. These measures are described in greater detail later. Participants also answered questions about their demographic characteristics.

First-year M.B.A. students received an e-mail inviting them to participate in an online research study. The e-mail contained a brief description of the study (i.e., “We are interested in personality and work experiences . . .”) and a link to the online study materials. We assured the students in both the recruitment materials and throughout the questionnaire that their responses would remain confidential.

To assess participants’ leadership effectiveness, we obtained archived records of their 360° leadership evaluations, which were conducted by a leadership center on campus. These 360° evaluations refer to multirater feedback—a form of assessment and evaluation often used by human resource departments to gain feedback about employees. The idea is that colleagues at different hierarchical levels rate a focal employee (e.g., peers, direct reports, managers) to provide a more informed assessment. The leadership center developed the leadership assessment tool for use in their M.B.A. and Executive Education programs (for a similar approach, see Ames and Flynn, 2007). Prior to the start of their first year of the M.B.A. program, students were asked to select at least five (and up to 10) supervisors, direct reports, clients, or peers to rate them on their leadership ability.8 Although participants were not told specifically whom they should ask to evaluate them, they were told to select individuals who could provide an accurate, honest, and thorough assessment of their leadership skills. Students provided contact information for their evaluators to a representative of the business school. Evaluators received an e-mail from the school that described the evaluation and the process for completing it online. Evaluators were informed that the ratings would be confidential, would be used for developmental purposes (they will not impact students’ grades or standing at the school), and should be made as honestly and accurately as possible. Whereas students never saw their evaluators’ individual evaluations, they did receive a composite of their ratings across evaluators.

Measures.

Independent variables.

Guilt proneness. We used the 16-scenario TOSCA-3 to assess participants’ predisposition to experience guilt (Cronbach’s α = .73) and shame (Cronbach’s α = .74).

Sense of responsibility for others. We generated five items to capture participants’ feelings of responsibility for others. In particular, we asked participants to respond to the following items on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree): (a) “I feel a great deal of responsibility for the people I work with”; (b) “I see it as my duty to make sure that my group succeeds”; (c) “I am always thinking about how my actions will affect others”; (d) “I feel personally accountable if my group is not doing well”; and (e) “I am usually more concerned about the group’s success than

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8 The mean number of raters per participant was 7.53 and the median number of raters was seven. The number of raters per participant ranged from three to 28.
my own.” We averaged participants’ responses to these five items to create an overall measure of sense of responsibility for others (Cronbach’s α = .77).

Dependent variable: Leader effectiveness. We measured leader effectiveness with 16 items from the participants’ 360° feedback that captured important facets of leader effectiveness, including the ability to achieve results, manage others, manage oneself, and communicate effectively (see Ames & Flynn, 2007, for a similar approach). The full list of items is presented in the Appendix. For each item, raters indicated the frequency with which the target exhibited the trait on a 7-point scale (1 = never and 7 = always). Because multiple raters evaluated each participant, we averaged the raters’ responses to each item to create an overall score for that particular item. To justify aggregating raters’ responses, we calculated the $r_{wg}$ (within-group interrater reliability) to assess the degree of interrater agreement (James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1984, 1993; LeBreton & Senter, 2008). The $r_{wg}$ measure is a common method for assessing interrater agreement, although it is not without its critics (LeBreton & Senter, 2008). Nevertheless, compared with the one-way random effects intraclass correlation coefficient, $r_{wg}$ is better able to handle an unequal number of raters. The median $r_{wg}$ rating was .72, suggesting a sufficient level of agreement among raters to justify aggregating across raters’ responses (James et al., 1984, 1993; LeBreton & Senter, 2008). Therefore, following previous research (Ames & Flynn, 2007), we created an overall measure of leader effectiveness by averaging scores on all 16 items (Cronbach’s α = .93).

Because the leadership measure was obtained from an archival source and is not a previously validated scale, we sought to provide evidence of the measure’s validity. To provide evidence of convergent validity, we assessed its relationship with a similar measure of leadership effectiveness used by Ames and Flynn (2007) and with the transformational leadership subscale of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ; Bass & Avolio, 1997), which is one of the most commonly used leadership assessment tools (intended to capture effective and transformational leadership). We surveyed 91 working adults from an online participant pool maintained by a behavioral research lab at the same university attended by the M.B.A. students. Participants were asked to think of their direct supervisor and to rate him or her on three measures: our measure of leadership effectiveness, the measure used by Ames and Flynn (2007), and the transformational leadership subscale of the MLQ 5X Short (Bass & Avolio, 2000). Overall scores on all three measures were highly correlated. Of importance, our measure of leadership correlated positively and significantly with the transformational leadership subscale of the MLQ, $r = .86$, $p < .001$, and with the leadership measure from Ames and Flynn (2007), $r = .82$, $p < .001$.

To provide evidence of predictive validity, we assessed whether our measure of leadership effectiveness could predict which M.B.A. students were selected to serve as leadership fellows in the second year of the M.B.A. program. The leadership fellows are recognized as high-potential M.B.A. students who are selected to spend two quarters during their second year mentoring and coaching first-year M.B.A. students. The selection process to become a leadership fellow is comprehensive. A set of executive coaches and faculty members observe the candidates in a simulated team meeting, listen to them present a short talk about their past experiences and personal attributes, and evaluate them in a mock coaching interaction. We obtained a list of students from two consecutive school years who were selected to serve as leadership fellows. We also obtained scores on our leadership effectiveness measure for all the students in these two cohorts. We ran a logistic regression in which we used M.B.A. students’ scores on our measure of leadership to predict which students were selected to serve as leadership fellows. The results showed that an M.B.A. student’s score on our measure of leadership positively and significantly predicted whether he or she was selected as a leadership fellow, $B = 0.49$, $SE = 0.22$, Wald = 4.98, $p = .026$.

Control variables. We again sought to control for other personality traits. Specifically, we controlled for extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness, and agreeableness, using the same measures described in Study 2. The overall reliability for each of the subscales was acceptable (see Table 3). We also controlled for participants’ gender as we did in Study 2.

We wanted to control for participants’ intelligence to rule out the possibility that guilt-prone individuals are seen as having the potential to be more effective leaders because they are more intelligent. To this end, we contacted each participant to request permission to obtain his or her Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) scores from the office of academic operations after he or she completed the survey. Of the 141 participants, 124 agreed to let us use their score, 17 participants did not respond to our request, and zero participants explicitly stated that we could not use the score. We collected scores only for the 124 participants who gave us explicit permission to do so.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables are reported in Table 3. We used hierarchical linear regression for our analysis. We entered the control variables on the first step of the regression and then entered the predictor variables on the second step (all continuous measures were mean centered to reduce issues of multicollinearity).

Guilt proneness and leader effectiveness. To test our main hypothesis that guilt proneness would be positively related to leader effectiveness, we regressed ratings of leader effectiveness on the control variables (entered on the first step) and guilt proneness (entered on the second step). Consistent with our prediction, results from Model 2 (Table 4) show that an individual’s tendency to feel guilt (i.e., guilt proneness) is positively associated with judgments of his or her effectiveness as a leader.11

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9 A factor analysis showed that all of the items loaded on a single factor with an eigenvalue of 2.67, which accounted for 53.37% of the variance.

10 A factor analysis showed that all of the items loaded on a single factor with an eigenvalue of 8.21, which accounted for 51.29% of the variance. The one reverse had a higher factor loading on its own factor than it did on the overall factor of leadership, most likely because it was reverse coded. Because it also loaded on the overall factor of leadership, we retained the one-factor solution.

11 We again tested whether there was a significant quadratic relationship between guilt proneness and leadership. We regressed the measure of leader effectiveness on the control variables, guilt proneness and a quadratic guilt-proneness variable. No evidence emerged for a quadratic relationship between guilt proneness and leadership, ($B = -0.11$, $SE = 0.11$), $t(110) = -1.94$, $p = .35$. 
Guilt proneness and sense of responsibility for others. To test our prediction that guilt proneness would be positively related to sense of responsibility for others, we regressed sense of responsibility for others on the control variables (entered on the first step) and guilt proneness (entered on the second step). Guilt proneness was positively and significantly related to sense of responsibility for others (see Model 6 in Table 4), which supports our prediction that highly guilt-prone people tend to feel a greater sense of responsibility for the welfare of others than do less guilt-prone people.

Sense of responsibility for others and leader effectiveness. To test our prediction that sense of responsibility for others and leader effectiveness are positively related, we regressed leader effectiveness on the control variables (entered on the first step) and sense of responsibility for others (entered on the second step). As shown in Model 3 (Table 4), this hypothesis was supported: an individual’s general sense of responsibility for others was positively related to his or her leadership effectiveness, as evaluated by his or her colleagues, direct reports, and supervisors.

The mediating role of sense of responsibility for others. As can be seen in Model 4 (Table 4), when ratings of participants’ leadership effectiveness were regressed on participants’ guilt proneness and sense of responsibility for others, sense of responsibility for others remained a positive and significant predictor of leadership effectiveness, whereas guilt proneness became only a non-significant predictor (see Baron & Kenny, 1986). We used a bootstrap procedure to test the magnitude of the indirect effect of guilt proneness on judgments of leadership effectiveness through sense of responsibility for others (see Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). In support of our mediational account, the coefficient for the indirect effect of guilt proneness on leadership effectiveness through sense of responsibility to others was .09, and the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval ranged from .01 to .21 (1,000 bootstrap resamples). Given that the range does not include zero, we can conclude that the positive relationship between guilt proneness and leader effectiveness is mediated by sense of responsibility to others.12

General Discussion

What makes a leader? Personality researchers have attempted to answer this question for more than a century (Cowley, 1931; Judge et al., 2002; Stogdill, 1948; Terman, 1904), studying various traits, skills, and behaviors that may be related to leadership attributes, emergence, and effectiveness. Interest in identifying leaders persists, in part, because in these difficult economic and social times, concerns about “leadership crises,” “leadership voids,” and “leadership vacuums” remain strong.

Given that positive affectivity continually emerges as a positive antecedent of leadership (Bono & Ilies, 2006; George, 1995; Rubin et al., 2005), one might expect that individuals who are prone to experience positive emotions would be the most preferred and capable leaders. Indeed, we do not doubt the intuitive link between positive affectivity and leader effectiveness. That said, we found that proneness to experience guilt—a dysphoric emotion—is also positively and significantly related to leadership. Across three studies and three different measures of leadership, we found that individuals who are prone to experience guilt are more likely to be perceived as good leaders (Study 1), to emerge as leaders (Study 2), and to be judged as more effective in their leadership roles by their colleagues, clients, and supervisors (Study 3). Further, we found that a sense of responsibility for others underlies the link between guilt proneness and leader effectiveness.

Theoretical Contributions

The present work expands our understanding of the functional aspects of guilt proneness by showing that it not only promotes positive interpersonal behaviors such as forgiveness and reconciliation but also propels people to positions of greater status and social influence. We find that lay observers, group members, and work colleagues perceive more guilt-prone individuals to be better leaders than their less guilt-prone counterparts. This implies that the manner in which individuals respond to their mistakes and transgressions influences perceptions of the status they deserve. The positive association between guilt proneness and leader effectiveness suggests that individuals who are more prone to experience guilt may be better suited to represent or advocate for their group’s collective

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12 A Sobel test also confirmed that the reduction in variance of leadership effectiveness that was explained by guilt proneness was significantly reduced when we controlled for participants’ sense of responsibility for others, $z = 2.38, p = .017$. 

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Note. $N = 139$ (listwise deletion). Gender: 0 = man, 1 = woman. GMAT = Graduate Management Admission Test. TOSCA = Test of Self-Conscious Affect.

† $p < .10$. ‡ $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. 

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations Among Study Variables (Study 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>5</th>
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<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Leadership effectiveness</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Conscientiousness</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.15†</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Extraversion</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.17†</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Emotional Stability</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.34**</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Openness</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>−.03</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.15†</td>
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<td>6. Agreeableness</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.08</td>
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<td>7. GMAT score</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>−.14</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>−.61</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>−.12</td>
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<td>8. Gender</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>−.01</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>−.19</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>−.08</td>
<td>−.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Sense of responsibility for others</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>−.30**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>−.14**</td>
<td>−.14</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Shame proneness (TOSCA)</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>−.06</td>
<td>−.19*</td>
<td>−.27*</td>
<td>−.31**</td>
<td>−.14</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.24*</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Guilt proneness (TOSCA)</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td>−.07</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>−.11**</td>
<td>−.11</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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interests than individuals who are less prone to experience guilt. Thus, the present findings lay the foundation for future work on the relationships among self-conscious emotions, social status, and the creation and maintenance of social hierarchies.

The present work also advances the trait approach to leadership. First, it reveals an important exception to the general findings that negative affect impairs leadership (Bono & Ilies, 2006; George, 1995; Staw & Barsade, 1993; Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994). Although guilt is a negative emotion that people seek to alleviate, the behaviors that people undertake to reduce or prevent feelings of guilt (e.g., apologizing for their past mistakes, helping people they have harmed) may be the marks of great leadership. The relationship between guilt proneness and leadership appears to be about guilt proneness per se as the relationship exists while other traits, such as conscientiousness and emotional stability, are controlled. The present findings do not necessarily counter or undermine previous work on trait approaches to leadership, but rather refine general assumptions about the relation between negative affect and leadership.

Our results highlight the important role that a sense of responsibility for others can play in theorizing about leadership. Leaders often are motivated to set aside their own self-interest for the betterment of the collective (De Cremer, 2002; De Cremer et al., 2009), and to take responsibility for the missteps of their subordinates (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998). The present work underscores the powerful link between feelings of responsibility for others and leader effectiveness, while showing that this sense of responsibility for others can be enhanced or diminished by individual traits such as guilt proneness. Whereas guilt proneness is not the only trait that enhances people’s sense of responsibility for others, it may be uniquely suited to effective leadership. For instance, whereas shame proneness was also positively related to a sense of responsibility for others in Study 3, it did not relate to leadership. In the future, researchers could investigate whether other traits that are related to a sense of responsibility for others such as regret proneness also lead to effective leadership.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Although we claim that guilt-prone people may be more likely to emerge as leaders, we do not claim that they are highly ambitious. Instead, because guilt-prone individuals feel a great deal of responsibility for others, they may sometimes be loath to “take the lead” on tasks because they are wary of the burden of responsibility. In addition, they are socially sensitive and thus may be reluctant to compete for a leadership role, if doing so requires them to take the reins away from someone else. This would suggest an intriguing paradox in which a guilt-prone individual might possess a natural ability for leadership performance but lack the necessary motivation. To wit, the kind of people who would make outstanding leaders may, in some cases, be reluctant to occupy leadership roles. To further understand the relation between guilt proneness and leadership, researchers should look at whether guilt-prone individuals seek to assume leadership roles with less enthusiasm than their guilt-free counterparts.

Given our focus on guilt proneness as a trait, the question remains whether our findings generalize to momentary experiences of guilt. There are some reasons to believe that state guilt would also be positively related to leadership evaluations. First, we find that the affective component of guilt proneness (i.e., feeling bad about one’s negative behaviors) relates to emergent leadership behaviors. This implies that individuals who momentarily feel bad about their negative behaviors may also feel compelled to take charge of group tasks. Additionally, similar to trait guilt, state guilt appears to enhance people’s sense of responsibility to others; individuals tend to exert greater effort, engage in more collective action, and extend more help to others when they feel guilty than when they do not (Basil et al., 2006; Brockner et al., 1986; Ketelaar & Au, 2003). However, when individuals believe that others are trying to make them feel guilty, they can experience strong feelings of resentment (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995; Brehm, 1966; Coulter & Pinto, 1995). Consequently, inducing guilt in others may make them less inclined to take the lead and...
less effective in their leadership roles. In sum, the relationship between state guilt and leadership likely depends on the source of, and the reason for, an individual’s guilty feelings.

The cross-sectional nature of the data limits some of the conclusions that can be drawn from the present research. In particular, we cannot say much about how guilt-prone individuals behave, or how they are judged, in leadership roles over time. It might be worthwhile in future research to evaluate turnover rates among guilt-prone people in leadership positions. On one hand, guilt-prone individuals may be less likely to leave a leadership role because they have strong feelings of responsibility for their group’s goals and their group’s members. On the other hand, guilt-prone individuals may have more interest in leaving their leadership positions because their keen sense of responsibility for others can become overwhelming when they are asked to take on extensive obligations and duties. It would be helpful to follow leaders over time to see whether the association between guilt proneness and leadership is short lived or not.

As people advance from one level of leadership to the next, their responsibilities become more varied and the people for whom they are responsible become more diverse. One of the primary challenges that leaders face is managing the divergent interests of their followers and getting people to coalesce around a common goal (Hogan et al., 1994). Recent research suggests that individuals who are prone to experience guilt may struggle to manage conflicting interests and opposing responsibilities (de Hooge, Nelissen, Breugelmans, & Zeelenberg, 2011). When individuals were primed to feel guilty, they privileged the welfare of the target of their guilt over the welfare of other relevant individuals (de Hooge et al., 2011). Future research might help to shed light on how guilt-prone leaders resolve conflicting interests and responsibilities.

Finally, although the present research found that guilt-prone individuals were generally preferred and judged to be more effective in their leadership positions, there may be certain situational circumstances that make guilt-prone individuals more or less likely to emerge as leaders and more or less likely to succeed in their leadership positions. In the present work, we studied leadership emergence in the context of group exercises in a behavioral research lab. This is a situation in which group members, on average, have low levels of responsibility for the group’s success because there are no rewards or consequences for the group’s actions. Given that guilt-prone individuals have a greater sense of responsibility than their guilt-free counterparts, they may be especially likely to emerge as leaders when the overall level of felt responsibility is low. However, if the stakes for the group’s success are high, or if other group members are given specific duties, guilt-prone individuals may not be as likely to emerge as leaders because others share their sense of responsibility.

**Conclusion**

We admire great leaders for their courage under fire and their commitment to collective goals. We continue to need great leaders because the times we live in are fraught with difficult and troubling challenges. But who will rise to meet these challenges, and more importantly, who is well equipped to do so? The present research suggests that those who are inclined to feel guilt frequently and intensely may be better suited to assume leadership roles. Although our intuition and past research both suggest that great leaders will be characterized by their positive affective dispositions, the mark of a great leader might also be partly driven by their negative affective disposition. In particular, good leaders are characterized not simply by their ability to do the right thing but by their ability to respond well when they do something wrong.

**References**


Boyle, G. J. (1991). Does item homogeneity indicate internal consistency
or item redundancy in psychometric scales? Personality and Individual Differences, 12, 291–294. doi:10.1016/0191-8869(91)90115-R


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**Appendix**

**Items Used to Measure Leader Effectiveness From Study 3**

1. Consistently tracks key factors to measure progress
2. Exceeds expected results
3. Continuously improves work processes
4. Fosters continuous innovation
5. Motivates others
6. Earns the trust of others
7. Coach others to improve their performance
8. Provides an excellent role model for others
9. Recovers quickly from setbacks and frustrations
10. Expresses emotions productively
11. Struggles with change (reverse coded)
12. Takes responsibility for mistakes
13. Writes persuasively
14. Captivates audience when communicating
15. Uses effective body language when communicating (e.g. facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and gestures)
16. Tailors message to effectively communicate with diverse audiences.

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