The role of guilt in the workplace: Taking stock and moving ahead

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Many popular self-help books dole out advice about how to lead a guilt-free life. On its face, this advice seems appealing. After all, guilt is a dysphoric emotion that most people try to avoid if they can. However, early management scholars proposed that guilt could have a useful purpose, at least in the workplace. In particular, equity theorists claimed that feeling overpaid triggered guilty feelings that, in turn, spurred an increase in work performance (Adams, 1965; Walster, Walster, & Bercheid, 1978). Although intuitively appealing, these overpayment predictions did not bear out in subsequent empirical research. As a result, the notion that guilt could operate as a positive force in work organizations began to lose its appeal (cf. Barker, 1993), prompting one organizational scholar to declare, "The field has basically given up on the fact that guilt can be harnessed into productive work" (Staw, 1984: 637).

Recent advances in the study of self-conscious emotions suggest that the potential positive relationship between guilt and productive work deserves a second look, but from a new vantage point. In this chapter, we synthesize some of these new insights in order to identify a path forward for future research. In particular, we identify three insights that help account for weak findings regarding the role of guilt in explaining important employee outcomes: (1) the experience of guilt (and shame) often has more to do with the person than the situation; (2) guilt can be channeled into productive work to the extent that global negative self-evaluation is minimized; and 3) heterogeneity in standards of worthy behavior can make it difficult to predict to whom, or about what, people feel guilty. We hope that drawing attention to these three insights will help researchers fully realize guilt's potential as a primary construct in organizational behavior theory and research.

The negative self-conscious emotions

Any discussion of guilt tends to include at least some mention of shame. In popular parlance, people use the terms "guilt" and "shame" interchangeably to refer to the same affective experience. However, personality and social psychology researchers carefully distinguish these two dysphoric emotions—noting their clear differences as well as their similarities. As for their similarities, these emotions share much in common. Guilt and shame travel with us throughout our daily lives, whether we want them to or not (Cooley, 1922; Scheff, 1987). Both emotions attune us to social and moral standards and provide immediate, aversive feedback when we fall short of these standards (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney & Fischer, 1995; Tracy, Robins, & Tangney, 2007). A pang of guilt or a sting of shame lets us know that we have hurt someone's feelings or failed to acknowledge a person's contribution to a group's project. These experiences have a basic adaptive social function of encouraging behaviors that promote collective goals and constraining behaviors that do not (Barrett, 1995).

Guilt and shame are founded in social relationships in which people not only interact with others, but evaluate and judge themselves from the perspective of others (Tangney & Fischer, 1995; Tracy et al., 2007). Nevertheless, one's sense of self is central to the experience of self-conscious emotions (Tracy & Robins, 2004). Indeed, self-awareness and self-representations are necessary conditions for the experience of any self-conscious emotion (cf. Buss, 2001, James, 1890; Leary, 2007; Lewis, Sullivan, Stangor, & Weiss, 1989; Lindsay-Hartz, de Rivera, & Mascolo, 1995; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007; Tracy & Robins, 2007). For this reason, guilt and shame are not seen in animals who lack the capacity for self-reflection or in human infants who have not yet acquired the ability to think consciously about themselves (Hart & Karmel, 1996; Leary, 2007). Although self-conscious emotions are

fundamentally social, their experience is not constrained to social situations; they can arise simply when people think about what others think about them (Leith & Baumeister, 1998, James, 1890). This representation of the self from a "meta-aware" viewpoint can evoke these emotions in the privacy and solitude of one's own home (and often, lamentably, when one is trying to fall asleep) (cf. Higgins, 1987).

Guilt, shame, and the regulation of behavior

One might assume that guilt and shame regulate people's behavior in accordance with normative or moral standards because both emotions are aversive experiences that people seek to minimize (cf. Tangney & Dearing, 2002). However, work in social psychology has shown time and again that "shame and guilt are not equally 'moral' emotions" (Tangney et al., 2007). Guilt is positively associated with perspective taking and other-oriented empathy (Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall, & Gramzow, 1996), which can prompt a desire for reconciliation (Jordan, Flynn, & T. Cohen, 2015; Lindsay-Hartz et al., 1995). Because guilt orients people to the impact of their actions on others, it spurs people to behave in ways that support collective goals even at the expense of personal goals (T. Cohen, Panter, & Turan, 2012; Leach, Iyer, & Pedersen, 2006; Wiltermuth & T. Cohen, 2014). Shame, in contrast, disrupts these processes by igniting a painful self-focus that short-circuits people's ability to experience empathy for others (Hoffman, 1984; Tangney, 1991; Tangney, 1995). Moreover, the self-directed hostility associated with shame often morphs into outward hostility as shamed individuals seek to blame others as a means of regaining a sense of control, agency, and self-worth (Tangney, 1995; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, 1992; Tangney et al., 1996). These stark contrasts between shame and guilt lead to opposing effects on moral and ethical behavior (T. Cohen et al., 2012; Tangney et al., 2007). The anticipation of guilt is negatively

associated, and the anticipation of shame is positively associated, with risk-taking and delinquent behaviors among adolescents (Stuewig & Tangney, 2007), lying for personal gain in situations that require cooperation (T. Cohen, 2010), and recidivism rates among previously incarcerated populations (Tangney, Stuewig, & Martinez, 2014). These different correlates of guilt and shame (and a frequent failure to measure the two emotions distinctively) may help explain some of the weak findings surrounding guilt in the workplace.

In line with equity theory, some employees may feel guilty when they are overpaid, when they fail to contribute fairly to a group project, or when they harm a colleague, client, supervisor, or subordinate in the workplace. Such feelings of guilt may even spur the same employees to work harder and to perform better, as scholars have long contended. However, these same experiences can also evoke feelings of shame—leading employees to avoid the problem or to blame others for it rather than working to amend past mistakes. This completely different reaction presents a thorny issue when trying to determine the effects of guilt and shame on productive work: feelings of guilt and shame tend to be highly correlated with each other, but also show divergent correlations with a range of important outcome variables (see Tangney & Dearing, 2002 for a review). To understand how each emotion relates to productive work requires empirically and theoretically distinguishing the two emotions in order to ascertain their unique relationship to a given behavior. The majority of contemporary social psychological research on moral emotions has focused on resolving both of these issues. In the following section, we summarize the key takeaways from this line of research.

Distinguishing guilt and shame: I did a terrible thing vs. I'm a terrible person

Feelings of guilt and shame arise when people have failed, or anticipate failing, to live up to standards of worthy behavior in the eyes of others—either doing something they should not

have done or failing to do something they should have done (Tangney et al. 2007; Tangney & Tracy, 2012). Despite their similarity, these emotions arise from different attributions for a transgression, and prompt different (often opposite) responses (Tracy & Robins, 2006). Shame arises when people attribute the source of their failures to something core and unchangeable about the self; guilt arises when people attribute the source of their failures to a changeable action (Niedenthal, Tangney, & Gavanski, 1994; Tracy & Robins, 2006). Consider an employee who overlooks a deadline and fails to submit a report on time to her boss. If this employee attributes the transgression to her behavior (e.g., I overlooked the deadline because I didn't mark my calendar), she is likely to experience guilt. If she attributes the transgression to something core about herself (e.g., I overlooked the deadline because I am a lazy, unconscientious person), she is likely to experience shame. Because guilt does not involve a negative evaluation of the whole self, it tends to be a less devastating emotional experience than shame (Harder, 1995; Tangney, Wagner, & Gramzow, 1992), and it tends to promote more constructive responses to one's mistakes and misdeeds (see Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney et al., 2007 for reviews).

Guilt and shame relate to separate aspects of agency and control (Tangney, 1995; Tracy & Robins, 2006). In guilt episodes, people focus on what they could have done differently, or what they could do differently in the future (Niedenthal et al., 1994). In shame episodes, people think about how things would be better if they were a different person (Niedenthal et al., 1994). People who experience guilt remain focused on the implications of their actions for others, whereas people who experience shame remain focused on the implications of their actions for their own character (Tangney et al., 2007). Consider an employee who made a mistake in a report that caused a delay in a group project. If this employee were to feel guilt, she might think that she was not careful enough and that she should be more careful in the future. If this same

employee then starts to make internal, stable attributions for this behavior (e.g., "I wasn't careful enough because I am not conscientiousness.") such feelings of guilt transform into more debilitating feelings of shame.

The inward focus associated with shame can be problematic because it prompts people to engage in behaviors that minimize their feelings of self-reproach (Lindsay-Hartz et al., 1995), even if these behaviors are unproductive for themselves or their organization (e.g., avoiding interpersonal interaction or blaming others for their mistakes, Stuewig, Tangney, Heigel, Harty, & McCloskey, 2010; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher et al., 1992). In contrast, guilt is associated with a strong action orientation that motivates people to restore the moral order by amending what they have done wrong or changing their behavior to ensure that no future wrong occurs (Tangney, 1990; Tangney et al., 1995). These two different action orientations correspond to different attributional antecedents (Tracy & Robins, 2006). With guilt, people take action to amend their mistakes because they believe the source of their transgressions is mutable. With shame, people avoid being reminded of their mistakes because they believe the source of their transgression is an immutable feature of their character. Because they can't change "who they are," the "best" route to minimizing shame seems to be removing oneself from situations that are likely to elicit it again (cf. Lindsay-Hartz et al., 1995).

A person-centered perspective on shame and guilt

Whether people experience guilt or shame depends on the attributions they make for the cause of their mistakes and misdeeds. But what leads someone to make more immutable, self-focused attributions (and feel shame) or more mutable, behavior-focused attributions (and feel guilt)? Some scholars suggest that specific features of the transgression or the situation—such as whether individual behavior is private or public—can influence whether people are likely to

experience guilt or shame (Sheff, 2003; Smith, Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002; Wolf, Cohen, Panter, & Insko, 2010). However, this point about public attention has sparked debate. Tangney and Dearing (2002) acknowledge the public perception that "shame is seen as arising from public exposure and disapproval of some shortcoming or transgression, whereas guilt is seen as a more 'private' experience arising from self-generated pangs of conscience" (pg. 14). At the same time, the authors point out that empirical support for this view is weak (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996).

The idea that features of the transgression determine whether people experience guilt or shame has also been controversial. On the hand, Scheff (2003) argued that shame is the primary emotional response to perceptions of low social attention, low social attractiveness, or declining social status, whereas guilt is thought to arise in response to perceived moral transgressions—especially those that relate to harm and fairness violations. People feel guilty when they benefit at the expense of others, or when they inflict harm, loss, distress, or disappoint another person—all factors that can be triggered by situational circumstances (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995a; 1995b). On the other hand, some scholars contend, "[The] type of event has surprisingly little to do with the distinction between shame and guilt" (Tangney et al., 2007, pg. 348). In support of this latter stance, according to contemporary views of guilt and shame in personality psychology, the experience of these emotions may have more to do with the characteristics of the person than with the characteristics of the situation (see Tangney, 1991; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Faced with the same transgression, some people tend to experience shame, some people tend to experience guilt, some people tend to experience both emotions, and some people tend to experience neither. These general tendencies reflect one's overall "moral

affectivity"—the extent to which an individual is guilt-prone and shame-prone (T. Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011; Tangney, 1990; Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

Guilt proneness and shame proneness are similar to positive and negative affectivity insofar as they capture general tendencies, or individual differences, in an affective propensity (T. Cohen et al., 2011; Tangney, 1990). They reflect people's dispositions across time and across situations to feel and anticipate guilt or shame, rather than people's moment-to-moment (or state) experiences of these emotions. Another similarity to positive and negative affectivity is the fact that guilt-proneness and shame-proneness emerge early in life. They may arise in part from early interactions with one's immediate caregiver, eventually stabilizing across the lifespan as behavioral patterns (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Indeed, a person's level of guilt proneness at age 12 predicts his or her level of guilt proneness at age 18 (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Moreover, a study of 83 monozygotic and 78 dizygotic twins revealed a stronger genetic (than environment) component for shame and a stronger environment (than genetic) component for guilt (Zahn-Waxler & Robinson, 1995).

Together, these findings provide compelling evidence that guilt and shame spring from deep-rooted dispositional drivers. To be clear, this does not mean that state self-conscious emotions are unimportant. On the contrary, when it comes to self-conscious emotion, personality is far from destiny. In this summary, we choose to highlight the person-centered approach for understanding self-conscious emotions in order to identify the key ways in which our affective dispositions prime us to experience (or not to experience) certain state emotions throughout our daily lives.

Empirical approaches to assessing guilt proneness and shame proneness

The preceding sections have summarized the social psychological perspectives on the distinctions between guilt and shame and the person-centered drivers of these emotions. These theoretical insights have formed the basis for contemporary measures of guilt and shame. The Test of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA) (Tangney 1990; Tangney & Dearing, 2002), which shows high levels of predictive, discriminant, and convergent validity is the most widely used measure aimed at capturing an individual's dispositional proneness toward guilt and shame. To separately account for guilt and shame, the TOSCA includes unique items designed to measure each. Various versions of the TOSCA are used in clinical psychiatric settings, social psychological studies, and organizational research (e.g., Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012; Sanftner, Barlow, Marshall, & Tangney, 1995; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher et al., 1992).

The TOSCA includes 16 brief scenarios, each describing routine personal experiences that may evoke feelings of guilt, shame, or some combination thereof. Respondents report how they would react to each of these scenarios. For example, one scenario reads, "You are driving down the road and you hit a small animal." The two items associated with this scenario are "You would think 'I'm terrible'" (shame-prone) and "You'd feel bad you hadn't been more alert driving down the road" (guilt-prone). For each scenario, respondents indicate their likelihood of responding both in a guilt-prone way and a shame-prone way. Shame proneness and guilt proneness scores are calculated by taking an average across the 16 shame-prone and 16 guilt-prone responses, respectively. This approach allows for shame proneness and guilt proneness to be orthogonal so that someone could be high in guilt proneness or high in shame proneness, high in one of these affective dispositions and low in the other, or low in both.

To determine the unique correlates of guilt proneness and shame proneness, it is common practice to measure and control for the other moral affectivity when assessing the relationship

between either guilt proneness or shame proneness and an outcome variable (see Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012; Schaumberg & Flynn, 2012 as examples). Another approach is to generate measures of shame-free guilt and guilt-free shame (Tangney, 1990; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). These measures are achieved by regressing shame proneness on guilt proneness and using the residuals as a measure of guilt-free shame and regressing guilt proneness on shame proneness and using the residual as a measure of shame-free guilt.

The development of the TOSCA has been instrumental for delineating the unique effects of guilt proneness and shame proneness (see Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney et al., 2007 for reviews), but it is not without its critics (e.g., T. Cohen et al., 2011). The Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (GASP) was developed to address some of the perceived shortcomings with the TOSCA, namely the fact that the TOSCA does not separate the attributional antecedents and action tendencies of guilt and shame (see T. Cohen et al., 2011). The GASP is similar to the TOSCA in that it is a scenario-based measure designed to assess people's proneness to guilt and shame. It is different from the TOSCA in that it aims to produce four subscales corresponding to negative behavior evaluation, negative self-evaluation, repair motivation, and avoidance motivation. According to the authors, the negative behavior-evaluation subscale is considered indicative of guilt proneness, and it is often used as a stand-alone measure separate from the full GASP scale (see T. Cohen et al., 2012; Wiltermuth & T. Cohen, 2014). Indeed, Cohen and colleagues now recommend a revised and expanded edition of this scale as a measure of guilt proneness (T. Cohen, Kim, & Panter, 2014). The other scales have been used less widely, but provide useful means for teasing apart the components of shame proneness and guilt proneness.

Guilt proneness, shame proneness, and productive work behaviors

The person-centered perspective on guilt and shame provides an updated answer to the question: Can guilt be channeled into productive work? Rather than assume that state guilt is universally experienced to the same degree (by all individuals), recent research suggests that people's proneness to experience guilt and shame—as traits—can better account for a range of employee outcomes such as ethical behavior, job performance, leadership effectiveness, and conflict management skills.

Prosocial and ethical behavior

The relationship between guilt proneness and shame proneness and prosocial and ethical behavior has been explored at length in previous research, some of which we have already described (and has been reviewed elsewhere, see T. Cohen & Morse, 2014; T. Cohen et al., 2012; Tangney et al., 2007). We note two of the most prominent themes to emerge from this work. The first is that high guilt-prone individuals are some of the most moral and cooperative members of society (T. Cohen et al., 2014; T. Cohen & Morse, 2014). The second is that shame and guilt are not equally moral emotions (Tangney et al., 2007). In a diverse set of populations including teenagers, inmates, and working adults, guilt proneness shows strong, negative relationships with antisocial and risk-taking behaviors (Steuwig & Tangney, 2007). As one example, a person's level of guilt proneness at age 12 is negatively associated with their tendency to engage in unprotected sex or to abuse drugs during their teenage years (Dearing, Stuewig, & Tangney, 2005). As another example, in a longitudinal study of incarcerated adults, guilt proneness assessed shortly after incarceration negatively predicted recidivism and substance abuse in the year following one's release (Tangney et al., 2014). As a final example, guilt proneness related positively to organizational citizenship behavior and negatively to counterproductive work behaviors in a diverse sample of working adults (T. Cohen et al., 2014).

In contrast, in each of the above studies, shame proneness showed either a positive relationship or no relationship to antisocial or risk-taking behaviors.

Task effort and job performance

Guilt proneness is positively related to task effort and job performance (Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012; Schaumberg, Chavez, Merritt, & Flynn, 2016). High guilt-prone employees exert greater effort at their job-related tasks and perform better than their low guilt-prone counterparts—over and above other established predictors such as the Big Five personality traits (Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012; Schaumberg et al., 2016). This enhanced effort translates into higher performance both in terms of employees' end-of-the-year performance appraisals as well as more objective, anonymous evaluations of their contributions (Schaumberg et al., 2016). In one study, Workers from Amazon Mechanical Turk were recruited to complete a standard measure of guilt proneness. Their guilt proneness scores predicted Workers' lifetime approval ratings across all tasks they had completed for previous "employers" on the crowd-sourcing website: Workers with higher levels of guilt proneness had higher lifetime worker approval ratings than did Workers with lower levels of guilt proneness (Schaumberg et al. 2016).

The story with shame is different. Unlike anticipated feelings of guilt, anticipated feelings of shame motivate people to avoid shame-inducing situations, which may lead them to lessen their task effort on challenging tasks rather than "double down" and work harder. High shame-prone people are more likely than low shame-prone people to make stable, internal attributions for their poor behavior. If they fail to achieve a performance objective, a high shame-prone person is inclined to think, "I'm a terrible worker," or "I'm terrible at this task." Because they attribute their failures to something immutable about themselves, they do not believe they can change their actions to produce better outcomes. From the high shame-prone person's

perspective, the "best" option to reduce or avoid future feelings of shame is to avoid the tasks they have performed poorly. As a result, unlike guilt proneness, shame proneness tends to be negatively related (or, at best, unrelated) to task effort and task performance (Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012; Schaumberg et al., 2016).

Leadership

When people think about the traits that predispose people to be good leaders, guilt is probably not the first trait that comes to mind. Nevertheless, high guilt-prone individuals may be effective leaders because they have a strong sense of responsibility for the welfare and socioemotional needs of others. They also have a strong sense of agency to act on their felt responsibility. High shame-prone individuals may also feel responsibility for others, but because they lack a sense of agency, they avoid these responsibilities. In line with these ideas, guilt proneness was positively related to peer and supervisor judgments of leadership ability, whereas shame proneness was either negatively related or unrelated to these judgments (Schaumberg & Flynn, 2012). Moreover, people rated high guilt prone behaviors as being more indicative of good leadership relative to low guilt prone behaviors, but they did not express the same view toward shame-prone behaviors (Schaumberg & Flynn, 2012).

In a separate study by Schaumberg and Flynn (2012), guilt-prone people were more likely to emerge as leaders in situations where leadership was needed but no one had been designated to serve as a leader. In a pair of leaderless tasks in which small groups were expected to collaborate and generate solutions to a challenging problem, high guilt-prone individuals were more likely to assume control of the group, provide direction, and steer the group toward a successful outcome than were less-guilt prone individuals (Schaumberg & Flynn, 2012). It may be that this willingness to assume an informal leadership role was borne from feelings of duty

and obligation ("If no one else will do this, I guess I'll have to do it"), rather than ambition. Future research is needed to clarify this point—whether guilt prone people are effective, but reluctant leaders.

Negotiation and conflict management

Guilt proneness is associated with positive conflict management skills such as perspective taking, forgiveness, and reconciliation (Covert, Tangney, Maddux, & Heleno, 2003; Jordan et al., 2015; Tangney et al., 1992; Tangney et al., 1996). In contrast, shame proneness is associated with externalization of blame, anger and hostility, and a lack of empathy (Covert et al., 2003; Tangney et al., 1992; Tangney et al., 1996). These different associations may have important consequences for negotiators and their potential success. In particular, high guilt-prone negotiators may be more likely than low guilt-prone negotiators to find integrative (win-win) solutions, whereas high shame-prone negotiators may be less likely than low shame-prone negotiators to do so. Because guilt proneness is negatively associated with lying during negotiations and positively associated with perceptions of trustworthiness (T. Cohen, 2009; T. Cohen et al., 2011), high guilt prone negotiators may be particularly successful in repeated bargaining contexts, in which reputation matters greatly.

Job attitudes and job burnout

Compared to their less guilt-prone colleagues, high guilt-prone employees work harder, perform better, and take on leadership roles more readily. Given the amount they contribute to their organization, do high guilt-prone employees begin to feel dissatisfied, used, or burnt out? The short answer appears to be "no." Guilt proneness is positively associated with job satisfaction (Schaumberg & Flynn, 2017) and affective commitment (Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012), but is not associated with absenteeism or other types of withdrawal behavior (Schaumberg

& Flynn, 2017). In this way, the job attitudes associated with guilt proneness mirror work in clinical psychology on the relationships between guilt proneness and psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety (see Tangney & Dearing, 2002 for a review). Whereas shame proneness predisposes people to negative psychosocial outcomes, guilt proneness does not. If anything, high guilt prone people appear to be well adjusted both in and out of the workplace.

The discriminant validity of guilt proneness

The positive association between guilt proneness and each of the above outcome variables may evoke questions about the discriminant validity of the trait. "Is this just about conscientiousness?" is a common question to arise in response to work that posits guilt proneness as a powerful predictor of employee outcomes. This question makes intuitive sense. Guilt proneness and conscientiousness parallel each other in many ways. Nevertheless, at both the conceptual and empirical levels, the traits are distinct.

Conscientiousness, as a personality trait, reflects the extent to which a person is orderly, responsible, dependable, competent, and self-disciplined (John & Srivastava, 1999). While both conscientiousness and guilt proneness relate positively to job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Schaumberg et al., 2016), task effort (Barrick, Mount, & Strauss, 1993; Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012; Yeo & Neal, 2004), leadership (Judge, Bono, Iles, & Gerhardt, 2002; Schaumberg & Flynn, 2012), and ethical behavior (T. Cohen et al., 2012; T. Cohen et al., 2014), the underlying motivation that gives rise to these positive outcomes is different for guilt proneness and conscientiousness. For the highly conscientiousness individual, a personal desire for achievement tends to drives these positive behaviors (Barrick et al., 1993; Judge & Ilies, 2002), whereas for the high guilt prone individual, these behaviors arise more from a desire to do well by others (T. Cohen et al., 2014; Schaumberg & Flynn, 2012; 2017). High guilt-prone

people exhibit high levels of communal orientation and consideration of others; it is these relational concerns and their strong sense of responsibility to the collective that motivate high guilt-prone people's behaviors, not their own personal desire for achievement.

In line with this conceptual distinction, guilt proneness tends to overlap more with individual differences in agreeableness than it does with individual differences in conscientiousness because agreeableness also captures an other-orientation (Schaumberg & Flynn, 2017). At an empirical level, conscientiousness and guilt proneness are positively correlated, but the magnitude of this correlation is often modest or, at times, decidedly weak (see T. Cohen et al., 2011; Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012; Schaumberg & Flynn, 2012). In regression models predicting a range of outcomes including job performance, task effort, leadership, and ethical behavior, guilt proneness predicts these behaviors over and above conscientiousness (T. Cohen et al., 2011; Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012; Schaumberg & Flynn, 2012). Thus, while there is an understandable knee-jerk reaction that effects attributed to guilt proneness are just a repackaging of conscientiousness effects, there is substantial conceptual and empirical evidence to support the discriminant validity of guilt proneness.

Future directions for the study of guilt proneness and shame proneness in organizations

Being able to theoretically and empirically differentiate guilt proneness from shame proneness has advanced the study of self-conscious emotions in organizations. From reducing absenteeism to making people better leaders, guilt proneness might seem like a panacea for unethical behaviors, lack of motivation, and underperformance, while shame proneness might seem like a cancer. However, the impact of guilt proneness and shame proneness on employee outcomes is likely more complicated than extant work has suggested. To date, research has focused on differentiating these two forms of moral affectivity and seeing whether each can

relate to productive work. Now it is time to ask not just whether guilt proneness and shame proneness predict positive employee behaviors, but also when and for whom they do. In the sections that follow, we identify two promising directions for future research that may help answer these questions.

Overcoming the undermining effect of shame proneness

The study of shame proneness has focused almost exclusively on how it can negatively affect individual wellbeing, interpersonal behaviors, and organizational outcomes. Little evidence suggests that shame proneness has any positive consequences (see Tangney et al., 2007 for a review). In some ways, the deleterious effects of shame proneness on individual and collective achievement are surprising. High shame-prone people, much like high guilt-prone people, are attuned to, and concerned about, fulfilling standards of worthy behavior, feel bad when they fail to act in accordance with these standards, and harbor a keen sense of responsibility toward others (Barrett, 1995; Scheff, 2003). Thus, it would seem that shame proneness leads people to be good citizens and good colleagues, and yet it does not. But, why not?

The negative effects of shame proneness can be linked to one primary factor: negative global self-evaluations. Because shame involves global, stable, and uncontrollable attributions about the self (e.g., "I'm a bad person, I'll always be a bad person, and I can't change that"), high shame-prone individuals tend to be highly self-critical (Tangney, 1995; Tangney, 2007). Their thoughts are filled with self-loathing and personal failures (Steuwig et al., 2010). Countless studies have documented the damaging effects of harboring shame. Rather than continuing to catalogue the negative behaviors associated with shame proneness, we believe that future research may benefit from identifying ways to turn off the negative self-evaluation associated

with shame in order to unlock its positive potential (particularly in the workplace). We now suggest some ways this could be done.

Uniformly negative global self-evaluations represent the source of many ills associated with shame proneness. For shame proneness to translate into productive work, these problematic self-evaluations must be minimized. People have a general desire for global self-integrity, to see themselves as "competent, good, coherent, unitary, stable, capable of free choice, and capable of controlling important outcomes" (Steele, 1988). Threats to one's global self-integrity spur people to reduce or manage the threat, often by avoidance (Steele, 1988). For instance, people avoid getting tested for infections or diseases or learning information about health behaviors that would threaten their global integrity (Sherman, Nelson, & Steele, 2000).

For high shame-prone individuals, their global self-integrity is constantly under siege, and thus these individuals may especially benefit from behaviors or situations that affirm their global self-integrity. In support of this, Sherman and Cohen (2006) note that people are more receptive to threatening information and less likely to avoid it when they have affirmed an important value before receiving such information. Such interventions have been credited with boosting the self-esteem, sense of belonging, and performance of first-generation college students and members of disadvantaged groups (G. Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006; Harackiewicz et al., 2014). Self-affirmation may be particularly beneficial for high shame-prone people. Future research should assess how self-affirmation can dampen the negative self-evaluation associated with shame proneness, which, in turn, causes people to experience better psychosocial outcomes and improved employee performance.

Job challenges may be another means of minimizing the negative self-focus associated with shame proneness because job challenges can down-regulate (or mute) the experience of

negative affect (cf. Van Dillen & Koole, 2007). Job challenges refer to the degree to which people must work hard, fast, and/or under time pressure (Van den Broeck, De Cuyper, & De Witte, 2010). Distraction theories of emotion regulation suggest that working memory is a fixed resource. When working memory is used for one task (e.g., a cognitive demanding exercise), less of it is available for regulating other tasks (e.g., the maintenance of one's negative self-view) (Van Dillen, Heslenfeld, & Koole, 2009; Van Dillen & Koole, 2007). Job challenges can "down regulate" emotional circuits because increased involvement of the cognitive system decreases involvement of the emotional system (cf. Van Dillen et al., 2009; Van Dillen & Koole, 2007). Indeed, when people are cognitively taxed, they have a harder time acquiring or sustaining any type of emotional mood, either positive or negative (Van Dillen et al., 2009; Van Dillen & Koole, 2007).

Because job challenges can down-regulate the experience of negative affect, they may benefit high shame-prone individuals' well-being and job performance by silencing the negative affect that undermines high shame prone people's ability to thrive. Recent findings support this possibility. In a recent laboratory study, Schaumberg and Wiltermuth (2016) found that job challenges boosted the task performance of high shame-prone people, but had an opposite effect on low shame-prone people. While these findings are relatively nascent, they point to a potentially effective, albeit counterintuitive, means of unlocking the positive benefits of shame proneness.

Guilt proneness in the context of heterogeneous standards

Daily life is filled with competing demands for one's time and resources. People are aware of and committed to multiple sets of goals and expectations within and outside their organization. These foci of commitment might include their professions, unions, organizations as

well as occupations, top management, supervisors, co-workers, customers, and of course family and other non-work entities (Becker, 1992; Becker, Billings, Eveleth, & Glibert, 1996; Reichers, 1985). Standards and expectations associated with each group can diverge and sometimes conflict with each other. Given fixed resources, and the inability to do everything or to please everyone, employees often find themselves faced with a dilemma—no matter what they choose to do, someone will be harmed or feel let down. A focal employee may stay late to finish a project for his boss, but miss his child's soccer game in the process. Another employee may choose to forgive a customer's debt, but by doing so hurt the organization's bottom line. Senior executives may have to choose between meeting their shareholders' cost-cutting goals and harming their employees' livelihoods in a mass layoff. How do guilt prone people manage these different foci of commitment and reconcile conflicting behavioral standards?

Answers to this question remain unknown because previous research on guilt proneness and shame proneness has examined contexts in which little variability in standards of worthy behavior exists (Tangney et al., 2007). Rather, desired behavior seemed quite clear in each study. To address this limitation, future research must identify the content of various standards that employees face, highlight potential conflict between these standards, and investigate the manner in which people reconcile such conflict.

The effects of guilt proneness in the context of clear versus ambiguous standards

Does guilt influence behavior more in contexts of clear or ambiguous performance standards? We predict that role clarity (or clarity of performance standards, generally) moderates the relationship between guilt and productive work behaviors. However, there are two competing hypotheses as to what the nature of this interaction would look like. One hypothesis suggests that guilt proneness relates more strongly to productive work in contexts of clear performance

expectations (e.g., explicit sales quotas). A key theme with guilt is that it promotes alignment between one's behaviors and standards of worthy behavior (cf. Lindsay-Hartz et al., 1995). Thus, so long as standards of worthy behavior are clear and widely held, a proneness to experience guilt should more tightly align employees' behaviors with these standards. Thus, it would seem that high task clarity or clear performance standards would be a necessary condition for guilt to promote productive work.

However, an alternative hypothesis can be derived from the mood-as-input model of emotions (Forgas & George, 2001; George & Zhou, 2002). In the absence of clear performance standards it can be difficult to answer the question: Have you worked hard enough today? When dealing with nebulous performance standards, the mood-as-input model of emotions suggests that people rely on their emotional state as a cue about whether their task effort has been sufficient. Positive emotions signal that one's efforts have been sufficient, which causes one to relax. In contrast, negative emotions signal that one's efforts have been insufficient and thus one should work harder. From this perspective, without an objective criterion to evaluate one's performance against, high guilt-prone people may be more likely than low guilt-prone people to infer that their effort has been insufficient because high guilt-prone people's chronic anticipatory guilt signals to them that they have not worked hard enough. These competing predictions regarding the effect of clear versus amorphous performance standards on the task effort of high and low guilt-prone people may be worth investigating, and hopefully reconciling, in the future.

Reconciling the conflict between one's own interests and the interests of others

Personal and collective interests do not always align. When conflict occurs, high guilt-prone individuals may follow a reliable approach to resolve it -- prioritizing the collective interest over their own personal interest. Psychologists argue that self-system is made up of three

separate components: the individual self, the relational self, and the collective self (Sedikides, Gaertner, Luke, O'Mara, & Gebauer, 2013). These separate selves may not be valued equally. For most individuals, the individual self will be considered the most meaningful and therefore dominate their decision making. However, guilt-prone individuals may be less inclined to prioritize the individual self. Indeed, personal satisfaction or what one wants to do has relatively less influence on the behavior of high guilt-prone people than on the behavior of low-guilt prone people (Schaumberg &, Flynn, 2017).

Guilt is the foremost emotion for regulating one's immediate self-interest, especially when one's self-interest conflicts with collective or long-term goals (Barrett, 1995; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Guilt minimizes id-like impulses (Barrett, 1995); it regulates behavior so that people do not harm others, do not take more than their fair share of a collective resource, and do not indulge their short-term interests in ways that incur long-term costs (Baumeister, Stillwell & Heatherton, 1995; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Put simply, the behavior of high guilt-prone people is governed more by what they should do than what they personally want to do, which results in less freeriding off of others' efforts, lying for personal gain, or playing hooky from work when they are dissatisfied with their job. In short, high guilt-prone individuals may be more likely than low guilt-prone individuals to put collective interests ahead of their own interests (or prioritize their collective self over their individual self).

Reconciling the competing interests of multiple foci of commitment

What about cases in which the conflict is not between one's own interest and the interest of the collective, but between the competing interests of different collectives or differently valued entities? It may be difficult to make predictions *a priori* about how high guilt-prone people behave in these circumstances. For instance, in an intergroup mixed-motive setting,

would guilt proneness lead people to compete or cooperate with out-group rivals? The answer may seem perfectly clear. Compared to their less guilt-prone counterparts, high guilt-prone people should be more likely to cooperate because they would feel bad for causing harm to their competitor. However, the answer to this question may not be straightforward. Rather, it may require knowing to which foci guilt-prone people attend. If high guilt-prone people feel a strong sense of loyalty to their focal group, and improving the group's interest is of central importance, then high guilt-prone people may feel motivated to compete harder against a rival out-group than low guilt-prone people.

This is precisely what Cohen and colleagues have found in several studies (T. Cohen, Montoya, & Insko, 2006). In an experiment, participants played a mixed-motive behavioral decision-making game in which they had to decide whether their group would cooperate or compete with an out-group. They instructed participants to either be objective or empathic to their ingroup. This manipulation of focus had no impact on low guilt-prone participants' decisions to compete or cooperate, but it altered high guilt-prone participants' decisions. High guilt-prone participants were both more likely to compete with the outgroup when they focused on their ingroup compared to other high guilt-prone participants who focused on being objective and to low guilt-prone participants who took the perspective of their ingroup.

These findings do not mean that high guilt prone people show higher levels of group loyalty, on average. Rather, they suggest that their tendency to show loyalty depends on specific cues in their environment—cues that sometimes conflict. Consider some recent work by Schaumberg and Flynn (2017) on the relationship between guilt proneness and absenteeism. The authors evoke the concept of competing foci to explain the puzzling absence of a negative relationship between guilt proneness and absenteeism. Being absent from work when one is

expected to be there would seem to violate an employer's standards of worthy behavior, and thus compel high guilt-prone employees to show up at the office. However, people face multiple sets of expectations, many of which may be at odds (Becker, et al, 1996). Which expectations will high guilt-prone individuals feel more motivated to fulfill? If they prioritize their employer's expectations then guilt proneness would likely relate negatively to absenteeism. If they prioritize the expectations of non-work entities (e.g., family, friends), this relationship may change.

Some evidence suggests that high guilt-prone people may reconcile competing standards by adhering to the standards that deliver the most instrumental value. People report higher levels of guilt for harming someone who can help them in the future than harming someone who cannot help them. This has left some people to propose a relational utility to guilt that would lead people to prioritize the interests of parties who have high relational value over low relational value (Nelissen, 2014). At the same time, high guilt-prone people appear to be highly principled and less concerned than low guilt-prone people with maximizing their own instrumental outcomes (cf. Wiltermuth & T. Cohen, 2014). Given these competing predictions, future research would benefit from assessing how perceptions of an entity's instrumental value influences the extent to which high guilt-prone people prioritize its interests.

We propose a different idea. We suspect that guilt-prone people resolve conflicts of interest between competing foci of commitment, in part, by judging which choice will deliver the highest *moral value*. Guilt is, after all, a moral emotion. When faced with a decision that has strong moral implications (betraying a long-term client) and strong instrumental implications (gaining a lucrative new client), guilt-prone people will attend to the former more than the latter. Of course, not all decisions involve choosing between moral and instrumental concerns. Rather, moral judgment often involves choosing between two options that carry moral implications.

These dilemmas are particularly difficult for guilt-prone people to resolve because they present a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" paradox. In this case, for the guilt-riddled person, the option that carries the greatest relative value in terms of supporting her view of herself as moral and righteous will be adopted.

At present, it remains unclear how high guilt-prone people behave in the face of competing interests—when someone will be harmed regardless of what choice is made. We believe that identifying (1) whether there are particular foci of commitment that high guilt-prone people tend to prioritize, and/or (2) what types of strategies high guilt-prone people use to reconcile competing standards of worthy behavior are critical (and fruitful) questions for future work on guilt in the workplace.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have sought to address a longstanding question among organizational scholars and managers alike: Can guilt be channeled into productive work? Empirical findings regarding the relationship between guilt and employee behavior have been mixed. In synthesizing more recent social psychological and organizational behavior research on negative self-conscious emotions, we identify three key insights regarding the potential benefits of guilt in the workplace. First, whether people experience guilt or shame has more to do with their own personal characteristics than the characteristics of the situation. Second, guilt may be channeled into productive work to the extent that global negative self-evaluation is minimized. Finally, guilt increases the alignment between one's behaviors and standards of worthy actions, but it is not always clear which standards of worthy behavior guilt-prone people prioritize. People's daily work and non-work lives are filled with competing standards of worthy behavior, and thus it is critical to understand which standards high guilt-prone people value most in order to predict

which behaviors guilt proneness predicts. In identifying these themes, we hope this chapter serves as a reference and guide for future research on the re-emerging study of guilt in the workplace.

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