Feeling guilty at work: the consequences of experienced guilt and guilt-proneness

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Abstract

This research had three objectives. First, to compare the effects of guilt-proneness and experienced guilt. Secondly, to replicate the results of Flynn and Schaumberg (2012) and Cohen, Panter and Turan (2012). And lastly, to investigate possible negative effects of guilt, with a focus on burnout. To reach these objectives, questionnaires were distributed among 176 Dutch employees, who mainly worked in the healthcare sector. Only a difference in effects of guilt-proneness and experienced guilt on counterproductive work behaviour (CWB) was found. Guilt-proneness was negatively related with CWB, meaning that employees who are more guilt-prone engage in less CWB than those who are less guilt-prone, while experienced guilt was unrelated to CWB. Thus, the results of Cohen, Panter and Turan (2012) were replicated, in contrast to the results of Flynn and Schaumberg (2012), since no relations between guilt-proneness and task effort, or guilt-proneness and organizational commitment were found. Furthermore, no relation between guilt and burnout was found. Further implications and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Guilt, Guilt-proneness, Shame, Shame-proneness, Counterproductive Work Behaviour, Task Effort, Organizational Commitment, Burnout

Feeling guilty at work: the consequences of experienced guilt and guilt-proneness

Most negative emotions have negative effects at the workplace (Brief & Weiss, 2002), for example, employees with a negative mood have higher turnover intentions (George,1989), and are more often absent (Pelled & Xin, 1999). But recent studies show that some negative emotions, like guilt, also have positive effects. Researchers found that more guilt-prone employees show less counterproductive work behaviour (CWB), like abusing colleagues or stealing from their employer (Cohen, Panter & Turan, 2013). They also make less unethical business decisions than less guilt-prone employees (Cohen, Wolf, Panter and Insko, 2011). For instance, less guilt-prone employees were more inclined to market a profitable food product, while there were known health hazards. Furthermore, guilt-proneness is positively related to task effort and organizational commitment (Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012). This research will extend previous studies on guilt and organizational behaviour in three ways. First, this research will not only measure guilt-proneness, but will also look at the effects of guilt experienced at the work place. Secondly, it will try to replicate the findings of Flynn and Schaumberg (2012), and Cohen, Panter and Turan (2012), and see whether experienced guilt has the same effects as guilt-proneness. And lastly, since guilt rises from stressful conditions (Lazarus, 2006), and the possible negative consequences of guilt have been neglected until now, it will also focus on the negative consequences of guilt with an emphasis on burnout. But first, a brief overview of the literature concerning the effects of guilt(-proneness) will be given.

Guilt and its consequences

Guilt is the unpleasant feeling when one beliefs that one should have felt, thought, or acted differently (Kubany & Watson, 2003). Although guilt is often mentioned in the same breath (or confused) with shame, shame and guilt are distinct emotions. Shame focuses on the negative evaluations of the self ("*I* did that horrible thing"), while guilt focuses on the

behaviour ("I *did* that horrible thing") (Lewis, 1971). This distinction is important, because guilt and shame have different influences on motivation and behaviour (see Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

Guilt seems to be the more adaptive emotion, because it motivates reparative actions, fosters other-oriented empathy and promotes constructive strategies for coping with anger (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek, 2007). Guilt also helps to improve relationships by motivating people to treat partners well and to avoid transgressions (Baumeister, Stillwell and Heatherton, 1994). Therefore, guilt is considered to be one of the so-called moral emotions (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek, 2007), together with shame, embarrassment and pride. This means that the emotion motivates people to behave in a morally correct way (Tangney and Dearing, 2002). But feeling guilty can also lead to psychopathology, because guilt can inflict punishment and pain (Carni, Petrocchi, Del Miglio, Mancini & Couyoumdjian, 2013). This self-punishment does not occur every time one feels guilty. Only when one cannot compensate for his or her wrong behaviour, may guilt evoke self-punishment. This tendency to punish oneself out of guilt is also called the Dobby effect (Nelissen & Zeelenberg, 2009). So, guilt can have both positive (interpersonal) and negative (personal) consequences.

The positive effects of guilt-proneness

Not everyone feels the same amount of guilt in the same situations (Lewis, 1971). The tendency to feel guilt is called guilt-proneness, and is defined as the tendency to experience negative feelings about personal wrongdoing, even when the wrongdoing is private (Cohen, et al., 2011; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney et al., 2007; Tangney, Youman, & Stuewig, 2009; Wolf, Cohen, Panter, & Insko, 2010). When you are more guilt-prone, you experience stronger feelings of guilt and are more likely to feel guilty than those who are less guilt-prone. As a personality trait, guilt-proneness can predict several attitudes and behaviours (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). For example, guilt-prone children were less likely to be arrested, convicted

and incarcerated, less likely to abuse drugs, and more likely to practice safe sex when they reached adolescence (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Furthermore, guilt-prone college students reported less criminal activity (Tibbetts, 2003), and are less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol (Dearing, Stuewig & Tangney, 2005). Those who are high in guilt-proneness thus engage in less incorrect behaviour than those who are less guilt-prone.

Guilt-proneness has also shown to have several positive consequences at the work place. In their research among 443 American employees, Cohen et al. (2013) found that more guilt-prone employees committed fewer counter productive work behaviours than less guilt-prone employees. Counter productive work behaviours are behaviours that harm or intend to harm the organization or the people in the organization, for example stealing, abusing another colleague, or purposely doing your work incorrectly (Spector, 2011). Furthermore, Cohen et al. (2011) have also shown that adults who are more prone to feel guilt make less unethical business decisions, for example 41% of participants low in guilt-proneness would exploit a loophole which made it possible for their hypothetical company to drill for oil and gas in a country where it is illegal to do so because of human right violations committed by that country's government, whereas only 25% of those high in guilt-proneness would exploit this loophole. Guilt is also positively related to organizational commitment (Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012). This relationship is mediated by task effort, meaning that when you are more guilt-prone, you put more effort in your tasks, which leads to higher organizational commitment. According to Flynn and Schaumberg (2012), guilt-prone employees might work harder because they want to avoid and repair negative outcomes. But, the effects of experienced guilt and the possible negative consequences of guilt at the workplace have thus far been neglected.

Experienced guilt vs. guilt-proneness

This research will try to replicate and extend the findings of Flynn and Schaumberg (2012) and Cohen, Panter and Turan (2012) by explicitly comparing the effects of

experienced guilt to those of guilt-proneness. Although guilt-proneness leads to more effort and higher commitment (Flynn & Schaumberg, 2012) and to less counterproductive work behaviour (Cohen, Panter & Turan, 2012), the effects of experienced guilt are thus far unknown. Therefore this research will also try to find out whether the effects of experienced guilt differ from those of guilt-proneness.

As we have seen before, feeling guilty can have two consequences: reparative actions and compensation (Tangney, Stuewig & Mashek, 2007), or self-punishment (Nelissen & Zeelenberg, 2009). But, since self-punishment only occurs when one cannot compensate for his or her wrong doing, we assume that at the workplace most of the time an employee will be able to compensate. We therefore expect employees who feel guilty more often to work harder and put in more effort to repair or compensate for their wrong doing, and thus expect a positive relation between experienced guilt and task effort, as is in line with the results for guilt-proneness (Flynn and Schaumberg, 2012). Furthermore, when you have to work harder to be part of a group, you subsequently show greater affinity for that group (Aronson & Mills, 1959). Therefore we also expect that feeling guilty more often will lead to a higher organizational commitment.

When employees engage in CWB, it might cause them to feel guilty about what they have done. It could also be that employees who often feel guilty at work will try to compensate for their behaviour, and therefore engage in less CWB. Since both could be the case, this research will explore the relationship between experienced guilt and CWB to find out more about it.

Guilt and stress: the possible negative consequences of guilt

As we have seen, guilt motivates people to adapt their behaviour according to social and cultural rules, which seems to be reflected in the positive outcomes mentioned above. It thus seems beneficial to hire those who are more guilt-prone, since this will have several

positive effects. But feeling guilty is also associated with feelings of distress (Lazarus, 2006), and these negative effects of guilt at the work floor are thus far neglected.

Guilt is related to distress in various ways (Hoffman, 1982; Baumeister, Stillwel & Heatherton, 1994; Kubany & Watson, 2012). According to Hoffman (1982), distress can arise as an empathic response on the suffering of others. This means that when you see another person suffer, you will feel bad yourself, and this bad feeling is the basis for guilt. One function of guilt is to redistribute this distress (Baumeister et al., 1994). When your actions have made someone else suffer, while you profit from it, guilt causes you to feel less enjoyment and therefore makes the victim feel better. Guilt also seems to be a subcategory of distress over inequity, because receiving more than you deserve while another does not, may also cause guilt (Hassebrauck, 1986).

There are also more direct ways in which guilt-proneness may lead to stress and burnout. Flynn and Schaumberg (2012) found that more guilt-prone employees put more effort into their work and are more committed to their organization. They suggest that this tendency arises because guilt-prone people are more likely to take reparative steps to correct past failures and shortcomings (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh & Larkin, 2003), which might cause employees to do more work to compensate for their failures. Furthermore, when you are more guilt-prone you also strongly dislike disappointing others (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). This could cause employees to put more effort into their work so their boss or colleagues will not be disappointed, and they will not feel guilty about it. While this seems to be a positive outcome at first, there also is a plausible risk that more guilt-prone employees will put too much effort into their work, leading them to become more stressed and finally resulting in burnout. Therefore it is expected that more guilt-prone employees will have higher scores of burnout. This possible relation between guilt and burnout can have important consequences for HR practices and the prevention and treatment of burnout.

Indeed, feelings of guilt are an often mentioned symptom of burnout, and several studies have reported positive correlations between burnout and guilt, ranging from .25 to .42 (Kafry & Pynes, 1980; Pines & Aronson, 1981; Pines & Kafry; 1981; Pines & Kanner, 1982; Weinberg, Edwards & Garove, 1983). To test these hypotheses, questionnaires were distributed amongst employees. Experienced guilt, guilt-proneness, burnout, organizational commitment, task effort, and CWB were measured. Because shame and guilt feelings often overlap (Tangney & Dearing, 2002), we also measured experienced shame and shame-proneness to verify that the observed effects (if any) were unique to guilt.

Method

Participants

Participants (*N* = 178, age 20 – 65 years, *M* = 45 years, *SD* = 12.61). Of them 143 were female (M, SD), and only 35 were male. All worked between 3 and 55 hours a week (M = 29, SD = 9.29). The majority of the participants worked at health care companies in the Netherlands.

Procedure

Participants were recruited by contacting companies whether they were interested to let their employees participate in a short study about the effects of emotions on workplace behaviour, performance and employee well-being. In exchange, the company would receive a report of the results of the study. When employees agreed to participate, they received an informed consent and a short overview of the procedure of the study. Employees filled in a questionnaire with geographic questions, and measures for guilt experienced at the workplace, guilt-proneness, burnout, organizational commitment, task effort and CWB. The questionnaire was in Dutch.

Measures

Guilt-proneness. To measure guilt-proneness, the Guilt and Shame Proneness scale (GASP) was used (Cohen et al., 2011). The GASP measures individual differences in the tendency to feel shame or guilt. Of the 16 items, 4 items measured the emotional responses of guilt-proneness, and 4 items measured the emotional responses of shame-proneness. The other 8 items measured the behavioural responses of both guilt- and shame-proneness, but since Schmader and Lickel (2006) and Harris and Darby (2009) found that those behavioural responses are not always exclusive for either guilt- or shame-proneness, only the emotional response scales were used. Participants had to imagine that they had made a transgression, and then indicate how likely they were to react in the described way. The scale ranged from 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely). An example of a guilt-proneness item is: "After realizing you have received too much change at a store, you decide to keep it because the salesclerk doesn't notice. What is the likelihood that you would feel uncomfortable about keeping the money?". Guilt-proneness scores were made by summing (or averaging) the four guilt-proneness items ($\alpha = .73$), the same was done for the four items of shame-proneness ($\alpha = .66$).

Experienced guilt. To measure how often participants felt guilty at work during the last week, they filled in the Differential Emotions Scale IV (DES IV; Izard, 1977). The DES IV measures how often one experiences ten primary emotions. Participants had to consider a specific time period of their live, in this case the last week at work, and rated the frequency with which they experienced each emotion. The three items for experienced guilt were used ($\alpha = .68$), just as the three items for experienced shame ($\alpha = .76$). The scores of these scales were averaged. The other emotions were not taken into account. An example of a guilt item is: "How often during the last week did you feel like you did something wrong". An example of a shame item is: "How often during the last week did you feel embarrassed when anybody saw you make a mistake".

Organizational commitment. The Affective Commitment Scale (ACS, Meyer & Allen, 1984) was used to measure organizational commitment (α = .76). Affective commitment refers to the employee's emotional attachment to, involvement in, and identification with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1984). The ACS consists out of 8 items, with a response format of a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). An example item is: 'This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me'.

Task effort. To measure task effort, the Work Intensity Scale (WIS; α = .89) and the Time Commitment Scale (TCS; Brown & Leigh, 1996; α = .87) were used. Each consists of 5 items, which participants had to answer with a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). An example question of the WIS is: 'When I work, I do so with intensity'. For the TCS, an example question is: 'Few of my peers put in more hours weekly than I do'.

Counterproductive work behaviour. CWB was assessed with the Counterproductive Work Behaviour Checklist (CWB-C; Spector et al., 2006; α = .64). The CWB-C consists of 33 items. Employees had to indicate how often they had done each of the behaviours, on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from never (1) to every day (5). High scores indicate higher levels of CWB. The time frame of the questions was adjusted to refer to the last week, so it matched the timeframe of the DES IV.

Burnout. To measure burnout, the Dutch version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach & Jackson, 1981), the Utrecht Burnout Scale (UBOS) was used (Schaufeli & van Dierendonck, 2000). The UBOS consists of 15 items, measuring three scales: emotional exhaustion (5 items; α = .90), cynicism (5 items; α = .82), and professional efficacy (6 items; α = .75). The exhaustion scale measures how emotionally exhausted employees are because of their work. The cynicism scale measures a distant, cynical attitude employees have towards

their work (activities), and the professional efficacy scale measures the extent to which employees feel like they are able to do their work well. Answers were given on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from never (0) to always, daily (6). For each score the average of the items was used. For exhaustion and cynicism, higher mean scores correspond to higher degrees of burnout. For professional efficacy, lower mean scores correspond to higher degrees of burnout.

Data analysis

To test the hypothesises, several multiple regression analyses were conducted. The three components of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment), organizational commitment, task effort (work intensity and time commitment) and CWB were used as dependent variables. For each dependent variable, one multiple regression was executed with guilt-proneness, shame-proneness, and the control variables (age, gender and hours worked) as independent variables, and another multiple regression was executed with experienced guilt, experienced shame, and the control variables as independent variables. Both guilt and shame constructs were added together following the example of Flynn and Schaumberg (2012), so the unique effects of guilt-proneness can be distinguished, since shame and guilt are often correlated. Guilt-proneness and experienced guilt were added to separate models so the effects of each variable could be observed independently.

Results

For means, standard deviations, correlations between variables, and Cronbach's alpha, see Table 1. Standard multiple regression analyses were conducted for each of the dependent variables. For an overview of the results, see Table 2 for task effort, organizational commitment and CWB, and Table 3 for burnout.

Effects of Guilt- and Shame-proneness

Organizational commitment. The model only explained 5.1% of the variance in organizational commitment, and was not significant. None of the independent variables had a significant relation with organizational commitment. Therefore, there seems to be no relation between guilt-proneness and organizational commitment, which does not support the hypothesis that more guilt-prone employees will have a higher organizational commitment than less guilt-prone employees.

Task effort. For task effort, both work intensity and time commitment were tested. For work intensity, none of the independent variables had a significant relation with work intensity. The total variance explained by the model for time commitment was 12.9% (R square = .13, F (5,157) = 4.64, p =.001). When looking at each independent variable individually, the only variable with a significant influence on time commitment was the control variable hours worked. Shame-proneness had a marginally significant result. No effect of guilt-proneness on time commitment was found. Therefore, task effort does not seem related to guilt-proneness. The hypothesis that more guilt-prone employees will put in more task effort then less guilt-prone employees was thus not supported by the results.

Counterproductive work behaviour. For CWB, the variance explained by the model was 13.2% (R square = .13, F (5, 142) = 4.31, p = .001). Both hours worked and guilt-proneness came forth as predictors of CWB. This means that those who are more guilt prone, engage in less CWB than those who are less guilt prone, which supports the hypothesis.

Burnout. Each of the three scales of the UBOS were taken into account. No variables had a significant influence on emotional exhaustion. For depersonalization, 5.4% of the variance was explained by the model, which was not a significant result. From the independent variables, only hours worked had a significant relation with depersonalization. For the last scale of the UBOS, personal accomplishment, none of the independent variables

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation coefficients between experienced guilt, experienced shame, guilt-proneness, shame-proneness, affective commitment, work intensity, time commitment, counterproductive work behaviour (CWB), emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Experienced guilt	1.56	.57	**.675**										
2. Experienced shame	1.55	.63	,560**	**.753**									
3. Guilt-proneness	6.29	.92	-,007	,013	**.729**								
4. Shame-proneness	6.03	.96	,035	,078	,619**	**.656**							
5. Affective commitment	3.32	.68	-,068	-,169*	,067	,098	**.758**						
6. Work intensity	4.46	.65	-,123	-,105	,161*	,176*	,196*	**.886**					
7. Time commitment	2.59	.93	,082	,125	,016	,073	,013	,202**	**.868**				
8. CWB	1.08	.07	,189*	,225**	-,245**	-,186*	-,132	-,033	,039	**.640**			
9. Emotional exhaustion	1.50	1.08	,188*	,156*	,034	,072	-,186*	,078	,176*	,100	**.895**		
10. Depersonalization	1.01	1.06	,179*	,130	-,116	-,130	-,381**	-,104	-,014	,097	,467**	**.822**	
11. Personal accomplishment	4.68	.87	-,172*	-,260**	-,053	-,159*	,263**	,184*	,033	-,001	-,281**	-,428**	**.753**

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$

Note: The coefficients on the diagonal in bold are the Cronbach's alpha of each scale.

Table 2

Standard Multiple Regression Analyses predicting organizational commitment, task effort (time commitment and work intensity), and counterproductive work behaviour (CWB).

	Organizational commitment			Work intensity			Time commitment			CWB		
Predictor	R^2	β	SE	R^2	β	SE	R^2	β	SE	R^2	β	SE
Model 1	.051			.051			.129**			.132**		
Age		.123	.004		.111	.004		.065	.006		.033	.000
Gender		-.092	.150		.070	.144		.129	.198		-.107	.016
Hours worked		-.142	.006		.102	.006		.390**	.008		.217*	.001
Guilt-proneness		-.002	.077		.033	.074		-.120	.101		-.231*	.008
Shame-proneness		.104	.073		.158	.070		.184^{+}	.096		.031	.008
Model 2	.064^{+}			.041			.122**			.154**		
Age		.101	.004		.108	.108		.048	.006		.007	.000
Gender		-.047	.142		.137	.098		.126	.191		-.202*	.015
Hours worked		-.149^{+}	.006		.104	.004		.358**	.008		.177*	.001
Experienced guilt		.046	.110		-.106	.139		-.018	.149		.068	.012
Experienced shame		-.175^{+}	.100		-.050	.006		.121	.135		.211*	.011

$^{+}$ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 3

Standard Multiple Regression Analyses predicting burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment).

	Emotional exhaustion			Depersona-lization			Personal accomplishment		
Predictor	R^2	β	SE	R^2	β	SE	R^2	β	SE
Model 1	.034			.232			.053		
Age		-.069	.007		.082	.007		.140^{+}	.006
Gender		.108	.240		.138	.233		-.064	.191
Hours worked		.138	.010		.195*	.010		.000	.008
Guilt-proneness		-.023	.122		-.116	.119		.040	.097
Shame-proneness		.078	.116		-.059	.113		-.160	.092
Model 2	.061^{+}			.059^{+}			.092**		
Age		-.070	.007		.067	.007		.131^{+}	.005
Gender		.102	.225		.070	.222		-.061	.179
Hours worked		.111	.010		.174*	.010		.033	.008
Experienced guilt		.143	.175		.135	.173		-.051	.139
Experienced shame		.053	.159		.052	.156		-.209*	.126

$^{+}$ $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

predicted personal accomplishment. This means that guilt-proneness seems to have no relation with either of the burnout scales. The hypothesis that more guilt-prone employees will feel more burned out than less guilt-prone employees is therefore not supported.

Experienced guilt

Organizational commitment. 6.4% of the total variance in organizational commitment was explained by the model, which was a marginally significant result (R square = .06, F (5, 164) = 2.25, p = .051). There was no effect of experienced guilt on organizational commitment. This does no support or expectations that employees who experience more guilt will be more committed to their organization.

Task effort. For task effort, both work intensity and time commitment were tested. None of the independent variables had a significant relation with work intensity. For time commitment, 12.2% of the total variance was explained by the model (R square = .12, F (5, 158) = 4.38, p = .001). The only significant predictor of time commitment was the control variable hours worked. Therefore, there seems to be no relationship between experienced guilt and time commitment. The expectation that employees who feel guilty more often will also put more effort into their work, is thus unsupported.

Counterproductive work behaviour. 15.4% of the total variance in CWB was explained by the model (R square = .15, F (5, 142) = 5.17, $p \leq .001$). From the control variables, both gender and hours worked were significant predictors. Experienced shame was also a significant predictor of CWB, meaning that those who experience more shame, engage in more CWB. There thus seems to be no effect of experienced guilt on CWB.

Burnout. For burnout, each of the three scales of the UBOS were taken into account. For emotional exhaustion, the model was marginally significant and explained 6.1% of the variance in emotional exhaustion (R square = .06, F (5, 164) = 2.15, p = .062). None of the independent variables had a significant effect on emotional exhaustion. 5.9% of the total

variance of the second burnout scale, depersonalization, was explained by the model, which was marginally significant (R square = .06, F (5, 163) = 2.05, p = .074). Only hours worked was a significant predictor of depersonalization. For the last scale, personal accomplishment, the model explained 9.2% of the total variance (R square = .09, F (5, 162) = 3.27, p < .01). Experienced shame was the only significant predictor of personal accomplishment, meaning that those who experienced more shame, had a lower sense of personal accomplishment. No effect for experienced guilt was found. These results do not support the hypothesis that those who feel guilty more often are more burned out than those who feel guilty less often.

Discussion

This research had three objectives. First of all, to find out whether experienced guilt had the same effects as guilt-proneness. Secondly, to try to replicate the findings of Flynn and Schaumberg (2012) and Cohen, Panter and Turan (2012). And thirdly, to investigate whether guilt-proneness and experienced guilt also had a negative outcome, namely burnout. To reach these objectives, the relationship between respectively guilt-proneness or experienced guilt, and organizational commitment, task effort, CWB and burnout was tested. Since guilt and shame are often confused (Tangney & Dearing, 2002), shame-proneness and experienced shame were also taken into account.

A difference in effects between guilt-proneness and experienced guilt was only found for CWB. For the other variables tested, no significant relationships were found at all. Guilt-proneness was negatively related to CWB, while there was no relation between experienced guilt and CWB. This mean that while those who are more guilt-prone engage in less CWB than those who are less guilt-prone, those who experience more guilt do not differ in how often they engage in CWB from those who experience less guilt at work. This seems to indicate that guilt-proneness and experienced guilt do have different effects when looking at CWB, but not when looking at task effort, organizational commitment, or burnout.

Secondly, the results of Flynn and Schaumberg (2012) were not replicated, while the results of Cohen, Panter and Turan (2012) were. Flynn and Schaumberg found a positive relationship between guilt-proneness and organizational commitment, which was mediated by task effort. In this study, no relationship between respectively guilt-proneness or experienced guilt, and organizational commitment or task effort was found. This is contrary to our expectations and to the earlier results of Flynn and Schaumberg (2012).

Cohen, Panter and Turan's (2012) finding that guilt-proneness negatively predicted CWB was confirmed by this study. Thus, employees who are more prone to feel guilty, will engage in less CWB at the work floor. Furthermore, experienced guilt did not seem to influence the amount of CWB employees engage in, but experienced shame did predict CWB, meaning that those who engage in more CWB also feel ashamed more often.

Thirdly, no negative consequences, in particular burnout, of both guilt-proneness and experienced guilt were found, which is contrary to our expectations that both guilt-proneness and experienced guilt would lead to higher burnout scores. Experienced guilt did correlate with each of the three dimensions, but these effects disappeared when controlling for age, gender, hours worked and experienced shame, which had a negative relation with personal accomplishment.

While there was, as expected, a negative relationship found between guilt-proneness and CWB, no relationship was found between experienced guilt and CWB. This points at a difference in effects between guilt-proneness and experienced guilt. But, it seems likely that the relationship between guilt-proneness and CWB is responsible for the absence of an effect of experienced guilt at CWB. Since those employees who engage in CWB are less guilt prone, they will feel less guilty or will not feel guilty at all after engaging in CWB. Those who would feel guiltier after engaging in CWB, in other words the more guilt prone employees, try to avoid actions that could cause them to feel guilty, and therefore engage in

less CWB or do not engage in CWB at all. This could result in the absence of a relationship between CWB and experienced guilt.

Also, there was no relation found between respectively guilt-proneness or experienced guilt, and task effort or organizational commitment, while Flynn and Schaumberg (2012) did find this relation in their research. This difference could be explained by the fact that Flynn and Schaumberg (2012) used the Test of Self-Conscious Affect (TOSCA) to measure guilt-proneness. The TOSCA measures guilt- and shame-proneness by measuring both behavioural and emotional responses together in one scale for each construct. In those behavioural responses guilt responses are characterized by repair action tendencies (e.g. apologizing), while shame responses are characterized by withdrawal action tendencies (e.g. hiding). But, research of Schmader and Lickel (2006) and Harris and Darby (2009) showed that shame-proneness can also lead to repair actions, and guilt-proneness can also lead to withdrawal responses. The GASP, on the other hand, contains four scales, measuring the emotional and behavioural responses separately for guilt- and shame-proneness each. Since only the emotional response scales were used in this study to avoid the earlier mentioned overlap in behavioural responses, it could be that the effect Flynn and Schaumberg (2012) found was (partially) caused by the behavioural responses, leading to the absence of an effect in this study. This seems especially logical for the relation between repair action tendencies and task effort, because you will probably have to put in more effort than usual if you want to make up for your mistakes. This could also lead to the absence of a relationship between guilt-proneness and organizational commitment, since task effort mediates this relation (Flynn and Schaumberg, 2012).

Likewise, no effect between experienced guilt and task effort, or between experienced guilt and organizational commitment was found. According to Baumeister, Vohs, DeWall and Zhang (2007), one function of guilt is to provide feedback about (morally) incorrect

behaviour. You will not behave the wrong way again because you will anticipate feelings of guilt. This would mean that guilt might not always lead to reparative actions, but can also just function as a warning mechanism to not engage in the wrong behaviour. But, it was assumed that guilt would lead to reparative actions, which would cause employees to put more effort into their work, and that this effort would lead to a higher organizational commitment. This feedback function of guilt could thus explain the lack of relationships between experienced guilt and task effort, and between experienced guilt and organizational commitment.

Furthermore, no relation between respectively guilt-proneness or experienced guilt, and burnout was found. This was contrary to our expectations, and why this is the case is not clear. Experienced guilt was correlated with the three burnout dimensions, but when controlling for experienced shame, this relationship disappeared. Experienced shame did have a negative relation with personal accomplishment. It could be that the strong correlation between experienced guilt and experienced shame caused multicollinearity, leading to less reliable results. But, it could also be the case that in earlier research, reporting correlations ranging from .25 to .42 between guilt and burnout (Kafry & Pynes, 1980; Pines & Aronson, 1981; Pines & Kafry; 1981; Pines & Kanner, 1982; Weinberg, Edwards & Garove, 1983), the found correlations between burnout and guilt were actually (partially) caused by shame instead of guilt.

This research had several limitations. First of all, the sample mostly consisted of employees who worked in health related professions. Therefore these results could be less generalizable to other professions. Some participants also mentioned that some of the questions did not fit their job activities, which could have influenced the results.

Secondly, all measures were self-report measures, which could lead to socially desirable answers. This seems especially the case for participants who are less guilt-prone, since guilt-proneness is highly correlated with the Honesty-Humility scale of the HEXACO

model (Cohen et al., 2011), which includes traits like sincerity, fairness, and modesty (Ashton & Lee, 2008) . This could mean that those who are less guilt-prone have filled in the questionnaires less honest than those who are more guilt-prone. If so, it seems logical that they would want to make themselves look better and thus give more positive answers, which makes it remarkable that more guilt-prone employees still indicate to engage in more CWB than less guilt-prone employees. Therefore it could be that the effect of guilt-proneness on CWB is even stronger than we found. But, it could also have caused the difference in scores between more guilt-prone and less guilt-prone employees to disappear, if the more guilt-prone employees have given more positive answers on the task effort and organizational commitment scales.

Thirdly, both guilt- and shame-proneness measures, and experienced guilt and experienced shame measures were strongly correlated. This could lead to multicollinearity problems, and therefore lead to erroneous conclusions about the predictive value of the constructs. The question should be asked whether it is necessary to control for shame when researching guilt (or the other way around). Cohen et al. (2011) assume that a large portion of the shared variance of guilt- and shame-proneness reflects negative self-consciousness, which is a fundamental component of both guilt and shame, and therefore suggest that guilt and shame should be examined separately from each other. This way, negative self-consciousness continues to be a part of guilt or shame. We therefore recommend future research to analyse guilt and shame separately.

This study has several implications. First of all, it seems that guilt can have different effects than guilt-proneness, since a difference in effects on CWB was found. No other differences were found, but experienced guilt should be taken into account in future research. Organizations should also take this into account, since selecting employees who are high in

guilt-proneness can lead to les CWB at the work floor, while adjusting the work floor to evoke guilt responses will not have this effect.

Secondly, this research did not find negative consequences of guilt-proneness and experienced guilt, since no relationship between guilt(-proneness) and burnout was found. However, other possible negative consequences of guilt should not be neglected.

Furthermore, this study shows the importance of replicating results. The results of Cohen, Panter and Turan (2012) were replicated, providing stronger evidence for the existence of a negative relationship between guilt-proneness and CWB. Therefore, organisations should take guilt-proneness into account when selecting employees. This could help reduce CWB on the work floor, by selecting employees who are high in guilt-proneness.

But, the findings of Flynn and Schaumberg (2012), that guilt-proneness was positively related to task effort and organizational commitment, were not replicated, possible due to a difference in used measures. This effect is therefore not as clear-cut as it seemed to be. Further research should investigate this effect further and find out what causes this difference in results, and whether guilt-proneness is related to task effort and organizational commitment.

Future research should also use more different, objective measures instead of self-report measures, such as observer ratings or supervisor reports, to find out whether experienced guilt and guilt-proneness are related to actual outcomes at work, instead of perceived outcomes.

Furthermore, future studies should focus on the differences in effects at work of guilt-proneness and experience guilt. These possible differences have not been investigated before, and could have important implications in organisational of HR practices. Likewise, research should not neglect the possible negative effects of guilt. That none were found in this study does not mean that there are none.

Conclusion

Not all negative emotions have negative consequences at work. While no negative consequences of guilt were found, guilt-proneness does have a positive effect at work, namely more guilt-prone employees engaged in less CWB than less guilt-prone employees. This was not the case for experienced guilt, which indicates that guilt-proneness and experienced guilt can have different effects at the work floor. Organisations could use this information in selecting employees. Future research should analyse guilt and shame separately, despite the high correlations between them, and investigate the possible positive and negative effects of guilt further.

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