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Empowering the wolf in sheep's clothing: Why people choose the wrong leaders

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Abstract

Three studies explored the possibility that one source of corruption in organizations is the paradoxical human tendency to choose socially appealing leaders who do not necessarily value the welfare of group members. We investigated the relative weight of sociality versus prosociality in leader perceptions, leader emergence, and leader behavior. The results reveal a stark dissociation between the type of leader that people say they want and the type of leader that people actually choose. Although people reported an explicit preference for prosocial over social leaders, they revealed a significant behavioral preference for social over prosocial leaders. Leader choice was mediated by perceived status, such that social individuals were viewed as high status, and high status individuals were preferred as leaders. Prosociality, on the other hand, did not lead to higher status, and actually caused individuals to be perceived as *less* leader-like. Moreover, social individuals were more likely than prosocial individuals to be power-seeking, self-promoting, and self-serving when they attained leadership positions. Taken together, these data reveal, ironically, that the leaders most likely to be elected are not the leaders most likely to show concern for those who empowered them.

Empowering the wolf in sheep's clothing: Why people choose the wrong leaders

For humans, like most social animals, the benefits of group-based living are offset by challenges such as coordination, organization, and conflict resolution. Leadership is one mechanism that can facilitate the functioning of social groups, thereby providing advantages to both leaders and followers (Van Vugt, 2006; Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008). However, leaders' disproportionate control over resources, rules, and procedures, gives them both the opportunity and ability to exploit other members of the group (Bass & Bass, 2008). Consequently, followers express an explicit desire for leaders who are compassionate and socially responsible, as manifested in research on idealized leadership prototypes (e.g., Epitropaki & Robin, 2004) and in individuals' reports indicating that *prosocial* traits (e.g., benevolence, integrity, trustworthiness) are at or near the top of the list of desired leader qualities (e.g., Bass & Bass, 2008; Den Hartog et al.,1999; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). However, copious anecdotal and empirical evidence indicate that leaders often do not behave in ethical or socially responsible ways. The world is rife with examples of government and industry leaders who selfishly exploit people, organizations, and systems in order to augment personal power and profit. What accounts for this dissociation between the leaders that people want and the leaders that people get?

One possibility is that power corrupts, such that good people become bad once they obtain leadership roles (Kipnis, 1972; 1976). Consistent with Lord Acton's famous quote that "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely", situational explanations have been proposed to explain the ubiquity of leader malfeasance (e.g., Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973). The basic assumption is that roles affect behavior, and the mere state of being in a

position of power can adulterate the actions of even the most well-intentioned individuals. The upshot is that people do not necessarily elect the wrong individuals; rather, these otherwise upstanding individuals become corrupted by the position of power.

However, an alternative perspective is that power accentuates pre-existing tendencies, thereby leading good people to become better and bad people to become worse when they ascend to positions of power. Consistent with the liberating view of power (Fiske, 2010), more recent research has revealed a Person X Situation interaction, such that power corrupts pro-self but not prosocial individuals. Specifically, research by Chen, Lee-Chai, and Bargh (2001) demonstrated that an increase in power led to an increase in greedy, selfish behavior for individuals with low prosocial values, whereas power actually *increased* benevolent, socially responsible behavior among individuals with high prosocial values (cf. Bargh & Raymond, 1995; Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995).

Taken together, the aforementioned findings suggest that: (1) people desire prosocial leaders, and (2) prosocial individuals may become even more prosocial when they are placed in positions of power and authority. When viewed in conjunction, these findings present a puzzle because it is unclear how corrupt, selfish leaders emerge in democratic systems. One possibility is that there is a discrepancy between the type of leader that people want, in theory, and the type of leader that people choose, in practice. How might the two types of leaders differ and why might this dissociation emerge? To provide a parsimonious framework for understanding the types of leaders that people want and the types of leaders that people choose, we make a distinction between *sociality*, the quality of being interpersonally appealing, engaging, entertaining, and socially adept, and *prosociality*, the quality of being kind, sincere, benevolent, and seeking to promote the welfare of others. We propose that people will express an explicit

preference for *prosocial* leaders—helpful, compassionate, moral, and trustworthy leaders who respect and value the welfare of others, but will show a behavioral preference for *social* leaders—outgoing, popular, charming individuals who are interpersonally engaging and socially skilled. We investigate these dimensions independently because we believe that they are orthogonal, such that one can be humorous and sociable without being generous and trustworthy, and vice-versa. We propose that for various reasons to be discussed (e.g., perceived role congruity, evolutionary predisposition) sociality outweighs prosociality in predicting actual leader choice. We also predict that social individuals will behave less benevolently than prosocial leaders when empowered, due both to the higher benevolence of prosocial individuals as well as the higher power-seeking, self-promotion tendencies of social individuals.

In summary, we posit that corruption is at least the partial result of people choosing the wrong leaders—of wanting prosocial leaders but choosing social leaders. In the subsequent sections, we provide theoretical and empirical support for this position.

Sociality and Leadership

The existing literature provides considerable insight into why people would prefer social leaders, as well as evidence suggesting that most leaders are social. First, evolutionary models of leadership argue that leadership evolved to solve problems of coordination rather than provision (Van Vugt, 2006; Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008). The primary role of leaders in early human groups (and in many present-day nonhuman social mammals) was to organize, communicate, and coordinate rather than to allocate resources (for reviews, see Van Vugt, 2006; Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008). Researchers across multiple scientific disciplines have observed the role of leadership in the coordination of group movement in many species (Bloom, 2000; Boinski & Garber, 2000; Couzin et al., 2005). If leadership evolved to serve the function

of coordination, it follows that people might have evolved to favor individuals who are best able to communicate, mobilize, and influence others. By definition, social individuals should be better able to connect socially with other members of their group.

However, the problem is that the structure of modern human society is vastly different from that of early human societies. Present-day leaders control access to goods and services—they manage budgets and allocate resources, in addition to (or sometimes in lieu of) coordination. According to the "mismatch hypothesis," proposed by Van Vugt, Johnson, Kaiser, and O'Gorman (2008) there is a disconnect between the type of leader that humans have evolved to prefer (e.g., social leaders who excel at coordinating) and the type of leader that would be most beneficial in modern organizational structures (e.g., prosocial leaders who are fair, compassionate, and trustworthy). Although individuals may consciously acknowledge the importance of prosociality in their leader preferences, vestiges of our evolutionary heritage may predispose followers to confer leadership roles to social rather than prosocial individuals. In short, social individuals might be favored as leaders because their interpersonal charm and social skill endow them with greater facility to inspire, persuade, coordinate, influence, and communicate with others in the group.

In addition to conceptual models that explain why people would prefer social leaders, there is empirical evidence to suggest that social people often obtain leadership positions. Past research has found a link between Extraversion and leadership attainment. Extraversion encapsulates our operationalization of sociality given that extraverted individuals are more outgoing and socially skilled than Introverts (Akert & Panter, 1988). The most comprehensive study linking extraversion to leadership is a meta-analysis by Judge, Bono, Ilies, and Gerhardt (2002), which found a robust relationship between extraversion and leadership attainment across

multiple lab, field, and organizational studies. Although the Judge et al. meta-analysis shows that leaders tend to be social (i.e., extraverted), it does not reveal whether social individuals are more likely to be leaders—it is possible that individuals, once elected, develop the necessary rhetorical and social skills. Secondly, it is not clear whether social individuals are *chosen* as leaders. It is possible that social individuals muscle their way to the top despite the resistance of others, or that they are enthusiastically endorsed by others to occupy positions of leadership. Finally, these data do not elucidate *why* sociality is important to leadership attainment.

We hypothesize that sociality is causally related to leadership attainment and that social individuals are chosen as leaders. We further propose two possible mediators. One potential mediator is that social individuals are preferred because they are perceived as more *competent* than prosocial individuals (cf. Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). As previously explained, social skills may be required to function effectively in leadership positions. If this is the case, then sociality becomes an essential component of leader competence. This is consistent with a *functional* model—the notion that sociality increases one's ability to perform in leadership positions. If people prefer social over prosocial leaders due to higher levels of perceived competence, then we would expect to find mean differences in perceived competence between social and prosocial individuals. We would also expect perceived competence to mediate the relationship between sociality and leader selection.

A second possible mediator is *status*, such that individuals high in sociality are perceived as more socially central, popular, or "cool" compared with individuals who are low in sociality. Their sociality gives them higher social status in the group, and their higher status makes them a seemingly natural choice for leadership positions because high status individuals are seen as a better "fit" for positions of power and authority.[1] The idea that status mediates the relationship

between sociality and leadership attainment is consistent with a *structural* model—higher status individuals occupy higher positions in the hierarchy. If the preference for social over prosocial individuals is due to the fact that sociality is linked to perceptions of higher status, then we would expect to find mean differences in perceived status between social and prosocial individuals. We would also expect that status would mediate the relationship between sociality and leader selection.

Past research has shown that sociality (i.e., extraversion, self-monitoring) is linked to status (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001; Anderson, Spataro, & Flynn, 2008; Flynn, Reagans, Amanatullah, & Ames, 2006). What is unclear is: (1) whether social individuals are perceived as higher in status than prosocial individuals, (2) whether these differences in perceived status explain why social individuals tend to attain leadership positions, and (3) whether and why prosocial individuals do *not* attain leadership positions.

Prosociality and Leadership

Although it is clear that sociality is linked to both status and leadership roles, the link between prosociality and status or leadership is less clear. To be sure, several studies have linked generosity or helpfulness to high status (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Flynn, 2003; Flynn et al., 2006; Willer, 2009). However, it is not clear in any of these studies whether generosity was purely strategic or whether it was an indicator of underlying prosocial motives. While we agree that reputational and status benefits can accrue through costly signaling in public contexts (e.g., “competitive altruism”; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006), we do not believe that this sort of signaling necessarily involves sincere prosocial motives or values. Although there are multiple contexts in which strategic prosocial behavior may be rewarded with status, we question whether such behavior reflects prosociality, which we define as a genuine desire to promote the welfare of

others. In short, we make a distinction between strategic, extrinsically-motivated prosocial behavior and sincere, intrinsically-motivated prosocial behavior. Although it has been shown that *signaling* (e.g., displaying wealth through acts of generosity) increases status (Flynn 2003; Flynn et al., 2006; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006), it is not clear whether *benevolence* (e.g., genuine concern, kindness, and helpfulness toward others) increases status. Assuming that there is something qualitatively different about the type of people who perform prosocial behaviors strategically versus sincerely, it stands to reason that these two types of individuals may differ in other fundamental ways as well (e.g., power-seeking) which could influence their level of status attainment.

In addition to the question of whether sincere prosociality increases status, there is the question of whether it is linked to leadership attainment. The data are equivocal with some evidence that prosociality facilitates leadership attainment (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006) whereas other studies suggest that it does not (e.g., Judge et al., 2002). For example, the meta-analysis of leadership traits by Judge et al. (2002) revealed that Agreeableness—the Big Five personality factor most closely related to prosociality—was either uncorrelated or negatively correlated with leadership attainment. The authors state "if our results reflect only individuals' implicit theories, we should have found some of our strongest relationships between leadership and Agreeableness. In fact, the opposite was true, as Agreeableness was the trait least associated with leadership across criteria and situations" (Judge et al., 2002; p. 775).

Why would prosociality be uncorrelated (or negatively correlated) with leadership attainment if followers want prosocial leaders? One potential answer lies in the perceived and actual demands of the leadership role. Leaders are often faced with tough decisions that may place them in ethical dilemmas, forcing them to make choices that may not square with their

personal morals or ethics (e.g., hostile corporate takeovers, raising prices on vital prescription drugs, refusing medical care to uninsured patients). As a result, prosocial values may sometimes prevent leaders from behaving in ways that would be profitable to their organization. We reason that the principled values of prosocial individuals are a double-edged sword. On the one hand, prosocial individuals are admired for their integrity, compassion, and moral rectitude. On the other hand, they may be perceived as feeble "bleeding hearts" who lack the guts to make legally sound decisions that advance the goals (e.g., economic success) of the organization.

The Folly of Choosing Social over Prosocial Leaders

In summary, it is clear that people prefer compassionate, prosocial leaders but often end up with dominant, self-serving leaders. We posit that much leader malfeasance can be traced not to leaders being corrupted by power, but rather to a higher tendency for socially skilled yet self-serving leaders to be elected to power. In short, people tend to elect the wrong leaders. We argue that people consciously desire prosocial leaders, but behaviorally empower people irrespective of how prosocial they are, opting instead for leaders who are socially appealing but self-promoting. We refer to this phenomenon as the *wolf in sheep's clothing effect*.

To our knowledge, the present study is the first to empirically investigate whether and why people are likely to select leaders that do not represent their conscious preferences or their objective self-interest. It is also the first to make a conceptual and empirical distinction between sociality and prosociality, and to show that these two seemingly similar dimensions produce quite divergent effects on leader emergence and behavior. Finally, the present study is the first to propose that, contrary to prior research findings, genuine prosociality does *not* lead to increased status, and in fact may be negatively associated with leadership attainment. We test these propositions in three studies that employ a variety of methodological approaches.

Research Overview

Study 1 investigates which types of leaders people prefer, and specifically compares the importance of sociality versus prosociality. Although past research has found that people highly value prosocial leaders (e.g., Den Hartog et al., 1999), it has not directly tested whether people place equal (or greater) value on leader sociality. Using three distinct types of responses, we test the hypothesis that people will show a clear explicit preference for prosocial over social leaders.

In Study 2, participants interact in small groups before choosing a leader who will be in charge of allocating resources to group members. We assess the actual and perceived sociality and prosociality of participants, and perform a series of analyses to determine which traits predict who emerges as leader and how selfishly these elected leaders behave once they have assumed their leadership roles. We predict that social individuals will be more likely than prosocial individuals to emerge as leaders, due to the perception that they possess higher status. We also predict that social individuals will be more likely to seek power, and prosocial individuals will be less likely to seek power. Finally, we predict that social individuals will be relatively more likely than prosocial individuals to exploit the group when they obtain leadership roles.

Study 3 is a controlled experiment that addresses many of the issues not addressed in the relatively uncontrolled group interaction context of Study 2. In Study 3, we directly manipulate sociality and prosociality and assess their relative effects on perceptions of status and leadership attainment.

In sum, the three studies will test the following four hypotheses:

H1: Followers will explicitly report a preference for prosocial over social leaders.

H2: Followers will show a behavioral preference for social over prosocial leaders.

H3: The behavioral preference for social leaders will be mediated by perceived status.

H4: Sociality will be positively correlated with power-seeking, self-promotion, and abuse of power whereas prosociality will be negatively correlated with these variables.

Study 1: Leaders that Followers Want

Although past research has shown that prosociality is a very important component of people's prototypes of desirable leaders (e.g., Den Hartog et al., 1999), no previous work has systematically investigated the *relative* importance of prosociality versus sociality. If it were the case that people value sociality equally or more than prosociality, then there would be no paradox between the leaders that people want and the leaders that they choose. In Study 1, we asked participants in an open-ended fashion to indicate the qualities they desired in a leader or manager in their organization. They also rated and ranked the importance of a list of social and prosocial traits, as well as other trait dimensions. As noted in Hypothesis 1, we predicted that people would report a strong preference for prosocial traits over social traits, across all three measures.

In addition, we administered a measure of sociality (i.e., extraversion) and prosociality (i.e., prosocial value orientation) in order to assess their relationships with power-seeking. Consistent with Hypothesis 4, we predicted that sociality would be positively associated with power-seeking whereas prosociality would be negatively associated with power-seeking.

Method

Participants

We recruited 86 participants (20 male, 66 female) from an online subject pool to participate in a 15-minute online survey on leadership. In exchange for participating, participants had an opportunity to win a $50 gift certificate. The online subject pool is administered by the

Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University and recruits participants via advertisements on popular websites, such as Craig's List. Participants lived in 29 U.S. states, and one participant lived in Canada. The sample was approximately 80% White, 11% Asian, 5% Black, and 5% Hispanic, with a mean age of 35 years (*SD* = 12 years, *range* = 18 to 67 years). In regards to employment, 42% of the sample was employed full-time; 17% were employed part-time, 20% were unemployed, 5% were retired, and 16% did not fall into any of the employment categories (e.g., students, stay-at-home parents).

Procedure

To prime participants to consider leaders in their own workplace, the survey began by asking participants to provide information about the organization where they currently work (or the last organization that they worked for if they were unemployed or retired). Next, participants were asked to indicate the importance of various leadership characteristics in three ways: (1) open-ended responses, (2) trait ratings, and (3) rank order.

Open-ended responses. Participants were asked to list five traits or qualities that they wanted in a leader. They were told that the leader might be a manager in their organization, or their immediate supervisor. Two coders blind to the study hypotheses sorted the responses into five categories: (a) prosocial traits (e.g., helpful, supportive), (b) social traits (e.g., dynamic, personable), (c) competence traits (e.g., intelligent, skilled), (d) high-status traits (e.g., influential, powerful), or (e) other or multiple categories (e.g., open to change). For each coder, we computed the response frequency for each of the five categories. That is, we calculated the percentage of traits listed in each category relative to the total number traits listed by all the participants together. Response frequencies were similar for both coders, so they were averaged.

Trait ratings. Next, we had participants rate the importance of various characteristics for a leader or a manager in their organization (1 = *not at all important*, 5 = *very important*). The list was randomized for each participant and contained: 8 prosocial traits (honest, trustworthy, sincere, helpful, generous, cooperative, warm, kind; $\alpha = .91$); 4 social traits (extraverted, outgoing, talkative, humorous; $\alpha = .82$); 3 competence traits (competent, intelligent, smart; $\alpha = .82$); and 7 high-status traits (high status, influential, dominant, persuasive, assertive, confident, powerful; $\alpha = .86$).

Rankings. Finally, we asked participants to rank the importance of prosocial, social, competence, and high-status trait dimensions in terms of their importance for a leader or manager in their organization. The four categories of dimensions were presented in a list (randomized for each participant) with the following labels: “benevolence traits (generous, trustworthy)”; “social traits (outgoing, extroverted)”; “competence traits (intelligent, smart)”; and “dominance traits (powerful, assertive).” A rank of 1 indicates the most important trait and a rank of 4 indicates the least important trait.

Personality measures. In the final section of the online survey, we assessed participants’ prosociality, sociality, and power-seeking, in addition to standard demographic information. Prosociality was assessed with the Prosocial-Cooperative subscale of the Social Value Orientation (SVO) scale (Van Lange, Otten, De Bruin, & Joireman, 1997). There are nine items in the SVO and we computed a sum score of the number of cooperative responses chosen (KR20 $\alpha = .95$; $M = 6.12$, $SD = 3.56$). Sociality was assessed with the Extraversion subscale of the Big Five 44-item inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). The Extraversion subscale contained eight items (e.g., talkative, outgoing), which were averaged ($\alpha = .90$, $M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.32$). Desire for leadership, or Power-Seeking, was assessed with five items that we composed.

Participants indicated agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) to: “I like feeling powerful”; “I enjoy being in leadership positions”; “I constantly look for opportunities to advance in the workplace”; “I actively pursue high-status positions”; “I seek out leadership opportunities.” We averaged these five items to form an index of Power-Seeking ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.43$).

Results

Open-Ended Responses

As shown in Table 1, prosocial traits were reported most frequently, followed by competence, high-status, and social traits. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, prosocial traits were reported much more frequently than social traits (33% versus 7%).

Trait Ratings

We tested for differences among the trait ratings with a Repeated-Measures ANOVA. Trait (prosocial vs. social vs. competent vs. high-status) was a four-level within-subjects factor. The analysis revealed a significant effect of trait, $F(3, 255) = 89.06$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons using a Benjamini-Hochberg correction to account for multiple comparisons (Thissen, Steinberg, & Kuang, 2002) revealed that each of the trait ratings significantly differed from the others except social and high-status traits which differed marginally $t(85) = 1.95$, $p = .054$. Of particular interest, prosocial traits were rated as significantly more important than social traits, $t(85) = 4.41$, $p < .001$, and high-status traits, $t(85) = 7.55$, $p < .001$.

Rankings

The median and modal responses for the importance rankings were identical. Competent was ranked as most important, followed by prosocial, social, and high status.

Prosociality, Sociality, and Desire for Leadership

Prosocial SVO and Extraversion were not significantly correlated, $r(82) = .11$, $p = .34$, suggesting that sociality and prosociality are orthogonal. We performed a multiple regression analysis in which we regressed Power-Seeking onto Prosocial-SVO and Extraversion simultaneously. This analysis yielded significant effects in opposite directions for Prosocial-SVO ($\beta = -.23$, $t = 2.36$, $p = .02$) and Extraversion ($\beta = .46$, $t = 4.63$, $p < .001$). Social individuals tended to seek status and power, whereas prosocial individuals tended *not* to seek status and power.

Discussion

Study 1 yielded three findings of interest, which set the stage for Study 2. First, Study 1 effectively demonstrated that people value prosociality more strongly than sociality in leaders. In support of Hypothesis 1, we found that across all three measures participants rated prosociality as being a more important leadership quality than sociality. They also rated prosociality as being more important than status. Secondly, Study 1 provided initial evidence that sociality and prosociality are orthogonal, as the correlation between Extraversion and Prosocial-SVO was both weak in magnitude and statistically insignificant. Third, we found that sociality and prosociality were asymmetrically related to desire for leadership. In support of Hypothesis 4, social individuals were significantly more likely to seek status and power compared with prosocial individuals.

Study 2 sought to build on Study 1 in several ways: (1) we investigated which leaders people actually chose, as opposed to the leaders that people said that they wanted; (2) we assessed prosociality and sociality using multiple self-report and behavioral measures to ensure that we had a comprehensive measure of the two dimensions; (3) we assessed Power-Seeking

using a behavioral measure rather than a self-report measure; and (4) we examined how social versus prosocial individuals behaved once they obtained power.

We predict a dissociation between the type of leaders that people say they want (Study 1) and the type of leaders that people actually choose (Study 2). That is, we predict that sociality and status will be much stronger predictors of leader selection than prosociality. Study 2 tested these predictions in a study in which participants interacted with each other in small groups before choosing a group leader who had power to control group resources.

Study 2: Leaders that Followers Elect

We propose that favoring social over prosocial leaders is a robust phenomenon that is tied to the link between sociality and status. To provide a strong test of this hypothesis, participants in Study 2 were informed that the only responsibility of the leader would be to allocate valuable resources to group members. Under these conditions, participants should logically favor prosocial leaders over social leaders. Favoring prosocial leaders who allocate resources fairly is consistent with followers' economic self-interest as well as their explicit, principled preferences (cf. Study 1). Finding a behavioral preference for social over prosocial leaders under these conditions—when the leader's only task is to allocate resources to group members—would provide particularly compelling evidence for the paradoxical tendency for people to favor social rather than prosocial individuals as leaders (see Hypothesis 2).

Consistent with the finding from Study 1 that extraverted individuals were more power-seeking, we predicted that social individuals would behave in self-promoting ways in order to increase their power, whereas prosocial individuals would behave in more humble, self-effacing ways to avoid power (see Hypothesis 4). Because one way to promote one's own power is to

vote for oneself, we allowed individuals to vote for themselves as well as other members of the group when electing a leader.

To compare the structural versus functional models of the link between sociality and leader emergence, Study 2 also tested whether social individuals were seen as having higher status and/or higher competence than prosocial individuals. After interacting with group members, each participant rated the others in the group on several traits relevant to status and competence. We predicted that social individuals would be perceived as higher in status but equal in competence compared to prosocial individuals. We further predicted that being perceived as having higher status would mediate the link between sociality and leader emergence (see Hypothesis 3).

Finally, we tested the extent to which social versus prosocial individuals would be likely to exploit the group once they attained leadership positions by examining how selfishly or equitably they allocated a valuable resource (i.e., raffle tickets).

To summarize, we test the following hypotheses in Study 2:

- People will vote for leaders perceived to be social rather than prosocial.
- The behavioral preference for social leaders will be mediated by perceived status rather than perceived competence.
    - Perceived status will be more strongly related to sociality compared with prosociality
    - Perceived competence will *not* be more strongly related to sociality compared with prosociality.
- Self-promotion will partially explain the emergence of social versus prosocial leaders.

- Social individuals will be more likely than prosocial individuals to abuse power when they obtain leadership positions.

Method

Participants & Procedure

We recruited 117 undergraduate students at Northwestern University (57 men, 60 women) to participate in an hour-long study on "personality, decision-making, and social interaction" in exchange for $15 plus the opportunity to earn additional money. Sessions were run with 12 same-sex participants. The sample was 45% White, 43% Asian, 5% Black, and 7% other, with a mean age of 20 years (*SD* = 1 year, *range* = 17 to 23 years).

We assessed four broad classes of measures:

1. *Objective* (personality/behavioral) measures of sociality and prosociality
2. *Subjective* measures of perceived sociality, prosociality, status, and competence.
3. Leader emergence (i.e., who was elected as leader)
4. Leader behavior (i.e., whether the leader abused their power)

We describe each of these measures in the sections below.

Objective Measures of Sociality and Prosociality

Personality measures. At the start of each session, participants completed a computer-administered survey containing measures of sociality and prosociality. As in Study 1, sociality was assessed with the Extraversion subscale (α = .88, *M* = 4.47, *SD* = 1.08) of the Big Five 44-item inventory (John et al., 1991), and prosociality was assessed with the Prosocial-Cooperative subscale (KR20 α = .97, *M* = 4.15, *SD* = 4.02) of the SVO scale (Van Lange et al., 1997).

We also included a second indicator of sociality, the Self-Monitoring scale (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986) and prosociality, the Honesty-Humility subscale of the HEXACO (Ashton &

Lee, 2007). The Self-Monitoring scale contained 18 items, which were summed (KR20 $\alpha = .66$, $M = 10.55$, $SD = 3.25$). Because Agreeableness also involves passivity and compliance (traits that could be considered detrimental to leadership), we chose to focus on the personality dimension of Honesty-Humility, which provides a more direct measure of honesty and integrity than Agreeableness. For example, there is evidence that Honesty-Humility is related to cooperation in social dilemmas (Hilbig & Zettler, 2009) and integrity in the workplace (Lee, Ashton, Morrison, Cordery, & Dunlop, 2008). The Honesty-Humility scale contained seven items (honest, greedy, fair, sly, conceited, sincere, pretentious) which were averaged ($\alpha = .67$, $M = 5.24$, $SD = .71$).[2]

In addition to these self-report measures, both sociality and prosociality were also assessed with behavioral measures, as described below.

Behavioral measure of prosociality (dictator game). Following the personality survey, we obtained a behavioral indicator of prosociality by having participants play a dictator game (Camerer, 2003). Participants were given 12 $1 bills, an envelope, and written instructions for a "decision-making study." The instructions informed participants that they would be making a single decision involving real money, and that their decision would determine their outcomes as well as the outcomes of another person. They read that they were randomly assigned to the role of sender and another participant in the study was randomly assigned to the role of receiver. Their task was described as follows:

> Your task is to decide how many $1 bills you would like to send to the receiver and how many you would like to keep for yourself. You can send any number of bills, from 0 to 12. Whatever you decide to keep is yours, and you can put it in your pocket right now.

The amount of money sent to the other person served as a behavioral measure of prosociality. On average, participants sent between $2 and $3 (*M* = $2.21, *SD* = $2.18). Participants were assured that all decisions in the dictator game were completely private.

Behavioral measure of sociality (talkativeness). After completing the decision-making task, each participant was randomly assigned to a private room with two other participants where they engaged in a five-minute "social interaction task." During the interaction, participants could discuss anything they wished. Their instructions were simply to "get to know one another as well as you can." Following the group interaction, participants indicated the percentage of time each person (including themselves) talked during the interaction. We combined the self and other ratings of time-talked to form a behavioral measure of sociality (α = .69).

Subjective Perceptions of Sociality, Prosociality, Status, and Competence

After the five-minute group interaction, participants voted for a group leader and completed a questionnaire in which they indicated their perceptions of the members of their group.[3] They indicated the extent (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) to which each group member was social, prosocial, had high status, and was competent. The questionnaire included four social traits (talkative, extraverted, outgoing, humorous, α = .86), eight prosocial traits (honest, trustworthy, sincere, helpful, generous, cooperative, warm, kind, α = .90), eight high-status traits (high in status, powerful, influential, persuasive, confident, assertive, dominant, has leadership skills; α = .90), and 3 competence traits (competent, intelligent, smart, α = .88). Throughout the paper we refer to these perception ratings as *judged social*, *judged prosocial*, *judged high status,* and *judged competent.*

Leader Emergence

Participants were given these instructions regarding the leadership voting procedure:

"You and each of the other two group members have 5 votes each. These votes will be used to select a leader for the group. Each group member can distribute the 5 votes between the three group members in any way that he or she sees fit. The voting will be anonymous and all the decisions will remain confidential even after the study is over. The group member to receive the most votes will serve as the group leader. We will provide the group leader real power. This power means that the leader will get to control certain resources that affect everyone in the group". [4]

The participant in each group with the most votes was chosen to be the group's leader. In the case of a tie, the leader was selected at random from those who received the highest number of votes. The leader was then given instructions regarding a resource allocation task, which served as our measure of leader behavior/benevolence.

Leader Behavior

The resource allocation task assigned to each leader involved distributing raffle tickets among members of the group. The raffle was for a $30 gift card (leaders were told there would be a new raffle for every 60 participants). The leader was given six raffle tickets and an envelope for each of the three members in the group. They were instructed to distribute the raffle tickets in any way they saw fit and were assured that their decision would remain confidential.

The number of raffle tickets given to others served as the indicator of leader benevolence. On average leaders kept 3 to 4 tickets for themselves and distributed 2 to 3 tickets among the other two group members (M = 2.31, SD = 1.69).

Analyses

We computed regression and path analyses with Mplus 5.1 (Muthen & Muthen, 2007). Because participants communicated with each other during the group discussion, their

observations were not independent. We addressed this concern by modeling the non-independence among group members with the cluster command in Mplus, which adjusts standard errors to account for nested data structures. Models in which the dependent variable was continuous used maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (MLR). Models in which the dependent variable was binary (e.g., leader selection) used weighted least squares means and variances estimation (WLSMV).

Results

Table 2 shows the correlations among all the study variables. As expected, the three indicators of sociality were positively correlated, and the three indicators of prosociality were positively correlated. However, none of the measures of sociality correlated with any of the measures of prosociality. Given this convergence within measures (and independence across measures) we chose to be parsimonious in our hypothesis testing by creating composite indices of sociality and prosociality instead of testing the hypotheses separately for each measure. We created the indices by standardizing and averaging the three indicators of sociality ($\alpha = .57$) and prosociality ($\alpha = .52$), respectively. These composites broadly assess the dimensions of sociality and prosociality, which consequently lowers their alpha levels. This approach actually decreases our likelihood of obtaining significant results, therefore providing a more conservative test of our hypotheses.

We first examined the effects of sociality and prosociality on perceived status and competence, respectively. The simultaneous regression of perceived status on sociality and prosociality revealed a significant positive effect of sociality ($\beta = .32$, $z = 3.04$, $p = .002$) and a nonsignificant negative effect of prosociality ($\beta = -.14$, $z = -1.53$, $p = .13$). The same analysis for perceived competence revealed nonsignificant effects of both sociality ($\beta = -.08$, $z = -.95$, $p =$

.34) and prosociality (β = -.06, z = -.45, p = .65). In short, these analyses effectively demonstrate that social individuals were not seen as being higher in competence than prosocial individuals, but they *were* seen as higher in status.

Next, we examined whether perceived competence or status played a larger role in determining who received leadership votes from others. When votes received by others was regressed on perceived competence and perceived status, only status was significant (β = .39, z = 4.76, $p < .001$); the effect of perceived competence was nonsignificant (β = -.06, z = -.49, p = .63).

Leader Emergence Path Model

We computed a path model to directly test the relationship between sociality, prosociality, status, and leader emergence (see Figure 1). This model fit the data well: $\chi^2(9, N = 117) = 90.62$, $p < .001$; *Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)* = .03; *Comparative Fit Index (CFI)* = .99.

Leadership votes received. As shown in Figure 1, the path from sociality to judged social was significant, indicating that social group members were perceived as more social. Next, there was a significant path from judged social to judged high status, indicating that group members judged as social were also judged as having high status. [5] Finally, there were significant paths from judged high status to votes received, and from votes received to elected leader. Consistent with the structural hypothesis, status mediates the relationship between sociality and leadership attainment. The five-variable indirect effect from sociality to judged social to judged status to votes received to elected leader was significant (z = 2.97, p = .003).

Figure 1 also shows that the path from prosociality to judged prosocial was nonsignificant, indicating that participants who were actually prosocial were not necessarily

perceived as prosocial. The path from judged prosocial to judged high status was nonsignificant, indicating that the significant correlation between judged prosocial and judged high status shown in Table 2 is accounted for by the shared variance between judged prosocial and judged social. Consistent with the nonsignificance of several of the prosocial paths, the five-variable indirect effect from prosociality to judged prosocial to judged high status to votes received to elected leader was nonsignificant ($z = .53$, $p = .60$).

Overall, the findings for leadership votes received from others indicate that people attribute status to those they believe to be social, but not to those they believe to be prosocial. Status, in turn, is associated with being elected as a group leader.

Self-promoting behavior. To assess self-promoting behaviors we also included in the path model the extent to which individuals voted for themselves. Table 3 also presents the zero-order relationship between self-promotion and key variables. As seen in Figure 1, social individuals were more likely to vote for themselves, whereas prosocial individuals were *less* likely to vote for themselves. The three-variable indirect effect from sociality to self-votes to elected leader was significant ($z = 2.57$, $p = .01$). The three-variable indirect effect from prosociality to self-votes to elected leader was also significant, but in the opposite direction ($z = -2.26$, $p = .02$).

This is a behavioral replication and extension of our Study 1 finding that sociality is positively related to power-seeking, whereas prosociality is negatively related to power-seeking. Unlike social group members, prosocial group members were less likely to allocate leadership votes to themselves, and this humility (which could also be interpreted as escape from power) lessened the likelihood that they would become leaders.

Leader Benevolence

The power for our analyses with leader benevolence was considerably lower than the other analyses, given that it only included individuals who were elected to be leader (N = 39 rather than N = 117). Nevertheless, leader benevolence showed a significant positive correlation with prosociality, $r(39) = .57$, $p < .001$, and a sizeable but nonsignificant negative relationship with sociality, $r(39) = -.26$, $p = .12$. More importantly, we tested whether these correlations significantly differed with Steiger's (1980) method for evaluating dependent correlations and found that the prosocial and social correlations with leader benevolence significantly differed from one another, $\chi^2(1, N = 117) = 13.18$, $p < .001$.

An examination of the raffle ticket allocations indicated that this significant difference was accounted for by a more equitable distribution of tickets by prosocial leaders and a disproportionately selfish allocation of tickets by social leaders (as opposed to prosocial leaders giving *all* of the tickets away to others compared with social individuals equitably distributing the tickets among others). Thus, prosociality encouraged fair and benevolent leadership whereas sociality encouraged relatively more abuse of power in the form of self-interested behavior.

Conceptual Independence of Sociality and Prosociality

Although both Study 1 and 2 clearly indicate that measures of sociality and prosociality are uncorrelated at the personality level (see Tables 2 and 3), we wanted to test whether sociality and prosociality were conceptually distinguishable at the perceived (subjective) level. The significant path between judged social and judged prosocial suggests that people may base their judgments of how prosocial a person is on their judgments of how social the person is (see Figure 1). Is it possible that individuals cannot distinguish between the two distinct interpersonal dimensions that we have labeled as sociality and prosociality? To address this question, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on the 12 social and prosocial traits in Study 2.

The analysis was computed with maximum likelihood estimation (ML) with oblique geomin rotation in Mplus 5.1 (Muthen & Muthen, 2007). As shown in Table 4, perceptions of social and prosocial traits emerged as two distinct (but correlated) factors. The EFA yielded two eigenvalues greater than 1 and the fit of the oblique two-factor model was acceptable (see Table 4). Moreover the EFA yielded excellent simple structure. The social traits had strong significant loadings on the social factor and the prosocial traits had strong significant loadings on the prosocial factor. This factor analysis indicates that social and prosocial traits are indeed seen as distinct, but related, dimensions of personality. The participants, however, relied much more strongly on sociality than prosociality when electing leaders due to the higher judged status of social individuals.

Discussion

Study 2 confirmed a clear behavioral preference for social leaders over prosocial leaders. This study further demonstrated that the preference for social leaders was mediated by status. Individuals high in sociality were perceived as having higher status than individuals low in sociality and this difference in perceived status led others to vote for them. Prosocial individuals, on the other hand, were not seen as high status and thus did not tend to elicit votes from others. Ironically, social individuals were also relatively more likely than prosocial individuals to abuse their power once they assumed positions of leadership, as evidenced by the greater tendency to hoard raffle tickets for themselves rather than distributing them equitably to the group.

In short, people elected the wrong leaders—the individuals most likely to be empowered were not the individuals who were most likely to behave fairly when they obtained power. Interestingly, the preference for social over prosocial leaders occurred in spite of the fact that the information provided to participants indicated that prosociality would be more relevant than

sociality to the leader's role (i.e., distribution of resources). Thus, our study provided a strong test of the hypothesis that social individuals would be preferred over prosocial individuals.

Consistent with the results of Study 1, Study 2 provided *behavioral* evidence that social individuals are self-promoting—and self-promotion was strongly related to leader selfishness. The hunger for power among social individuals raises questions about the true nature of sociality. One possibility is that social individuals develop and hone sociality as a tool to get what they want from others. Indeed, the zero correlation between sociality and prosociality suggests that social individuals are not social simply because they love helping people. Rather, for some, sociality might be a means to an end (i.e., being social helps them get what they want from people).

On the other hand, it is possible that prosocial individuals are underrepresented as leaders to some extent because they do not aspire to positions of power. Whereas social individuals tended to vote for themselves, prosocial individuals tended to escape from power by not voting for themselves. Nevertheless, our results also suggest that prosocial individuals are less likely to be seen as leaders by others, independent of whether they seek leadership positions, simply because they are not seen as being a good "fit" to positions of power. That is, prosocial individuals are not as high status and are therefore not seen as very "leader-like". We explore this possibility further in Study 3.

In summary, Study 2 is the first to show the relative impact of sociality and prosociality on leader emergence and leader behavior in dynamic, interactive small groups. However, part of the strength of the study is also its weakness. Because we had no control over the information that was conveyed during the uncontrolled social interactions, it is difficult to know what contributed to subjective perceptions of sociality and prosociality. One plausible alternative

explanation for our findings is that social rather than prosocial leaders were elected simply because sociality was more “visible” or detectable than prosociality. Indeed, our findings indicate that people were not as adept at detecting prosociality compared with sociality (see Figure 1). This differential visibility raises the possibility that sociality was more highly related to status and leadership because participants were better able to discern it compared with prosociality. This alternative explanation seems unlikely, given that the relationship between sociality and status was completely accounted for by *perceptions* of sociality rather than accuracy, or targets’ actual sociality. For instance, the significant relationship between actual sociality and judged status ($r(117) = .33$, $p < .001$) disappeared when controlling for perceived sociality (*partial* $r(114) = .06$, $p = .51$). However, the relationship between perceived sociality and judged status ($r(117) = .76$, $p < .001$), remained unchanged when controlling for actual sociality (*partial* $r(114) = .72$, $p < .001$).

A second, related explanation is that people confounded sociality and prosociality to some extent. However, this also seems to be an unlikely alternative explanation for our findings. First, our analyses show that people perceived the two dimensions as distinguishable (see Table 4). More importantly, our analyses statistically control for overlap between perceived sociality and prosociality. Nevertheless, the fact that people assumed that someone who was outgoing, humorous, and extraverted was also kind, generous, and trustworthy is interesting in its own right. This finding might be the result of a “halo effect” (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) or the “affect-as-information” phenomenon (Forgas, 2001; Slovic, Finucane, Peters, & MacGregor, 2002). In the former, people who have one set of positive characteristics are presumed to have other, often unrelated, positive characteristics as well. In the latter, individuals may infer that if it *feels* good

to be around a certain individual (e.g., social), then that individual must also *be* good (e.g., prosocial).

The likelihood of these two alternatives cannot be completely ruled out by Study 2. It is possible that if prosociality were more visible or separable, then perhaps it would also contribute to status attainment and leader perceptions. This possibility was experimentally tested in Study 3.

Study 3: Experimental Manipulation of Sociality and Prosociality

Method

Participants were 178 adults (72% women), who lived in 32 different states across the US, and 1 participant lived in Canada. The mean age was 38 years (*SD* = 13, Range = 18 to 71). As in Study 1, they were recruited from a nationwide online subject pool (administered by the Kellogg School of Management) to participate in a 15-minute survey on leadership. In exchange for completing the survey, participants were entered in a raffle for a $50 giftcard.

The experiment had a 2 (*social*: high vs. low) X 2 (*prosocial*: high vs. low) X 2 (*order*: social traits presented first vs. prosocial traits presented first) between-subjects design. The experiment began by presenting participants with a (hypothetical) profile of an employee in a Fortune 500 company. Participants were given the following instructions for the task.

> We are interested in examining how accurate people are in judging executives' and employees' personality traits. Below you will find a personality profile from a member of a Fortune 500 company. After reading the profile, please answer the questions that follow.

After reading these instructions participants were presented with one of eight profiles (randomly assigned). The profiles varied whether the target was high or low on social and prosocial traits, and the order of the trait presentation was randomly assigned, with half the

participants reading a profile in which social traits were presented first, and half the participants reading a profile in which prosocial traits were presented first. We did not find evidence of order effects in any of our analyses, so we do not discuss this variable further.

The target descriptions for the conditions in which the social traits were presented first are presented below.

High Social, High Prosocial Target. Mr. J. is interpersonally engaging and socially skilled. He is charming and outgoing, and has the ability to attract social attention and interact effectively with others. Mr. J. is also cooperative and seeks to promote the welfare of others. He is known for being honest and trustworthy, and enjoys helping others whenever he can.

Low Social, Low Prosocial Target. Mr. J. is reserved and feels more comfortable in quiet settings than around large groups of people. When interacting with others, he is not very talkative. Mr. J. is also competitive and self-promoting. He is known for being strategic and looking out for his own interests.

Low Social, High Prosocial Target. Mr. J. is reserved and feels more comfortable in quiet settings than around large groups of people. When interacting with others, he is not very talkative. Mr. J. is also cooperative and seeks to promote the welfare of others. He is known for being honest and trustworthy, and enjoys helping others whenever he can.

High Social, Low Prosocial Target. Mr. J. is interpersonally engaging and socially skilled. He is charming and outgoing, and has the ability to attract social attention and interact effectively with others. Mr. J. is also competitive and self-promoting. He is known for being strategic and looking out for his own interests.

After reading the profile, participants answered a series of questions about the target. First, participants were asked to indicate their perceptions of whether the target was a leader in the organization: “What do you think is this person’s rank in the organization?” Response options were: 1 = *Entry-level employee*; 2 = *Low-level manager*; 3 = *Mid-level manager*; 4 = *Senior Vice President*; 5 = *CEO*.

Next participants were asked to indicate their agreement with a list of statements describing the target (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The order in which the statements were presented was randomized for each participant. To test the effectiveness of the manipulation, we included one statement measuring perceived sociality of the target (“This person is extraverted”) and one statement measuring perceived prosociality of the target (“This person has good values”). Three items assessed perceived status: “This person has high status”; “This person is powerful”; “This person is influential.” We averaged these three items to form a composite indicator of perceived status ($\alpha = .90$).

Results

Manipulation Checks

An ANOVA of the item “This person is extraverted” revealed a significant main effect of social, $F(1, 174) = 179.26$, $p < .001$. The effects of prosocial, $F(1, 174) = .04$, $p = .84$, and Social X Prosocial, $F(1, 174) = .04$, $p = .85$, were nonsignificant. As expected, the high-social target ($M = 5.84$, $SD = 1.15$) was perceived as significantly more extraverted than the low-social target ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.78$).

An ANOVA of the item “This person has good values” revealed a significant main effect of prosocial, $F(1, 174) = 145.22$, $p < .001$. The effects of social, $F(1, 174) = 2.34$, $p = .13$, and Social X Prosocial, $F(1, 174) = .00$, $p = .99$, were nonsignificant. As expected, the high-prosocial

target (M = 5.96, SD = .94) was perceived as having significantly better values than the low-prosocial target (M = 3.95, SD = 1.27).

These manipulation checks confirm that both sociality and prosociality were clearly visible to participants.

Perceived Leadership Attainment

An ANOVA of the item that asked participants to indicate the target's rank in the organization revealed significant main effects for social, $F(1, 174) = 10.68$, $p = .001$, and prosocial, $F(1, 174) = 7.68$, $p = .006$. The Social X Prosocial interaction was nonsignificant, $F(1, 174) = .46$, $p = .50$. These effects are shown in Figure 2. The high-social target (M = 3.02, SD = 1.03) was *more* likely to be seen as a leader than the low-social target (M = 2.54, SD = .97), whereas the high-prosocial target (M = 2.60, SD = .90) was *less* likely to be seen as a leader than the low-prosocial target (M = 3.02, SD = 1.12).

Perceived Status

An ANOVA of the status composite revealed a significant main effect for social, $F(1, 174) = 49.34$, $p < .001$. The effects of prosocial, $F(1, 174) = 1.32$, $p = .25$, and Social X Prosocial, $F(1, 174) = .40$, $p = .53$, were nonsignificant. As shown in Figure 3, the high-social target (M = 5.27, SD = 1.10) was seen as higher in status than the low-social target (M = 4.00, SD = 1.29).

Mediation Analysis

We tested whether perceived status mediated the effect of sociality on perceived leadership attainment using Preacher and Hayes' (2008) bootstrapping procedure. The analysis included prosociality as a covariate. As shown in Figure 4, the direct effect of sociality on leadership (B = .48, SE = .15, p = .002) became nonsignificant (B = -.11, SE = .14, p = .42) when

status was included in the regression analysis, but the effect of status on leadership attainment remained significant (B = .46, SE = .05, p < .001). A 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence interval (CI) revealed that this mediation was significant (CI = .42 to .80).

Discussion

The results of Study 3 confirm that the higher perceptions of status and leadership attainment for social versus prosocial targets is not due to the differential visibility of sociality and prosociality. Rather these findings are due to differences in the very nature of sociality versus prosociality. Using a controlled experimental context in which sociality and prosociality were manipulated rather than measured, Study 3 conceptually replicated the results of Study 2. That is, sociality was associated with higher status and leader emergence whereas prosociality was not. Indeed, prosociality caused individuals to be seen as *less* leader-like. Moreover, the effect of sociality on perceived leadership attainment was mediated by status. That is, sociality caused individuals to see the target as high status, and high status, in return, was associated with increased leadership perceptions. Thus, Study 3 replicated the basic pattern of findings in Study 2 by showing that sociality is associated with high status, and high status is associated with leader emergence (see Figures 1 and 4).

General Discussion

Taken together, these three studies reveal an intriguing dissociation between the leaders that people say they want (and in fact, *should* want) and the leaders that people actually choose. The leaders that people report wanting are fair, trustworthy, compassionate, and benevolent. The leaders that people choose are self-promoting and power-seeking, albeit charming and socially engaging. People choose these “wolves in sheep’s clothing” for leadership roles due in large part to their higher status. Simply stated, this research reveals that people are more attracted to

sociality and status than prosociality and benevolence when selecting leaders. It is a paradoxical finding but one that has many real-world analogs. For example, consider the following scenarios:

> You are in high school and it is time to elect a class president. The first candidate, an honors student who volunteers to help underprivileged children with their homework, quietly takes the stage and gives a superb speech on his plans to improve school services. The second candidate, the convivial captain of the football team, advances toward the stage with an infectious smile, giving handshakes, high fives, and hearty cheers along the way. He approaches the podium, grins, raises his fist in the air, and yells "Panthers rule!" Who wins the election?
>
> It is an election year and the race is down to two candidates running for a major political office. The first politician is a bit uptight and socially awkward, but is experienced, intelligent, and seems to have the knowledge and motivation to improve the state of the world. The second politician is personable, charming, and "cool"—the kind of person with whom you could imagine yourself enjoying a casual dinner or drinking a few beers on a Friday night. He is outgoing and humorous, but seems interested in improving only the state of *his* world. Who wins the election?

These scenarios are loosely based on real elections, and in both cases the more social leader triumphed over the more prosocial leader. Moreover, in both cases, one could argue that the social leader's victory was not due to higher levels of competence, but rather to the sense that he was more interpersonally dynamic and had higher status. What is particularly disturbing is that in both cases the social leader did not act in the benefit of the group, broadly construed.

In addition to election anecdotes, there is indirect empirical evidence bolstering our ironic finding that the leaders that people want are not the leaders that they ultimately choose. For

instance, Tiedens (2001) showed that people claim to want benevolent leader reactions but respond more favorably to high-status leader reactions. Specifically, Tiedens (2001) investigated whether people thought that Bill Clinton should show remorse, a prosocial emotion, or anger, a high-status emotion, when being interrogated about the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Participants reported a strong preference for the President to show remorse rather than anger. However, when participants were shown video clips of Bill Clinton displaying either anger or remorse during the actual trial, they judged the President as having significantly higher status and leadership ability when he expressed anger rather than remorse. These data echo our findings: Although people report a preference for leaders who are moral (i.e., prosocial), they tend to actually support leaders perceived as having high status, even when the individual's behavior is not beneficial to the group as a whole.

These findings do not seem to be limited to leadership; a similar pattern of preference for charm and status over humility and benevolence also occurs in mate selection. Research on interpersonal attraction has documented a preference for high-status traits over prosocial traits. For example, a multi-method program of research by Sadalla, Kenrick, and Vershure (1987) found that high-status, dominant behavior in men led to an increase in women's sexual attraction toward them. What is particularly interesting about this set of studies is that although high-status behavior increased attraction, it did *not* increase liking. Women tended to express indifference or disdain for dominant men on a rational, explicit level, but found them attractive on a more visceral level. This visceral preference could be linked to the belief that dominant men are stronger, whereas prosocial men may be seen as weak. Jensen-Campbell, Graziano, and West (1995) argue that "a prosocial man may be seen as more socially desirable, but not more physically attractive or desirable as a date" (p. 428). In fact, they raise the possibility, as raised

by others (e.g., Daly & Wilson, 1988), that "worse still, it is possible that women may derogate a cooperative, altruistic man for being a nonmasculine weakling" (Jensen-Campbell et al., 1995; p. 428).[6]

Perhaps there is an evolutionary basis for these counterintuitive findings. It is certainly the case among many nonhuman social mammals that "alphas" are more dominant than compassionate, and that they almost invariably are leaders and the most attractive mates. Moreover, leaders in the animal kingdom are typically not the most generous members of the pack; in fact, they often behave more selfishly, taking more resources (e.g., food) than their "fair" share. Although people consciously realize that they should prefer prosocial leaders (or mates), they may be "wired" to favor strong, dominant, high status individuals, despite the fact that such individuals are not always the most kind, compassionate, or generous.

Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of the present studies is that they involved only experimental scenarios or short-term interpersonal interactions. It is well-known that brief interactions in ad hoc groups favor extraversion and talkativeness (Bass & Bass, 2008), but perhaps prosociality becomes more important with extended interactions. We recently addressed this issue in a study in which we investigated the consequences of prosocial values on leadership attainment and effectiveness in 26 corporations (Livingston, Berson, Oreg, Cohen, & Halevy, 2010). We found that employees with strong prosocial values (i.e., universalism; Schwartz, 1992) were significantly *less* likely to occupy high positions within their organization. Specifically, employees with high prosocial values were less likely to be Chief Executive Officers (CEO) or Senior Vice Presidents (SVP) compared with employees with low prosocial values. In addition, we found that CEOs and SVPs who held strong prosocial values were evaluated more negatively by their subordinates

compared with executives who were lower in prosocial values. Empirical evidence suggests that fairness often serves as a constraint on profit maximization in organizations (Kahnman, Knetsch & Thaler, 1986). Prosociality might hamper leader effectiveness because although it is associated with liking, it may not be associated with respect, which tends to be more closely tied to status (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

In a related experimental study, Livingston et al. (2010) also experimentally manipulated the extent to which a CEO expressed prosocial or pragmatic (i.e., financially-oriented) values. Although the prosocial CEO was seen as kinder and more ethical than the pragmatic CEO, the prosocial CEO was also seen as weaker (i.e., less dominant) and less likely to have a profitable company. In sum, these data suggest that our current findings generalize to real corporations and further indicate that sincere prosociality is a liability because it causes leaders to be seen as weak.

One question for future research concerns the boundaries of these findings. Although people throughout history have been attracted to charming, socially-skilled, charismatic leaders who often served their own self-interests, people have also supported, kind, benevolent, prosocial leaders who worked hard to benefit humanity. Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela are but a few examples. One factor that may moderate whether people favor social or prosocial leaders is the level of need among followers. People may show an enhanced preference for prosocial over social leaders in situations in which provisional roles have strong significance for followers, independent of whether it is due to a change in cultural ethos, institutional oppression, or material/economic conditions.

In a similar vein, future research should explore the moderators of when prosociality leads to higher status (e.g., competitive altruism) and when it does not (i.e., sincere prosociality).

One possibility is that generosity or helping under conditions of “signaling” conveys strength and status, but sincere generosity or benevolence conveys a sense that one is a “doormat” (e.g., passive, foolish, and/or weak). In essence, helping can make one a “hero” or a “servant”, and the context in which one helps may determine which perception emerges.

Finally, another important direction for future research would be to compare the objective performance of social versus prosocial leaders. In the current research, we did not find a difference in the perceived competence of prosocial versus social individuals. However, it is possible that prosocial individuals differ from social individuals in their *actual* (not perceived) leadership effectiveness.

Our findings regarding the impact of sociality on status and leadership attainment have many implications for organizational psychology. Selection and promotion decisions in organizations are often based on procedures that rely heavily on social interaction and interpersonal judgments (e.g., peer ratings, assessment centers, unstructured interviews; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Our findings suggest that these procedures might bias recruiters and supervisors toward hiring and promoting social individuals at the expense of prosocial individuals. Overlooking prosociality is particularly problematic when the positions that need to be filled require managing and allocating resources to other members in the organization. While emphasizing sociality over prosociality makes sense when a manager’s primary tasks are to motivate and coordinate the actions of others, negotiate on behalf of her organization, or involve important brokerage and boundary-spanning functions, it may well turn out to be a costly mistake when a manager’s primary task is to allocate resources fairly. The “folly of rewarding A, while hoping for B” (Kerr, 1975) is not unfamiliar to organizations of different kinds, including universities.

Conclusion

Examples abound of leaders who have ascended to power using their social charm, only to employ their leadership positions as a vehicle for egocentric ambition and personal greed. For example, Hogan and Kaiser (2005, p. 169) describe the ruthless and inhumane dictator Foday Sankoh as someone who was “bright, charming, and charismatic, and [who] immediately attracted a large popular following.” Because it is difficult to feel delighted by someone while simultaneously acknowledging their propensity for malevolence, people often assume that social individuals are also prosocial, which may or may not be accurate.

An ideal solution to the paradox of wanting prosocial leaders but choosing social leaders would entail a mass “re-wiring” of humans to prioritize the importance of benevolence and humility over sociality and status. People seem to have the right priorities in theory (Study 1), but not in practice (Studies 2 and 3). One viable strategy for preventing wolves in sheeps’ clothing from emerging as leaders might be to rely more heavily on objective information (e.g., prior record of prosocial behavior) rather than positive feelings or superficial impressions when selecting leaders.

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Footnotes

[1] The structural hypothesis might partially explain the existence of political dynasties occupied by high-status, “blue-blooded” families, who are disproportionately successful at achieving leadership positions, independent of their actual competence.

[2] The version of the Honesty-Humility scale used in Study 2 was based on early research on the HEXACO (Ashton & Lee, 2007). However the HEXACO inventory has subsequently been revised and newer measures of Honesty-Humility are now available (Ashton & Lee, 2008; see www.hexaco.org for more information).

[3] Because we did not want to contaminate the assessment of leadership votes, we had participants vote for a leader prior to making trait ratings or indicating the percentage of time each person talked.

[4] Participants were also told either that the leader would be in a position to harm group members or benefit group members. Results were similar in both the harm and benefit conditions, so we collapsed across this dimension for all reported analyses. The similarity of results for the harm and benefit conditions suggests that our findings are generalizable to both contexts.

[5] It is also possible that there is a path from judged status to judged social. Using real-world research and development teams, Cohen and Zhou (1991) found that individuals who have higher status are more social, participating in more group interactions and discussions. This possibility is not highly plausible in the current study because participants were exposed to social

information but were not familiar with other participants, and were not given any information about socioeconomic, educational, or peer status.

[6] A fictional scenario that captures the social versus prosocial quandary in mate selection can be found in the popular series “Sex and the City.” The protagonist is torn between two suitors who are both attractive and successful, but one (i.e., Mr. Big) is more social (outgoing, charming, high status) whereas the other (i.e., Aidan) is more prosocial (honest, supportive, caring). What is interesting about the scenario is that she knows that she should choose the prosocial individual but is nonetheless drawn to the social individual despite her efforts to resist him.

Table 1

Study 1: Perceived Importance of Leadership Traits

Trait	Open-Ended *Response Frequency*	Rating *M* (*SD*)	Ranking *Median/Modal Rank*
Competent	27%	4.49 (.68)	1
Prosocial	33%	4.20 (.70)	2
Social	7%	3.28 (.90)	3
High Status	8%	3.43 (.80)	4

Note. $N = 86$. Response frequency indicates the percentage of traits listed in each category relative to the total number of traits listed by the participants (percentages do not sum to 100% because 25% of responses we classified as other/multiple categories). Ratings ranged from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*very important*). Rankings ranged from 1 (*most desirable trait*) to 4 (*least desirable trait*).

Table 2

Study 2: Correlations among Sociality, Prosociality, Trait Perceptions, Leader Emergence, and Leader Benevolence

			1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*	*13*
Sociality	*1*	Self-Monitoring	--												
	2	Extraversion	**.56***	--											
	3	Time talked in group discussion	.12	**.23***	--										
Prosociality	*4*	Honesty-Humility	-.04	.01	-.09	--									
	5	Prosocial SVO	-.11	.00	.01	**.26***	--								
	6	Money sent in dictator game	-.08	.00	.04	**.24***	**.31***	--							
Trait Perceptions	*7*	Judged Social	**.19***	**.20***	**.46***	.05	.08	.04	--						
	8	Judged Prosocial	-.04	.00	-.01	.05	.11	.05	**.46***	--					
	9	Judged High Status	.16†	.15	**.42***	-.09	-.07	-.15†	**.76***	**.45***	--				
	10	Judged Competent	-.13	-.05	.01	-.04	.01	-.05	**.32***	**.65***	**.49***	--			
Leader Emergence	*11*	Votes Received from Others	-.12	.02	**.27***	.07	.14	.10	**.34***	**.25***	**.37***	.14	--		
	12	Votes for Self	-.05	.15	**.41***	-.09	**-.29***	-.13	.12	-.07	**.24***	.07	.10	--	
Leader Benevolence[a]	*13*	Raffle tickets given to others	**-.34***	-.17	-.07	**.35***	**.35***	**.62***	-.10	-.22	**-.36***	**-.35***	**.35***	**-.40***	--

Note. N = 117. Bivariate correlations are presented. SVO = Social Value Orientation. *p < .05, †p < .10

[a] Leader benevolence correlations were limited to the 39 leaders.

Table 3

Study 2: Correlations among Self-Promotion, Sociality, Prosociality, Status, Leader Benevolence

		1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
1	Self-Promotion	--				
2	Sociality	**.23***	--			
3	Prosociality	**-.23***	-.06	--		
4	Judged High Status	**.24***	**.33***	-.16†	--	
5	Leader Benevolence[a]	**-.40***	-.26	**.57***	**-.36***	--

Note. $N = 117$. Bivariate correlations are presented. Self-promotion was the number of self-votes for leadership. Leader benevolence was the number of raffle tickets the leader gave to others.

[a] Leader benevolence correlations were limited to the 39 leaders.

*$p < .05$, †$p < .10$

Table 4

Study 2: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) of Social and Prosocial Trait Perceptions

	Judged Social	Judged Prosocial
Humorous	.65*	.09
Talkative	.70*	.08
Extraverted	.95*	-.11
Outgoing	.82*	.01
Honest	-.10	.71*
Trustworthy	-.07	.77*
Sincere	.01	.81*
Helpful	.07	.70*
Generous	.05	.61*
Cooperative	-.17	.83*
Warm	.18*	.66*
Kind	.02	.79*

Factor intercorrelation = .50*

Eigenvalues = 5.74, 1.96, 0.83, 0.60, 0.53

Model fit: $\chi^2(43, N = 117) = 76.62$*; *RMSEA* = .08; *CFI* = .96.

Note. $N = 117$. EFA computed with maximum likelihood estimation (ML) with oblique rotation.

RMSEA = Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation. CFI = Confirmatory Fit Index.

*$p < .05$, †$p < .10$

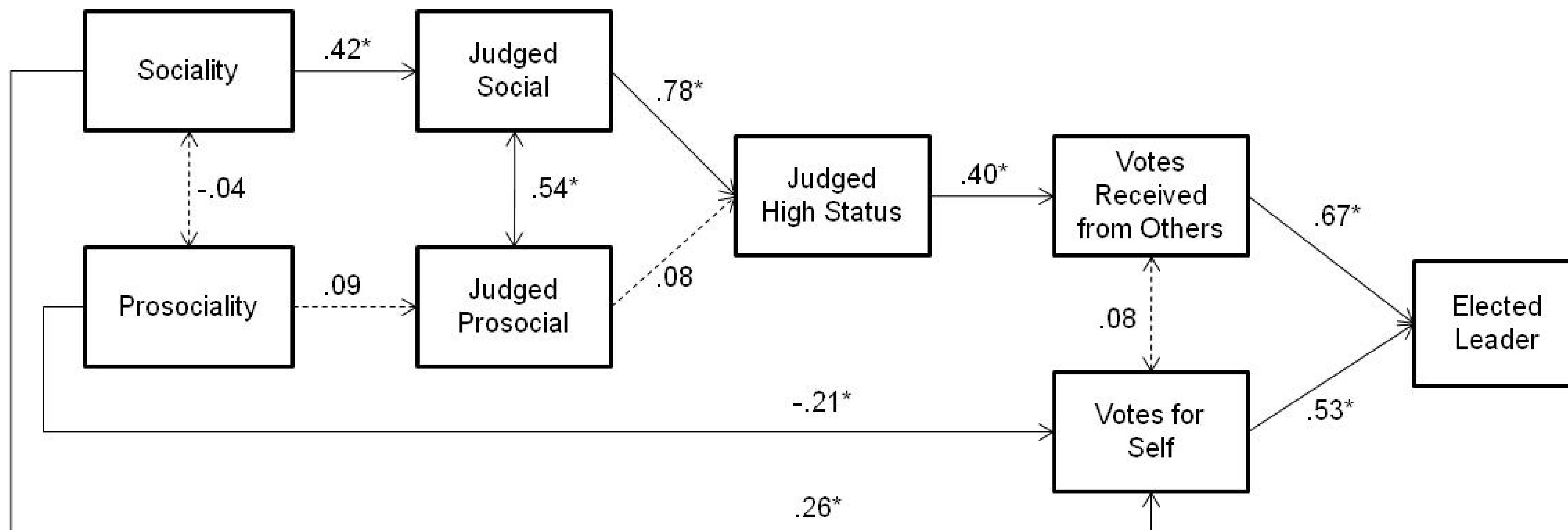

Figure 1. Study 2 (N = 117). Leader emergence path model. Standardized estimates are presented.

*$p < .05$, †$p < .10$

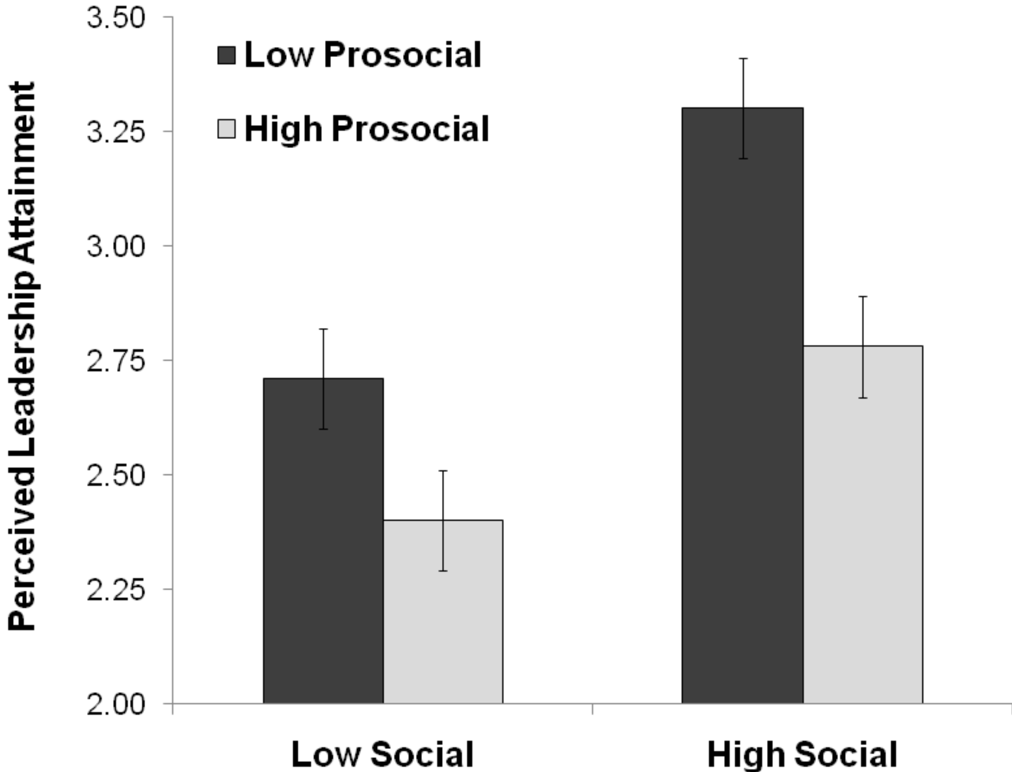

Figure 2. Study 3 (N = 178). The effects of sociality and prosociality on perceived leadership attainment (i.e., rank in the organization: 1 = *Entry-level employee*, 5 = *CEO*).

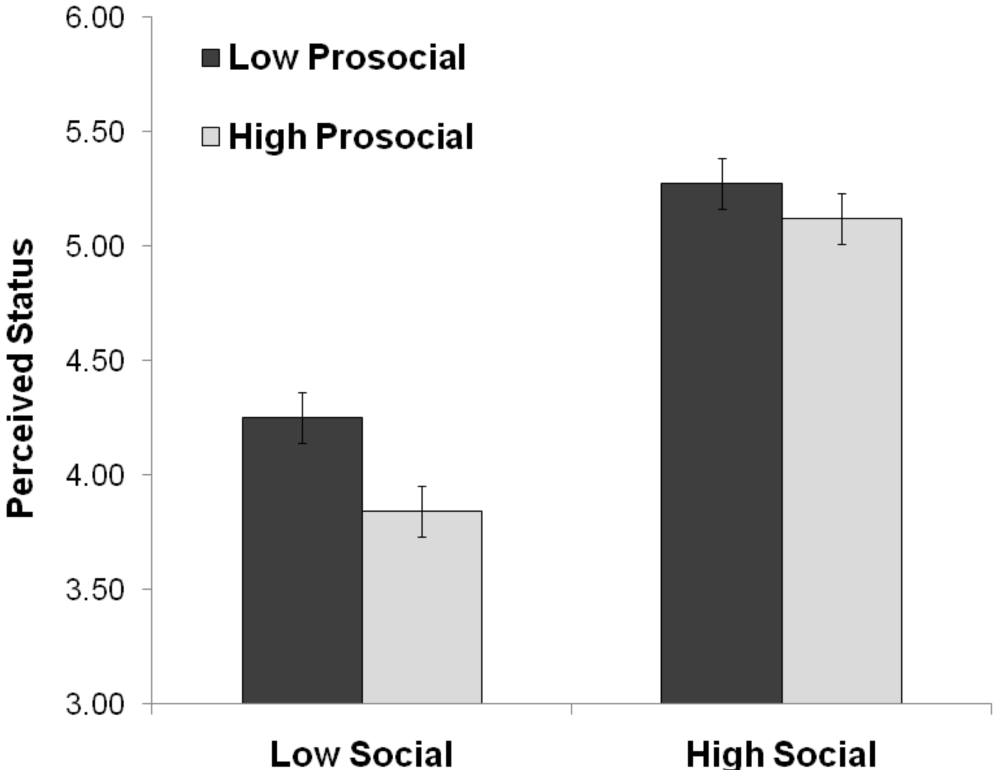

Figure 3. Study 3 (N = 178). The effects of sociality and prosociality on perceived status.

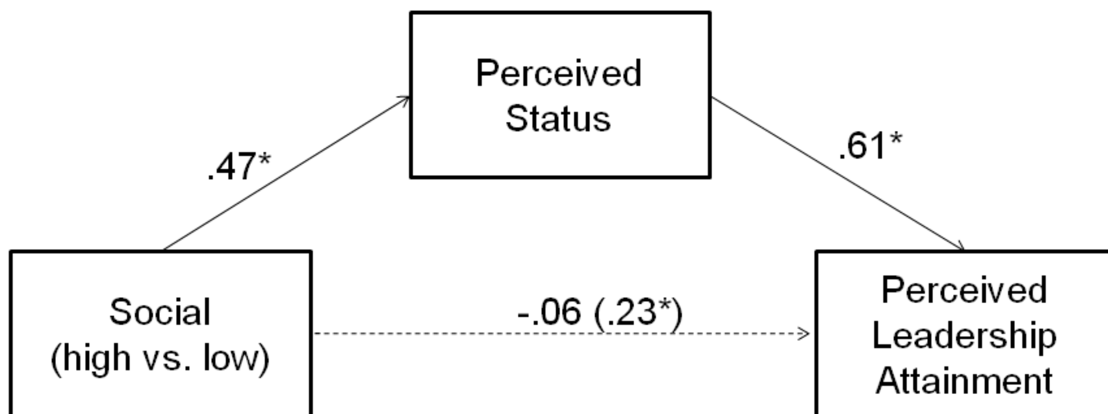

Figure 4. Study 3 (N = 178). Mediation of the effect of sociality on perceived leadership attainment by perceived status. Mediation analysis computed with Preacher and Hayes' (2008) bootstrapping procedure (95% Confidence Interval = .42 to .80). Prosocial included as a covariate.