Socioemotional Characteristics of Elementary School Children Identified as Exhibiting Social Leadership Qualities

MIRI SCHARF
OFRA MAYSELESS
University of Haifa, Israel

ABSTRACT. Elementary school teachers identified characteristics in 4 major socioemotional domains associated with children’s social leadership: self-perception, social anxiety, attachment orientation with peers, and interpersonal goals and skills in close friendships. Participants were 260 4th- and 5th-grade students (126 boys, 134 girls) from 10 classes in a school in northern Israel. Social leadership skills were associated with positive self-perceptions in various domains, low social anxiety, secure orientation to peers, higher levels of relationship-maintenance goal, lower levels of revenge goal in close friendships, and—unexpectedly—lower levels of accommodation as a strategy to solve conflicts with a friend. Positive self-concept and attachment security were indirectly associated with leadership qualities through their significant association with prosocial orientation skills. The authors discuss these findings as reflecting an internalization of positive model of self and positive model of others in children who exhibit social leadership qualities. The authors also discuss implications of these qualities for school and class ecology, as well as the importance of culture.

Keywords: childhood, emotional development, leadership, school, social development

RESEARCHERS HAVE EXAMINED THE EMERGENCE of leaders in social groups—one of the most prevalent social phenomena (Hogg, 2001)—mainly in adult populations (Bass, 1990). Hawley (1999) noted that leadership qualities reflect a developmental process and can be detected even in childhood. Researchers identified the emergence of leadership positions in a group, which entailed dominance hierarchy and affiliative choices, as early as the end of the preschool years (Hawley, 2002; Strayer & Trudel, 1984). Although situational factors and the group’s activity and composition affect the emergence of certain individuals as leaders (Bass; Fiedler, 1971), children seem to exhibit certain characteristics, such as leadership skills, that contribute to their likelihood of emerging as leaders.

Address correspondence to Miri Scharf, University of Haifa, Faculty of Education, Haifa 31905, Israel; scharfm@construct.haifa.ac.il (e-mail).
in a group (Edwards, 1994; French & Stright, 1991). The stability in leadership nominations across contexts reflects such personal qualities. For example, across a 5-year span that included students’ transition from elementary school to junior high school and a change in the identity of the classmates, students’ nomination of their classmates as leaders showed moderate stability (Coie & Dodge, 1983).

Schools provide natural environments for children to learn and exercise leadership skills and train in different leadership styles. The experience that students gain in leadership positions in social interactions in schools provides an important scaffolding for future leaders. Also, child leaders can have a strong effect on the ecologies of the class and school. The leaders can potentially facilitate a positive class climate in which students are likely to feel more comfortable and in a better position to optimize the learning opportunities that teachers present them within the first years in school (Birch & Ladd, 1996) and in middle childhood (Scharf & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2003).

Previous research on children identified as leaders by peer nomination, teachers, or observers pinpointed several characteristic qualities. Most of these children were sociometrically popular: Their peers chose them as friends (e.g., Chen, Rubin, & Sun, 1992; Dodge, 1983; Fukada, Fukada, & Hicks, 1997). In a factor analysis conducted using one of the most popular measures of social reputation, the Revised Class Play, a combined factor of leadership and sociability emerged (Masten, Morison, & Pellegrini, 1985), and this finding was replicated across samples and cultures (Chen et al.). Thus, child leaders also tend to be highly sociable and popular. In the present study, we focused on these social leadership qualities that teachers identified in elementary school children, and we examined these children’s socioemotional characteristics.

**Domains of Socioemotional Attributes of Leaders**

We examined two major socioemotional domains that we expected to characterize leaders: (a) internalization of a positive model of self and (b) prosocial interpersonal orientations and skills. We expected leaders to evince a positive self-model, which includes self-efficacy, low anxiety, positive self-concept, and attachment security. The link among positive self-concept, efficacy, and ability to lead seems self-evident. People who believe in themselves and their abilities to perform tasks successfully are better suited for leadership roles than are those who do not. Previous researchers found that children who are identified as leaders were also characterized as having high self-esteem and positive self-regard (Chan, 2000; Chen, Rubin, Li, & Li, 1999). Current conceptualizations view self-perception as a multidimensional construct that may reflect somewhat distinctively in different domains (e.g., academic vs. social; Harter, 1999). In light of the multidimensionality of the self-concept, we examined the association between social leadership qualities identified by teachers in children and various domains of self-perception. Also pertinent to the expectation that leaders evince a positive
model of self is the existence of self-efficacy in social situations. Hence, we also expected the social leadership qualities that teachers identified to be associated with lower levels of social anxiety.

As another manifestation of an internalization of positive model of self, we examined attachment orientation with peers. Secure individuals are better equipped than others are to become social leaders because of their internalization of positive and caring representations of self and significant others (Popper & Mayseless, 2003; Popper, Mayseless, & Castelnovo, 2000). Englund, Levy, Hyson, and Southe (2000) provided empirical support for this contention with children. They noted a clear association between secure attachment, as assessed in infancy, and leadership ratings by observers, during a weekend camp 15 years later when the participants were adolescents. In the present study, we assessed concurrent security of attachment orientation with peers.

Leaders are further expected to have a prosocial orientation that is proactive and effectual (Popper & Mayseless, 2002). Specifically, they are expected to have a positive model of others that includes caring about others and good interpersonal skills, which is in line with the notion that leaders are able and willing to contribute to the group. In the present study, we examined goals and conflict-resolution strategies in friendships as reflecting various domains of such interpersonal capacities.

As revealed in dyadic relations with friends, interpersonal skills should be important in the emergence of leaders. To promote and maintain cohesion in a group and solve conflicts that arise from it, a leader should have prosocial goals such as those of relationship maintenance. A leader should possess prosocial strategies of conflict management, such as wanting to compromise rather than take revenge. By practicing these goals and strategies in dyadic relationships with friends, children become proficient in prosocial interpersonal competencies that are useful in larger groups. Numerous researchers (Farmer & Rodkin, 1996; Hawley, 2002; Pakaslahti & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 2001; Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl, & Van-Acker, 2000) have shown in their studies on children that most leaders are sociable and agreeable. Nevertheless, researchers have not directly examined the social skills of children who are identified as social leaders or as exhibiting leadership skills. In the present study, we examined this association and further explored the association among positive self-model, prosocial competencies in the friendship context, and leadership skills.

The internalization of positive model of self may be associated with such prosocial competencies because a positive self-model may lead the child to trust others and seek to cooperate with them (Cassidy, 1999; Dodge, 1983). Previous researchers found that children with positive self-concept tend to show better interpersonal skills. Hence, we expected that the internalizations of positive model of self would be associated with prosocial skills in friendships and that these skills would partly mediate the association between positive model of self and leadership qualities.
Because of the salience and importance of social skills in the emergence of leaders, we expected various demographic variables previously linked to such skills to be associated with the social leadership qualities that teachers identified. These include gender and number of children in the family. Previous researchers have shown that girls evince higher levels of social skills, particularly with close friends (Sharabany, Gershoni, & Hofman, 1981). This may relate to the cultural expectations of the female gender role, which encourage nurturance and responsibility for maintaining relationships (Brody, 1996; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991). Previous research has also noted the possibility of better social skills in children with many siblings (Nakao et al., 2000). With siblings, children can exercise and learn social skills, as they spend many hours together and must get along.

In sum, the present study extended previous research with child leaders in several ways. First, considering the importance of teachers in identifying child leaders (e.g., Schneider, Ehrhart, & Ehrhart, 2002), we probed social leadership qualities as identified by teachers rather than the children’s peers. Second, we examined the association of social leadership qualities with several socioemotional attributes not previously explored, or explored only partially, in connection with social leadership in children: (a) model of self including various domains of the self-concept, social anxiety, and attachment security to peers, and (b) interpersonal orientation and skills including interpersonal goals and conflict-resolution strategies in close friendships. We observed the cumulative and relative contributions of each of these attributes to social leadership qualities and expected internalizations of positive model of self to be associated with leadership qualities through their association with prosocial interpersonal orientation and skills.

**Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1 (H₁):** Girls, as well as children with many siblings, are expected to show higher levels of social leadership qualities.

**H₂:** Social leadership qualities are expected to be associated with higher levels of positive self-perception in various domains, lower levels of social anxiety, secure attachment with peers, and prosocial goals and prosocial strategies in close friendship.

**H₃:** Higher levels of positive model of self are expected to be linked to social leadership qualities through their association with prosocial goals and prosocial strategies in close friendships, which are expected to partly mediate the association.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were 260 fourth- and fifth-grade students (126 boys, 134 girls) from 10 classes in three schools in northern Israel. The students ranged in age
from 9.5 to 11.5 years. We sampled all of the fourth- and fifth-grade classes in
these schools. Students at these schools came from mostly lower middle-class
neighborhoods.

Measures

Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter, 1985). This scale contains five
domain-specific subscales: (a) scholastic competence (six items; e.g., “Some
kids feel that they are very good at their school work but other kids worry about
whether they can do the school work assigned to them”), (b) athletic competence
(six items; e.g., “Some kids do very well at all kinds of sports but others don’t feel
that they are very good when it comes to sport”), (c) peer likeability (six items;
e.g., “Some kids find it hard to make friends but for other kids it’s pretty easy”),
(d) physical appearance (six items; e.g., “Some kids are happy with the way they
look but other kids are not happy with the way they look”), and (e) behavioral
conduct (six items; e.g., “Some kids often do not like the way they behave but
other kids usually like the way they behave”). A separate subscale assesses global
self-worth (six items; e.g., “Some kids like the kind of person they are but other
kids often wish they were someone else”). For the aforementioned subscales, in
the present study, Cronbach’s alphas were .78, .73, .73, .78, .65, and .69, respec-
tively. We first asked children to select the type of child they were most like:
those described in the first or second part of the aforementioned statements. After
they made their choices, they were asked to indicate whether that description
was “really true” or “sort of true” for them. This format reduced the tendency to
give socially desirable responses. A score of 1 represented low self-perception,
whereas 4 represented high self-perception. Researchers have widely used this
measure in studies in which they examined children’s self-perception, and the
measure has shown good psychometric qualities (Gillessen & Bellmore, 1999).

Social Anxiety Scale for Children-Revised (SASC-R; La Greca & Stone, 1993). In
this scale, children are asked how much they feel each of the statements is true
for them on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (all the
time) on the following subscales: (a) fear of negative evaluation (FNE; six items;
e.g., “I worry about what other kids say about me”; “I am afraid that others will
not like me”), (b) social avoidance and distress—new peers and situations (SAD
new; 8 items; e.g., “I feel shy around kids I don’t know”; “I get nervous when I
meet new kids”), and (c) social avoidance and distress—general (SAD general;
3 items; e.g., “I feel shy even with peers I know well”; “It’s hard for me to ask
others to do things with me”). For these subscales in the present study, Cronbach’s
alphas were .85, .65, and .68 (.76 with deleting one item), respectively. The internal
consistency, test–retest reliability and discriminant, concurrent validity, and
predictive validity were adequate (La Greca & Lopez, 1998; La Greca & Stone;
Reijntjes, Dekovic, & Telch, 2007).
Children's Goals and Strategies in Response to Conflicts Within a Friendship (Rose & Asher, 1999). The goal questionnaire comprised hypothetical situations representing five different contexts. Due to time constraints, we focused on the context of managing disagreements regarding resources because we thought this would reveal more individual differences than would other less-challenging contexts (e.g., maintaining reciprocity). The following is an example of a hypothetical situation:

You are shooting basketball by yourself in the playground during recess. Your friend comes over and says that he wants the ball. You tell him that you just got the ball from someone else and you want to play with it, but your friend still says that he wants the ball. What would your goal be?

In response to each hypothetical situation, children rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (fully agree) how much they agreed that each goal would be theirs. Following the presentation of four conflict-of-interest situations, we presented the children with six goal options. The score for each of the six goals was the mean of the child’s rating for that goal across the four hypothetical situations. We gave boys and girls versions of the questionnaires in which the pronouns representing the friend corresponded to the child’s gender.

Goals included the following six scales: relationship-maintenance goal (e.g., “I would be trying to stay friends,” $\alpha = .88$), moral goal (e.g., “I would be trying to be fair,” $\alpha = .84$), tension-reduction goal (e.g., “I would be trying to keep myself from getting upset,” $\alpha = .80$), instrumental goal (e.g., “I would be trying to play the same game again,” $\alpha = .70$), control goal (e.g., “I would be trying to keep my friend from pushing me around,” $\alpha = .70$), and revenge goal (e.g., “I would be trying to get back at my friend,” $\alpha = .71$).

The strategies section comprised the following six scales in which the examples relate to the previously described ball game: (a) accommodation (e.g., “I would tell my friend that he can pick the next game,” $\alpha = .77$), (b) compromise (e.g., “I would say that he could pick the game now if I could pick the game after that,” $\alpha = .70$), (c) self-interest assertion (e.g., “I would tell my friend that we should play the same game again,” $\alpha = .72$), (d) verbal aggression (e.g., “I would tell him to shut up because I want to pick,” $\alpha = .89$), (e) leaving (e.g., “I would just go away,” $\alpha = .77$), and (f) threat of termination of friendship (e.g., “I would tell my friend that I won’t be friends with him anymore unless we play the same game again,” $\alpha = .79$). Children’s goals and strategies were predictive of their real-life friendship adjustment: number of friends and quality of the friendship (for more details, see Rose & Asher, 1999).

We attempted to reduce the number of variables without losing meaningful distinctions. Where correlations between variables were high, we constructed a new composite scale that was the mean of the original scales. For conflict-management goals, we used the composite scales that Rose and Asher (1999)
constructed. The composite scale of the relationship-maintenance goal included the relationship, tension-reduction, and moral goals (α = .90). The composite scale of instrumental control included the instrumental and control goals (α = .78). For conflict-management strategies, the composite scale of hostile strategy included the goals of verbal aggression, leaving, and threat of termination of friendship (α = .88). As in Rose and Asher’s study, we kept the self-interest assertion scale separate. We also kept the compromise and accommodation strategies separate because the association between the variables in our sample was low (r = .08).

Attachment Orientations Regarding Peers (Finzi, Har-Even, Weizman, Tyano, & Shnir, 1996). This scale is an adaptation of the Hebrew version of Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) attachment styles questionnaire for middle childhood. We asked the children to report on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (completely not true) to 5 (completely true) the extent to which each of 15 statements described them. The questionnaire comprised three scales: (a) secure (e.g., “I connect easily with other children”; “It is not difficult for me to rely on/trust others, if they are my good friends”), (b) avoidant (e.g., “Sometimes someone gets too close to me”; “It is difficult for me to trust others completely”), and (c) ambivalent/anxious (e.g., “Sometimes I feel that others don’t want to be good friends with me as I want”; “Sometimes I am afraid that others will not want to be with me”). One scale reflecting secure attachment was constructed with avoidant and ambivalent items reversed (Cronbach’s α = .78). Test–retest and concurrent validities (children’s anxiety, depression) of the measure have been demonstrated with Israeli middle-childhood children (Finzi et al.).

Teacher-Child Rating Scale (T-CRS; Hightower, 1986). The T-CRS is a questionnaire that teachers fill out to assess children’s emotional, behavioral, social, and general school adaptation. Homeroom teachers were asked to rank all of their students. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of behaviorally oriented items describing school problems. The second part assessed the child’s strengths or competencies; teachers were asked to rate how well the items described the child on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very well). In the present study, we constructed one scale reflecting social leadership qualities from two scales of the second part: class social assertiveness and social skills (10 items; Cronbach’s α = .86; e.g., “comfortable as a leader,” “defends own views under group pressure,” “a self-starter,” “well-liked by classmates”).

Procedure

After receiving permission from the Ministry of Education, we sent consent letters to parents, whom we asked to provide passive consent. Eight children did not receive parental permission. A booklet of questionnaires was administered in the school setting at two 70-min sessions (2 weeks apart). Research assistants
introduced the project, read aloud a few sample items, and demonstrated how to complete the questionnaires. Children were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. At the second session, rehearsals for the year-end party and children’s illnesses resulted in our collecting questionnaires from only 228 children. In the first session, children filled out the attachment questionnaire and questionnaire on seeking and giving social support within a friendship (260 children). In the second session, they completed the questionnaire on self-perception and their goals and strategies in response to conflicts within a friendship (228 children: 108 boys, 120 girls). Background data, such as number of children in the family and children’s gender, were collected. No differences were found in the measures gathered at the first session between children who participated at both times and those who participated only in the first session.

Results

Association Between Demographic Variables and Leadership Orientations

Social leadership qualities were significantly associated with number of children in the family ($r = .13, p < .05$), for girls ($r = .22, p < .05$), but not for boys ($r = .02, n.s.$). The difference between the two correlation coefficients approached significance, $p < .07$. Girls ($M = 3.76, SD = 1.00$) exhibited stronger leadership qualities than boys did ($M = 3.44, SD = 1.06$), $t = -2.52, p < .01$.

Association of Leadership With Socioemotional Qualities

Table 1 presents Pearson correlations between the social leadership qualities scale and socioemotional qualities. As expected, social leadership qualities were associated positively with all but one dimension of self-perception (body perception) and negatively with stress and avoidance of new situations. Social leadership qualities were further associated positively with the secure attachment orientation, as expected. Regarding close friendships, social leadership qualities were associated positively with the relationship-maintenance goal and negatively with the revenge goal and accommodation strategy. Table 2 presents the intercorrelations among socioemotional variables.

To examine the cumulative and relative contributions of each of these socioemotional variables to children’s social leadership qualities, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis. In the first step, we entered the background variables of gender and number of children in the family. In the second step, we entered the variables assessing the model of self, self-perception, social anxiety, and attachment orientation. In the third step, we entered the variables that assessed prosocial orientations and skills in close friendships. As Table 3 shows, background variables explained 5% of the variance regarding leadership qualities, with gender being the only significant contributor. The second step added 12% of
TABLE 1. Pearson Correlations Between Socioemotional Qualities and Social Leadership Qualities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socioemotional qualities</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-perception</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>&lt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>&lt; .10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global self-worth</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social anxiety</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear of negative evaluation</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress/avoidance in new situations</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>&lt; .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress/avoidance in general</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>&lt; .10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment security</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>&lt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals in conflict management in close friendships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Revenge</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>&lt; .05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship maintenance</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>&lt; .05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instrumental control</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategies in conflict management in close friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hostile</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Compromise</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-interest assertion</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

explained variance, and in it, academic self-perception was the only added significant predictor. In the third step, which explained an additional 5% of the variance but was not significant, the strategy of accommodation in close friendship was a significant predictor. The final model explained a total of 22% of the variance.

We tested the hypothesis regarding the role of prosocial interpersonal skills in the association between internalizations of positive model of self and social leadership qualities by Structural Equations Modeling (SEM) using AMOS (version 6.0; Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999). The missing values were dealt with using full information maximum likelihood estimation, which has been shown to produce estimates that are unbiased and more efficient than other methods are, such as those of pair- or list-wise deletions (Arbuckle & Wothke). As Kline (1998) suggested, we used several goodness-of-fit measures to assess the models. A fit of the model was considered as reasonable if $\chi^2/df \leq 3$ (Carmines & McIver, 1981). In addition, we used the comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The CFI varied between 0 and 1, and values of .90 or higher indicated an acceptable fit (Hu & Bentler, 1995). For the RMSEA, a value of .08 and lower indicates an acceptable fit, with lower values representing a better fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1994).
| Variable                                         | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   | 6   | 7   | 8   | 9   | 10  | 11  | 12  | 13  | 14  | 15  | 16  | 17  |
|------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Self-perception                                 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 1. Academic                                     |     | .42 | .32 | .35 | .50 | .53 | .34 | -.28| -.28| .34 | .20 | .02 | -.19| -.17| .13 | -.01| .00 |
| 2. Social                                       |     |     | .49 | .50 | .42 | .56 | .38 | -.39| -.41| -.33| .36 | .03 | -.21| -.19| .25 | -.03| .05 |
| 3. Sport                                        |     |     |     | .46 | .21 | .44 | .25 | -.29| -.18| -.18| .22 | .10 | -.09| -.14| .03 | -.07| .08 |
| 4. Body                                         |     |     |     |     | .45 | .70 | .33 | -.35| -.28| -.17| .35 | -.04| -.14| -.14| .19 | -.02| -.04|
| 5. Conduct                                      |     |     |     |     |     | .59 | .36 | -.31| -.31| -.31| .32 | -.00| -.23| -.23| .23 | -.04| -.00|
| 6. Global self-worth                            |     |     |     |     |     |     | .43 | -.44| -.37| -.35| .35 | .03 | -.24| -.25| .22 | -.12| .03 |
| Social anxiety                                  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 7. Fear of negative evaluation                  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 8. Stress/avoidance in new situations           |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 9. Stress/avoidance in general                  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 10. Attachment security                         |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Goals in conflict-management                    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| in close friendships                            |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 11. Revenge                                     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 12. Relationship maintenance                   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 13. Instrumental control                        |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Strategy                                        |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 14. Hostile                                    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 15. Compromise                                  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 16. Accommodation                              |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 17. Self-interest assertion                    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |

*Note. Values represent Pearson correlation coefficients (r); for r ranging from .14 to .16, p < .05; for r ranging from .17 to .21, p < .01; for r ≥ .22, p < .001.*
TABLE 3. Prediction of Social Leadership Qualities

<table>
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<th>Predictor</th>
<th>( \Delta R^2 )</th>
<th>( \Delta F )</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>( t )</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
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<td>Number of children in family</td>
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<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
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<td>10, 197</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conduct</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stress/avoidance in new situations</td>
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<td>Stress/avoidance in general</td>
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<td>Goals in conflict management</td>
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<td>1.67</td>
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<td>1.13</td>
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<td>in close friendships</td>
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<td>Revenge</td>
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<td>in close friendships</td>
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<td>Self-interest assertion</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>2.75***</td>
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\(^{1}p < .10, ^{2}p < .05, ^{3}p < .01, ^{4}p < .001.\)

We created the following latent variables that reflected the constructs we assessed: three exogenous variables as predictors (security of attachment, positive self-concept, social anxiety), two endogenous variables as possible mediators (prosocial interpersonal skills, yielding as conflict resolution strategy), and one endogenous variable—social leadership qualities—as the explained construct. In constructing the observed variables for each latent construct, we followed the original composition of subscales in the questionnaires.

For example, for the attachment security construct, we used the following three observed variables: secure, ambivalent, and avoidant orientations. Similarly, for the social leadership qualities construct, we used the following two subscales:
class social assertiveness and social skills. For the interpersonal orientation and skills constructs, we deviated from this procedure because a factor analysis clearly showed that the goals and strategies in the relationships with friends are associated. The factor analysis produced the following three factors: (a) prosocial orientation skills including the relationship-maintenance goal, revenge goal (reversed), compromise strategy, and hostile strategy (reversed); (b) control that was not associated with leadership qualities but that included the instrumental control goal and self-interest assertion strategy; and (c) the accommodation strategy. Consequently, only two latent variables were constructed as possible mediators in the SEM analyses: (a) prosocial orientation skills, which included the relationship-maintenance goal, revenge goal (reversed), compromise strategy, and hostile strategy (reversed) and (b) yielding, which included accommodation as a strategy.

First, using AMOS (version 6.0; Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999), we estimated a simple regression model that included all direct paths from the three predictors (self-image, social anxiety, attachment security) and the two mediators (prosocial orientation skills, yielding) to the explained construct (leadership qualities). In this model, all parameter estimates in the measurement model were significant at the .01 level for all latent variables. However, this simple regression model did not provide a good fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 2.45$, $CFI = .86$, $RMSEA = .08$). Next, we added estimation of all indirect paths from the three predictors through the two mediators (six paths altogether) to the leadership latent construct. This model showed a better fit to the data but was still below the expected good fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.19$, $CFI = .88$, $RMSEA = .07$). Because all direct paths were not significant, whereas some of the indirect paths were significant, we eliminated the insignificant direct paths and estimated the model again.

This final model provided good fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 2.11$, $CFI = .90$, $RMSEA = .06$). Figure 1 presents the structural model and includes standardized estimates of the parameters in it. Estimation of this model showed that attachment security was significantly and positively associated with prosocial interpersonal skills. In turn, these were significantly and positively associated with leadership qualities. Yielding as a conflict-resolution strategy was independently and negatively associated with leadership qualities. Positive self-image was significantly associated with prosocial interpersonal skills which, as previously described, were significantly and positively associated with leadership qualities. Last, social anxiety was not significantly associated with any of the mediators. The three latent predictors (positive self-image, attachment security, social anxiety) were significantly associated with each other.

**Discussion**

**Characteristics of Child Leaders**

As expected, social leadership qualities were associated with positive model of self as reflected in positive self-perception in various domains, low levels of
social anxiety, and attachment security. These associations reflect the assumption that to be in a position to lead or to exert influence on others, a person needs to be self-assured. Researchers have found this association in several studies with adult leaders (e.g., Chemers, Watson, & May, 2000; Kotter, 1988; Mowday, 1979; Murphy, 2002). Its emergence with social leadership qualities in children as early as elementary school suggests the centrality of these personal attributes. Previous researchers who identified a positive association between leadership and self-concept perceived self-worth as a general construct (Chan, 2000) or examined only three domains of self-conception: social, behavioral (conduct), and self-worth (Chen et al., 1999). In the present study, the inclusion of the whole array of six domains of self-perception demonstrated that all except body image were
associated with social leadership qualities as identified by the teacher. These findings attest to the importance of positive self-concept, as revealed in various aspects of the self, for the emergence of leaders. As indicated in the zero-order correlations, the academic self-concept was the strongest, and in fact, the only one that was significant in the hierarchical regression analysis. These results also add important substantiation to the claim that a secure attachment can be conceived as a basis for the capacity to become a leader (Popper & Mayseless, 2003). Also, they add to the growing literature indicating that children who have internalized a secure attachment are in a better position over a wide array of positive developmental outcomes than others are (Thompson, 1999).

Also as we expected, social leadership qualities were associated with a prosocial orientation. This emerged in (a) the positive association with the relationship maintenance goal during conflict management in close friendships and (b) the negative association with revenge as a goal in conflict situations with friends. However, social leadership qualities were negatively associated with the strategy of accommodation during conflict with close friends. These associations (apart from the negative association with accommodation, discussed later) support the contention that social leadership qualities in childhood reflect a prosocial orientation in relations with peers.

In sum, these findings show that elementary school children who exhibited social leadership qualities had internalized a positive self-perception, felt confident in social situations, and had a secure and prosocial orientation toward peers and friends. This general pattern of results accords well with the model that Popper and Mayseless (2003) suggested, in that leadership should be clearly associated with a positive model of self and, in general, also with a positive model of others. These associations are especially revealing because they were obtained from two different sources: Teachers reported on the social leadership qualities, and children reported on their socioemotional attributes.

**Importance of Academic Self-Concept**

The results of the hierarchical regression underscored two major domains that uniquely predicted social leadership qualities as identified by the teachers: higher levels of academic self-concept and lower levels of accommodation as a strategy to solve conflicts in close friendships. The association of academic skills with leadership qualities replicates findings in other studies (Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1997) and is not surprising because of the context of the present study; namely, school, and the fact that teachers, who are primarily focused on academic issues, are rating the students' social leadership qualities. Success in school (at least in elementary school) seems to be a particularly salient domain associated with leadership qualities, at least when examined through teachers' perceptions. Previous researchers found that besides being concurrently associated with leadership, academic achievement also predicted leadership nominations 2 years later (Chen et al.). An inquisitive
and open-minded child is presumably better equipped to become a leader (Popper & Mayseless, 2002) and better able to achieve academic success, which may also give the child social credits to use later to influence others. Wentzel (1993, 2000) reported that social and academic goals or orientations are interrelated and both contribute to academic success. This association may put those potential leaders who are less academically successful at a disadvantage. Educational counselors and teachers may want to be aware of this potentially biasing experience and try to enhance the leadership potential of children who are less academically gifted. Researchers in future studies should address these questions.

Possible Role of Culture

Though social leadership qualities were associated, again as expected, with prosocial goals in conflict management with friends, there were mostly nonsignificant associations of social leadership qualities, with the scales assessing strategies in conflict situations involving a close friend. In fact, one of the unexpected findings of the present study was the negative association between social leadership qualities and accommodation strategy. This finding may be related to the realm of the behaviors that we examined. Leadership qualities are usually exhibited as part of a small group and reflect skills relevant to this setting. Close friendships may require a different set of skills, perhaps somewhat independent of the skills relevant to the larger setting of a group (for a discussion of similar idea, see Bukowski & Hoza, 1989; Rose & Asher, 1999). Another possibility is that the negative association with accommodation strategy and nonsignificant association with compromise reflect a cultural bias regarding the way that accommodation or compromise is perceived. In Israel, to accommodate another child—even a close friend—may be perceived as a weakness that makes one look like a sucker. In a conflict, one will not behave aggressively toward a close friend but will not yield or accommodate either (for a discussion of the term sucker in Hebrew, see Roniger & Feige, 1992). When researchers studied the Revised Class Play (Morison & Masten, 1991) in Israel, the items referring to good manners, observing rules, and being polite did not cluster with either the sociability or leadership factor (Krispin, Sternberg, & Lamb, 1992). This underscores the absence of the perception that leaders or sociable peers are polite or well mannered. In the future, researchers may need to include measures that assess strategies and goals in group situations and take into account such cultural diversity.

The results of the SEM strongly underscore the importance of social skills and prosocial orientation in friendships to social leadership qualities that teachers identified. Both positive self-concept and attachment security were indirectly associated with leadership qualities through their significant association with prosocial orientation skills, which included (a) prosocial goals, such as the relationship maintenance goal and lack of a revenge goal, and (b) prosocial strategies, such as trying to compromise and trying to not behave in a hostile manner.
Though these constructs were assessed concurrently and cannot be presented as reflecting a causal path, the results of this structural path analysis accord with the contention that a positive model of self leads young children to adopt positive and prosocial skills and goals in friendships, which, in turn, contribute to their emergent leadership qualities in the classroom. In the future, researchers may need to address this possible interpretation and examine these processes by using a research design that allows the examination of causal processes. In contrast, the accommodation goal was not associated with either of the latent constructs of positive model of self, though it was significantly and independently associated with leadership qualities. These findings accord with the interpretation we suggest in which the importance and significant effect of an accommodation goal reflect a cultural influence.

The Social Leadership Qualities Scale that we used comprised instrumental leadership qualities (e.g., assertiveness) and social leadership qualities (e.g., social skills). Both aspects were highly correlated ($r = .65$); most children who evinced instrumental leadership qualities also exhibited sociability and popularity. As indicated in previous research (Rodkin et al., 2000), only a minority of the children who become leaders in the schools is antisocial and disruptive. The most frequent occurrence of leadership skills in children involves both social and instrumental qualities. It is interesting that this contrasts with research findings with adult leaders (for a review, see Bass, 1990) wherein instrumental and task-oriented qualities proved somewhat independent of positive social qualities, such as likeability. This difference between child and adult leaders may be related to the fact that leadership position in children’s groups at school is an emergent natural position. It is not determined by formal positions of power or exogenous qualities such as academic degree or tenure in the job. In that sense, children’s leadership in natural groups, such as those at school, can teach us more about the emergence of leaders and their development than can the study of adult leaders. The examination of the emergence of natural leaders in school and the understanding of the two facets (task-oriented qualities, social leadership qualities), their interconnections, and how and when they may begin to diverge should be important tasks for leadership researchers.

In the present study, two demographic variables were associated with leadership qualities: gender and number of children in the family. The latter may be associated with more common and frequent social experiences at home, which can contribute to children’s experiential learning of influencing and managing others. Similarly, girls may be at an advantage for developing leadership skills that involve influencing others because of their stronger interest and investment in relationships. The fact that gender tended to moderate the association between number of siblings and leadership qualities, with girls showing a tendency for a higher correlation coefficient, further underscores the possible importance of interpersonal experience in developing leadership skills. Ben-Tzvi-Mayer, Hertz-Lazarowitz, and Safir (1989) reported that teachers perceived girls to have better
social skills than boys; these better skills may contribute to their leadership qualities. As Charbonneau and Nicol (2002) indicated, emotional intelligence regarding social relationships may play an important role in the emergence of leadership qualities in children in natural groups. How durable this advantage is in later years and the conditions contributing to its perseverance or its decline are unclear. Teachers may more easily identify girls who surpass boys at pleasing their teachers as having leadership skills, even though this may not directly reflect their dominance in the class (Halpern, 2006). Future research should address these questions.

**Limitations**

Several caveats to the present study should be noted. First, most of the findings rely on self-reports and teachers’ reports. We relied particularly on teachers’ reports regarding social leadership qualities of their students. Previous researchers found strong correlations between peers’ and teachers’ reports regarding leaders in the class (Schneider et al., 2002). Similarly, in another study conducted in Israel that used reports from teachers and students’ peers, a strong correlation of .66 was found between the two reports (Albeg, 2003). Thus, teachers’ reports in the present study can be viewed as adequate indicators of leadership qualities. Nevertheless, other sources of information, such as the children’s peers or observa- tions, may furnish richer information. Second, we conducted the present study in a specific cultural context: in Israel and at schools with students of mostly low to moderate SES. A more representative sample of children may be needed to allow generalizations to other contexts. Nevertheless, some of the findings we reported (e.g., association between leadership qualities and positive self-perception) were obtained in other cultures and contexts.

**Counseling and Educational Implications**

Children’s affective experiences in class and school influence their social, emotional, and academic adaptation and their well-being (Birch & Ladd, 1996; Parker, Rubin, Erath, Wojславowicz, & Buskirk, 2006). Frequently, school psychologists or counselors encounter problems involving groups at school, such as aggression, rejection, bullying, and discipline problems, which undermine teachers’ ability to teach and children’s ability to learn as well as harm students’ well-being. These problems may impair teachers’ functioning and well-being too. Often, child class leaders are key figures in shaping the class and the school’s environment because these leaders foster favorable and sometimes unfavorable ecologies (e.g., Chang, 2003). Identifying dominant and powerful students in the class (e.g., by means of brief questionnaire, such as the one we used) and fostering their positive qualities may prove to be an important task for teachers and counselors. Furthermore, when educational interventions are needed at the level of the group, engaging these child leaders in some of the planned activities
may be highly effective in implementing interventions. Ignoring the power of these leaders in the peer group may weaken the ability to successfully implement changes in the group ecology at the class or cohort level.

Last, the present study focused on some of the qualities that are important in children's leadership (i.e., positive self-perception, secure attachment). Popper and Mayselss (2002) suggested that besides the capacity to lead, individuals need to have motivation to lead. This motivation is related, among other things, to success in practicing leadership roles and in influencing others. An important part of becoming a leader involves experiential learning in various contexts when serving as a leader (Atwater, Dionne, Avolio, Camobreco, & Lau, 1999). Recent studies with adult leaders point in this direction, as they show a strong association of self-efficacy regarding leadership in adulthood with leadership experience in naturally occurring groups during childhood and adolescence (Chemos et al., 2000; Smith & Foti, 1998). Though often child leaders emerge naturally on the playground and during extracurricular activities, the school context may also prove to be an important arena for training in and cultivation of leadership skills, and teachers may prove to be important figures in supporting such efforts and coordinating opportunities for children to act as leaders, as they do in other domains (Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003).

NOTE

1. We used the scale as a continuous measure of leadership qualities; however, analyses performed with categorization into leaders (top 20% or 10%) and nonleaders yielded similar results, which we did not present.

AUTHOR NOTES

Miri Scharf is a senior lecturer of developmental psychology in the Faculty of Education at the University of Haifa, Israel, and is the head of the Educational Counseling Program. Her research interests are attachment across the life span, parenting, and developmental trajectories of resilience and risk. Ofra Mayselss is a professor of developmental psychology and the dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Haifa, Israel. Her research focuses on close relationships from attachment and caregiving perspectives during the transition from adolescence to adulthood and as they are manifested in parenting, leadership, and spiritual development.

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