



# Do Self-Conscious Emotions Moderate the Relationship Between Impulsivity and PTSD Among Trauma-Exposed College Students?

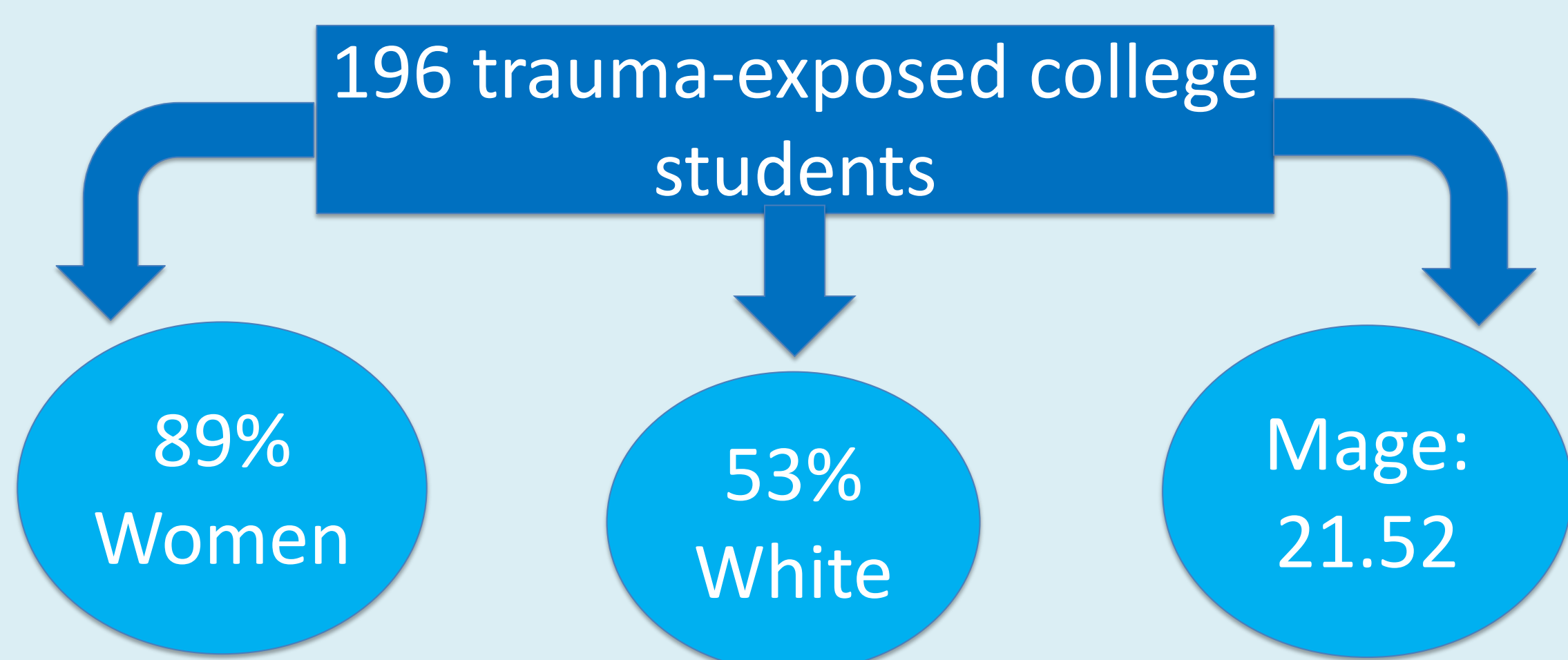
Autumn Teal<sup>1</sup>, Claire Kuehn<sup>1</sup>, Mara Allen<sup>1</sup>, June Glenney<sup>1</sup>, Theresa Fineout<sup>1</sup>, Padideh Hassanpour, MA<sup>1</sup>, Kate Walsh, PhD<sup>1</sup>  
Department of Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Madison<sup>1</sup>

## Background

Lifetime exposure to interpersonal violence is associated with deleterious mental health outcomes like PTSD, which can be influenced by impulsivity, shame, and guilt.<sup>1</sup> Studies show higher levels of impulsivity are associated with decreased guilt proneness, suggesting those high in impulsive behaviors may experience less guilt after impulsive actions, or that guilt could be used as a protective mechanism.<sup>3</sup> It's uncertain how these emotions interact with impulsivity to affect PTSD symptom severity.

**Objective:** This study investigated the moderating effects of trait guilt and trait shame on the relationship between impulsivity facets (positive urgency, negative urgency, sensation seeking, lack of perseverance, lack of premeditation) and PTSD symptom severity among individuals exposed to trauma.

## Methods



### Measures

- Test of Self-Conscious Affect-3<sup>4</sup>
- Short Form of the Impulsive Behavior Scale<sup>2</sup>
- Life Events Checklist<sup>5</sup>
- PTSD Checklist for the DSM-5<sup>6</sup>

### Statistical Analysis

Predictor variables were mean-centered; moderated regression analyses were run to test the influence of trait shame and guilt on the relationship between impulsivity facets and PTSD symptom severity, controlling for age, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity.

## Discussion

Trait guilt was found to buffer and exacerbate PTSD symptoms, depending on the impulsivity facet involved. Trait guilt lessened PTSD severity when related to positive urgency but intensified symptoms when linked to a lack of perseverance.

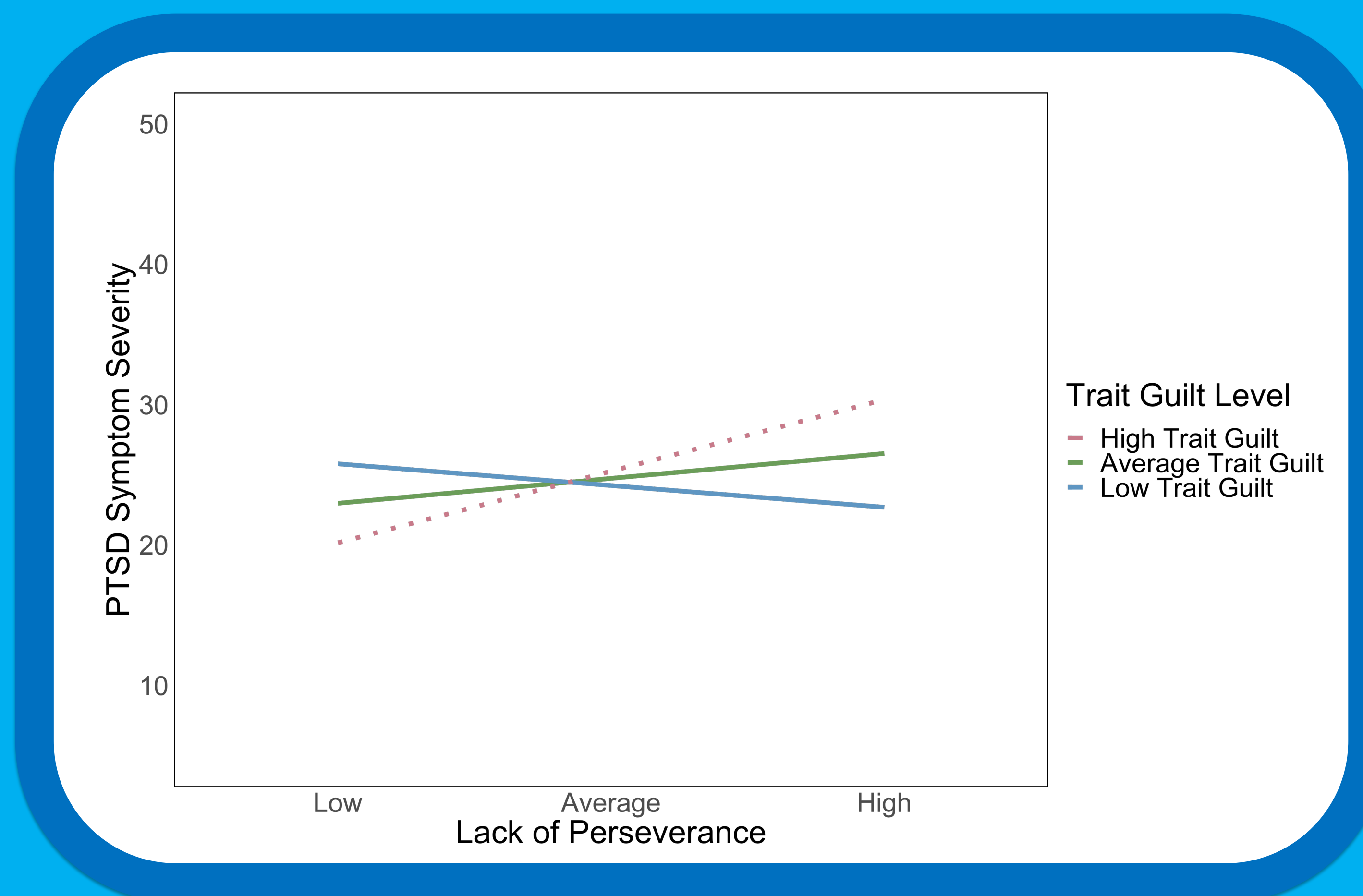
Conversely, trait guilt and shame showed no moderating effects on the association between other impulsivity facets (sensation seeking, negative urgency, lack of premeditation) and PTSD symptoms.

### Limitations & Future Directions

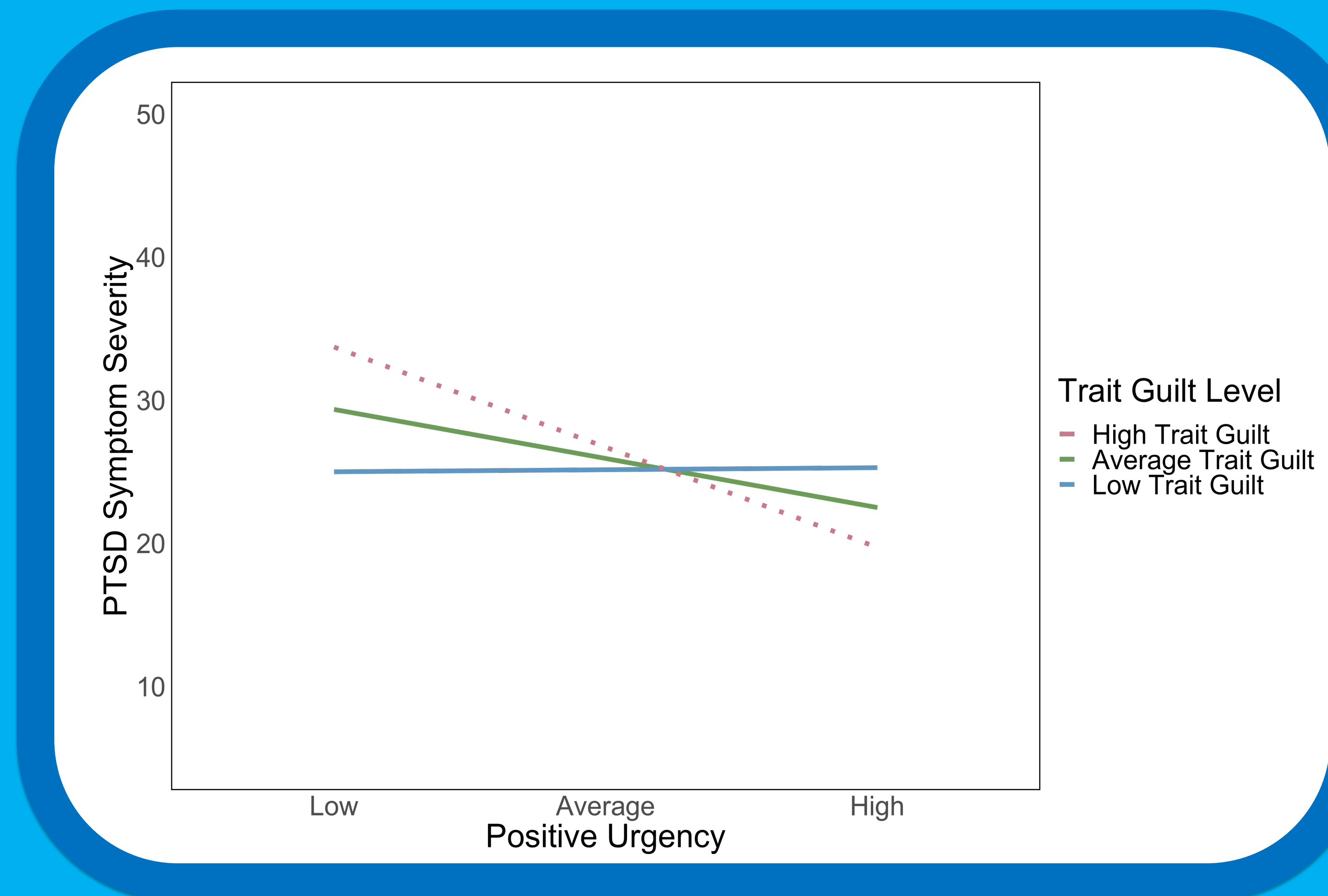
These findings highlight the complex role of guilt and impulsivity in PTSD and suggest that interventions focusing on guilt and perseverance may benefit individuals with PTSD.

Since the use of self-report measures may have introduced response bias, future research could employ a multimethod approach, combining self-report with behavioral tasks, to better understand the interplay between self-conscious emotions, impulsivity, and PTSD symptomatology.

While the current study's gender distribution reflects known disparities in trauma exposure by gender rather than recruitment bias, future studies should sample more men and gender diverse individuals to ensure findings are generalizable across these groups.



Trait guilt positively moderated the relationship between lack of perseverance and PTSD symptoms, suggesting high trait guilt may heighten remorse linked with giving up and exacerbate symptoms.



High trait guilt was associated with lower PTSD symptoms among those who had a greater tendency to act impulsively when experiencing positive emotions.

### References

