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RESEARCH REPORT

Out of Control: A Self-Control Perspective on the Link Between Surface Acting and Abusive Supervision

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In this study, we examined how leaders' customer interactions influence their tendency to abuse their followers. Specifically, we drew from ego-depletion theory to suggest that surface acting during customer interactions depletes leaders of their self-control resources, resulting in elevated levels of abusive supervision. Furthermore, we hypothesized that the effect of surface acting on abusive supervision is moderated by leaders' trait self-control, such that leaders with high trait self-control will be less affected by the depleting effects of surface acting than their peers. Results from a multiwave, multisource leader-follower dyad study in the service and sales industries provided support for our hypotheses. This research contributes to several literatures, particularly to an emerging area of study—the antecedents of leaders' abusive behaviors.

Keywords: abusive supervision, self-control, surface acting, ego depletion

Abusive supervision has a wide range of negative organizational implications (Tepper, 2000). For example, abusive supervision increases follower deviance (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007), decreases follower well-being (Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012), and inhibits follower performance (Aryee, Sun, Chen, & Debrah, 2008). Inspired by a desire to reduce abusive supervision, a limited but growing literature has begun to examine its antecedents. Some scholars have adopted a dispositional perspective, arguing that leaders who possess certain traits, such as high levels of Machiavellianism (Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, & Tang, 2010) and low levels of emotional intelligence (Xiaqi, Kun, Chongsen, & Sufang, 2012), are most likely to abuse their followers. Others have argued that abuse tends to occur when leaders perceive abuse to be an organizational norm or believe that a follower does not

deserve to be treated well. For example, research has shown that leaders are more likely to abuse followers in hostile organizational climates (Mawritz, Dust, & Resick, 2014), when upper management is abusive (Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012), or when leaders perceive that followers possess deep-level dissimilarities, making some more deserving of abuse than others (Tepper, Moss, & Duffy, 2011).

Whereas these studies have significantly enhanced our understanding of why leaders abuse their followers, the broader literatures on deviance and unethical behavior suggest that there are other factors that may lead to abusive supervision. In particular, ego-depletion theory (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998) suggests that one potentially meaningful yet unexamined predictor of abusive supervision is leaders' self-control—the “ability to override or change one's inner responses, as well as to interrupt undesired behavioral tendencies (such as impulses) and refrain from acting on them” (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004, p. 275). According to ego-depletion theory, self-control is a limited resource. Acts of self-control (e.g., refraining from cyber loafing at work) deplete individuals' pools of self-control resources, reducing their ability to exert self-control when faced with subsequent challenges (Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998). Thus, just as a muscle is depleted from continued exertion, ego-depletion theory argues that an individual's ability to regulate his or her impulses and behaviors are similarly depleted from continued exertion.

Scholars have examined self-control resource depletion in a wide array of contexts (Hagger, Wood, Stiff, & Chatzisarantis, 2010; Yam, Chen, & Reynolds, 2014). Relatively few studies,

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however, have examined self-control resource depletion in organizations, and even fewer have examined its relevance for leaders. As a result, we know little about how the demands of leadership contribute to self-control resource depletion or the extent to which this depletion affects how leaders treat their followers. Although predominant explanations for why leaders abuse their followers focus on factors external to the leader, ego-depletion theory suggests that abusive supervision is also likely to emerge from the self-control processes within leaders themselves. Most notably, the self-control perspective suggests that leaders are particularly likely to abuse their followers after engaging in resource-depleting behaviors during the workday.

In this paper, we integrate ego-depletion theory with the literature on emotional labor (Grandey, 2000) to develop an additional perspective on when and why abusive supervision occurs. First, drawing on the perspective of self-control as a limited resource that is easily depleted (Baumeister et al., 1998), we argue that leaders are particularly likely to become depleted when challenging customer interactions require them to engage in surface acting. Second, building on the literature on self-control and deviance (Christian & Ellis, 2011), we argue that this depletion will mediate the effect of leader surface acting on abusive supervision. Third, drawing from research on individual differences in self-control capacity, we argue that leader trait self-control moderates the depleting effect of surface acting, such that leaders are most susceptible to the effects of surface acting on abusive supervision when they are low in trait self-control (Tangney et al., 2004). A summary of our model is presented in Figure 1. We test this theoretical model via multisource data from the service and sales industries, offering insights for the literatures on abusive supervision, emotional labor, and self-control resource depletion.

The Depleting Effects of Leaders' Customer Interactions

Among the many challenges that leaders face in the service and sales industries, one of the most prominent is customer interactions. According to the emotional labor literature, employees tend to use one of two strategies when dealing with difficult customer interactions—deep acting or surface acting (Grandey, 2000; Groth & Grandey, 2012; Hochschild, 1983). Deep acting involves proactive attempts to genuinely experience desired emotions, whereas surface acting involves suppressing, manipulating, or overriding emotions after they are experienced (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998a, 1998b). Unlike deep acting, behaviors associated with surface acting have been shown to deplete individuals' self-control resources (Schmeichel, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2003). Specifically, research has shown that surface acting involves the regulation of automatic response patterns (e.g., mental states and physical expressions), which in turn reduces the

motivation and ability to tap mental and physiological resources during subsequent tasks (e.g., blood glucose; Gaillot et al., 2007; Hagger et al., 2010). In support of this theorizing, research has shown that emotion suppression inhibits individuals' performance on subsequent physical stamina exercises (Muraven et al., 1998) and creates feelings of exhaustion in call-center simulations (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007; see also Totterdell & Holman, 2003). In sum, the findings of these and other investigations of surface acting and self-control resource depletion indicate that employees' reactive attempts to govern their emotions leaves them in a weakened state.

Although several studies have established a link between surface acting and self-control resource depletion, the literature has focused exclusively on frontline employees. As a result, it is unclear to what extent this relationship applies to leaders. Research and theory on the psychological effects of power, a defining characteristic of leaders, have suggested that leaders might be relatively more immune to the depleting effects of surface acting. For example, individuals in high-power positions enjoy an improved sense of control (Magee & Galinsky, 2008), greater executive functioning (Smith, Jostmann, Galinsky, & van Dijk, 2008), and more cognitive flexibility than their low-power peers (Guinote, 2007). Likewise, individuals in high-power positions perform better during challenging interactions (Lammers, Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2013). Thus, the increased sense of power inherent in many leadership roles may buffer leaders from the depleting effects of customer interactions via the physiological, psychological, and behavioral effects of power itself (for a review see Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

Whereas research on the psychological effects of power suggests that leaders might be buffered against the depleting effects of surface acting, the dynamics of the leadership role itself suggest the opposite. Leaders occupy positions of unique responsibility. Beyond the core tasks typical of frontline employees, leaders are charged with a host of additional tasks such as dealing with employee conflict, customer complaints, and implementing strategic changes (Bass, 1985). Thus, leaders are less likely to operate as a matter of routine; rather, they regularly face complex, novel, and cognitively taxing job demands. Indeed, the customer-service literature suggests that leaders often handle the most difficult and multifaceted customer problems—incidents in which customers are unusually upset, or are trying to fix a particularly difficult issue that a frontline customer-service representative was unable to resolve (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003).

Given the challenging and variable nature of the customer issues that leaders regularly face, it should be extremely difficult for leaders to consistently use the same surface-acting tactics during every customer interaction, especially given many organizations' focus on tailoring customer interactions to each individual customer's unique needs and concerns (MacMillan & McGrath, 1997). This prediction is consistent with the metaphorical theorizing of self-control depletion and muscle strength. Repeated exertions on the same types of tasks may increase one's overall self-control strength over time, but exertions on different types of tasks and under varying conditions may worsen one's state self-control and even lead to burnout in the long term. To this end, Scott, Barnes, and Wagner (2012) found that employees who participated in surface acting at variable levels experienced more resource depletion than employees whose demands over time were more stable and routine.

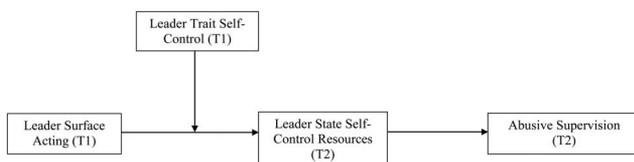


Figure 1. Theoretical model of the current research.

Thus, although frontline employees might be able to adapt to the challenges of surface acting in relatively routine environments (e.g., when driving routine bus routes; Scott et al., 2012), we suggest that such adaptation will be more difficult for leaders. As additional support for this perspective, DeWall, Baumeister, Mead, and Vohs (2011, Study 4) found that although participants primed with social power became more motivated to use their self-control resources, they nonetheless became depleted when faced with multiple unique and challenging tasks over time. We suggest that due to the variance and magnitude of problems that leaders often face on a daily basis, their surface acting should deplete their self-control resources.

Hypothesis 1: Leader surface acting is negatively associated with leaders' self-control resources.

Implications for Abusive Supervision

Abusive supervision has been defined as "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Examples of abusive supervision include breaking promises and expressing anger toward an employee when he or she is mad for another reason (Tepper, 2000). Several lines of research support the idea that the self-control resource depleting effects of surface acting will increase abusive supervisory behaviors. First, scholars have argued that in the absence of sufficient self-control resources, individuals tend to succumb to their impulses (e.g., self-interest behaviors, Loewenstein, 1996), and indeed, self-control resource depletion has been associated with a tendency to engage in impulsive (Baumeister, 2002) and deviant (Christian & Ellis, 2011) behaviors. From a neuroscience perspective, this link is due to decreased prefrontal cortex functioning, an area of the brain that primarily serves as executive control, as a result of self-control depletion (Berkman & Miller-Ziegler, 2012). A hallmark of impulsive behavior is that it brings an immediate hedonic reward at the expense of long-term goals; similarly, abusive supervisory behaviors often create short-term rewards at the expense of long-term goals. For example, leaders may break promises made to their followers (e.g., leave work early on a Friday night) and undermine long-term work relationships in pursuit of more immediately rewarding outcomes (e.g., a lower workload).

Second, additional research supports the idea that when leaders' self-control resources are depleted from surface acting, they will be especially prone to direct their impulses and deviance on their followers. Duffy, Shaw, Hoobler, and Tepper (2010) argued that behaviors requiring emotional labor such as surface acting will, in general, cause subsequent antisocial behavior in the workplace. Regarding the target of this antisocial behavior, they went on to suggest that the emotional suppression associated with behavior like surface acting "is often redirected or misplaced toward less-powerful or more-available targets" (Duffy et al., 2010, p. 103). In the case of leader surface acting with customers, we suggest that this is because leaders cannot retaliate directly against the customers who provoked them to engage in surface acting, and instead subsequently direct such frustrations (as a result of reduced

self-control) against people of lower power—their subordinates (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998).

Taken together, these lines of research support the idea that the diminished self-control associated with leaders' surface acting should leave them prone to engaging in abusive supervisory behaviors toward their followers. Two empirical studies provide indirect support for this hypothesis. Christian and Ellis (2011) found that senior business students who are depleted of self-control resources are more likely to verbally abuse their mentees. In addition, results from a study by Byrne et al. (2014) suggests that leaders who are anxious, depressed, or consume too much alcohol tend to abuse their followers due to a reduced capacity for self-control. In sum, we argue that when leaders' self-control resources are depleted by surface acting, they are more likely to engage in abusive supervision.

Hypothesis 2: Leader surface acting is associated with increased abusive supervision, mediated by decreased self-control resources.

The Moderating Role of Trait Self-Control

Hypotheses 1 and 2 suggest that leaders are most likely to abuse their followers when surface acting depletes their self-control resources. We recognize, however, that the effects of surface acting on leaders' abusive behavior are unlikely to be consistent across all leaders. A central tenant of ego-depletion theory is that individuals vary in their susceptibility to resource depletion. This individual difference is captured by trait self-control, a disposition that refers to an individual's general capacity to regulate his or her behavior across a range of domains and contexts (Tangney et al., 2004). Owing to their ability to control their impulses, people with high trait self-control are often described as "strong-willed" and perform better at school and work than their peers, and are particularly good at maintaining healthy lifestyles and close interpersonal relationships (de Ridder, Lensvelt-Mulders, Finkenauer, Stok, & Baumeister, 2012).

We argue that leaders who are dispositionally high in self-control will be less susceptible to the depleting effects of surface acting than their peers, which should attenuate the negative effects of surface acting on leaders' abusive supervision. Recent research provides some support for this argument. For example, Wang, Liao, Zhan, and Shi (2011) found that employees with high self-control over their emotions were less likely to retaliate against customers who had mistreated them. Another study found that leaders with high trait self-control are less likely to react to undermining within their family by undermining their followers (Kiewitz et al., 2012). Finally, Mawritz et al. (2012) found that conscientious leaders are less abusive than less conscientious leaders, and argued that this effect emerges in part because "highly conscientious supervisors have high levels of self-control" that help them overcome their impulses to act abusively (p. 4). In sum, leaders with high trait self-control should be better able to stave off the impulse to engage in abusive supervision when their self-control resources are depleted.

Hypothesis 3: The indirect effect of leader surface acting on abusive supervision via self-control resources is moderated by

leader trait self-control, such that this relationship is stronger when leader trait self-control is low.

Method

Participants and Procedure

In this study, we aimed to recruit leaders and followers who work in customer service or sales and have daily interactions with customers (i.e., “people work” occupations; Hochschild, 1983). We also aimed to collect data from leaders and followers across a variety of organizations to increase the generalizability of our findings. To meet these criteria, we recruited participants through the Study Response Project (for a recent example utilizing this data collection method, see Yam, Fehr, & Barnes, 2014). Participation was restricted to those who (a) worked fulltime in customer service or sales, (b) worked with a leader who interacts with customers on a daily basis, and (c) agreed to invite their leaders to participate in the study. Administrators from the Study Response Project verified leaders’ email addresses to ensure data integrity.

A total of 283 qualified employees expressed an interest in participating in the study. Surveys were sent to each of these employees and their corresponding direct leaders. A total of 184 dyads successfully completed the study (65% response rate). Leaders were an average of 41.6 years old, 70.1% male, and 76.5% European American. Most leaders identified themselves as retail branch managers or team managers (86.4%). Employees were an average of 38.2 years old, 67.2% male, and 75.8% European American. At Time 1 (T1), leaders completed measures of surface acting toward customers, trait self-control, and trait negative affect. At Time 2 (T2), approximately three weeks later, leaders completed a measure of their state self-control resources. Employees did not complete any measures at T1. At T2, employees rated leaders’ abusive supervision.¹

Measures

Leader surface acting. At T1, we asked leaders to report how often they engaged in surface acting toward their customers with a five-item scale (Grandey, 2003). A sample item was “faked a good mood in front of customers” (1 = *never* to 5 = *all of the time*).

Leader trait self-control. At T1, we measured leader trait self-control with the 13-item self-control scale developed by Tangney et al. (2004). A sample item was “In general, I am good at resisting temptation” (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*).

Leader state self-control resources. At T2, we measured leaders’ self-control resources with a five-item scale (Johnson, Lanaj, & Barnes, 2014; Yam, Reynolds, & Hirsh, 2014). Leaders were specifically instructed to focus on how they felt during the past three weeks. A sample item was “I feel like my willpower is gone” (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much*). To ease interpretation, we reverse coded all items so that a higher score represents higher levels of self-control resources.

Abusive supervision. At T2, followers were asked to rate leaders’ abusive supervisory behavior in the past 3 weeks with the 15-item abusive supervision scale (Tepper, 2000). We instructed followers to assess leaders’ behaviors toward themselves as well as other followers with similar rankings and

backgrounds. Whereas abusive supervision might entail an idiosyncratic component based on perceptions of individual followers and those followers’ behaviors, reduced self-control as a result of surface acting is likely to influence leaders’ behavior across a broad range of employees because leaders do not have resources to resist their urges to abuse all lower status individuals (i.e., followers). We therefore surveyed the effects of surface acting and self-control on the entirety of leaders’ abusive behaviors. A sample item was “my leader invades employees’ privacy” (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*).²

Controls. We controlled for several key variables in our analyses. First, because past research has shown that perceptions of leader behavior are sometimes affected by leaders’ demographics (e.g., Eagly & Johnson, 1990), we controlled for leader age, gender, and race. Second, following past research that has hypothesized a link between abusive supervision and negative affect (Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013), we controlled for leader trait negative affect (NA) with the 10-item Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Finally, past research suggests that, over time, individuals may habituate to the depleting effects of work (Converse & DeShon, 2009). That is, leaders who constantly engage in surface acting may become better at this task and the depleting effects of surface acting may diminish as job tenure increases. We therefore controlled for job tenure by asking leaders how many years have they worked at their current organizations on a 7-point scale (1 = *less than a year* to 7 = *11 years or more*).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

We first conducted confirmatory factor analyses to ensure that our focal constructs (surface acting, trait self-control, self-control resources, and abusive supervision) had satisfactory discriminant validity. Results indicated that the four-factor structure fit the data well, $\chi^2(98) = 230.64$; root mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .05; comparative fit index (CFI) = .95, and was superior to a model in which the trait self-control and state self-control resources items were set to load on a single factor, $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 66.02, p < .01$. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Leader Surface Acting and State Self-Control Resources (H1)

To Test H1, we conducted an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. All control variables and leader surface acting were entered in Model 1 to predict leaders’ self-control resources. Results revealed a negative effect of surface acting on leaders’

¹ The data presented in this article were part of a broader data collection effort. However, we confirmed that none of the substantive variables used in this article overlapped with our other ongoing research projects.

² To ensure that our measure of abusive supervision is consistent with the extant literature, we conducted a validation study on MTurk. Results revealed a high degree of overlap between abusive supervision as measured in our study and as measured by Tepper (2000), $r = .92, p < .01$. Details regarding this study are available upon request.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of the Focal Variables

Variables	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Leader surface acting (T1)	2.56 (1.06)	(.94)								
2. Leader trait self-control (T1)	3.53 (.62)	-.07	(.75)							
3. Leader self-control resources (T2)	3.11 (.89)	-.24**	.16*	(.89)						
4. Abusive supervision (follower report; T2)	1.61 (.76)	.17*	-.28**	-.36**	(.96)					
5. Leader trait negative affect (T1)	2.64 (1.23)	.23**	.03	-.10	.16*	(.91)				
6. Leader age (T1)	41.59 (9.47)	-.18*	.35**	.03	-.00	.05	(—)			
7. Leader race ¹ (T1)	N/A	.00	.05	.05	.02	.06	-.08	(—)		
8. Leader gender ² (T1)	N/A	-.23**	-.19**	-.13	.08	.14*	.07	.00	(—)	
9. Leader job tenure ³ (T1)	5.11 (1.45)	-.08	.03	-.02	-.12	.14*	.01	-.02	-.10	(—)

Note. N/A = not applicable. N = 184 dyads. Alpha coefficients are presented on the diagonal.

¹ Dummy variable (1 = White, 0 = others). ² Dummy variable (1 = male, 0 = female). ³ Leader job tenure was measured on a 7-point scale.

* p < .05. ** p < .01.

self-control resources ($\beta = -.20, p < .05$, see Table 2). Hypothesis 1 was therefore supported.

Implications for Abusive Supervision (H2)

We followed the recommendations of Preacher and Hayes (2008; also see Shrout & Bolger, 2002) and used the statistical software developed by Hayes (2013) to examine our mediated model by using a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure (see Hayes, 2009 for a summary of the advantages of this procedure). Controlling for leaders' demographics, trait NA, and job tenure, bootstrapping analyses (1000 resamples) revealed a significant total indirect effect. The coefficient for the indirect effect of state self-control resources was .05 (SE = .03), and the bias corrected 95% confidence interval (CI) did not include zero (95% CI [.01, .12]), indicating support for Hypothesis 2.

Moderated Mediation (H3)

To test our hypothesized first-stage moderated mediation model, we began by examining the interactive effect of leader

surface acting and leader trait self-control on leader state self-control resources. Results yielded a significant interaction term ($\beta = .92, p < .05$; see Table 2 and Figure 2). To Test Hypothesis 3 in an integrated fashion, we utilized the bootstrapping-based analytic approach of Edwards and Lambert (2007) and the statistical software of Hayes (2013) to test for indirect effects at one standard deviation above the mean and one standard deviation below the mean of the moderator (i.e., leader trait self-control; with 1,000 resamples). We used path analysis conventions to describe the direct, indirect, and total effects of leader surface acting on abusive supervision (via state self-control) at different levels of leader trait self-control (for a recent example utilizing a similar analytical procedure, see Duffy, Scott, Shaw, Tepper, & Aquino, 2012). When leaders were high on trait self-control, the indirect effect model was not significant. When leaders were low on trait self-control, however, the indirect effect model was significant (see Table 3). The index for moderated mediation was $-.07$ (SE = .03, 95% CI = $-.15$ to $-.02$). Together, the results suggest that leaders who are low on trait self-control are most likely to be affected

Table 2
Summary of Regression Results

Variable	DV = Leader state self-control resources								
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Step 1									
Leader age	.00	.01	.04	-.01	.01	-.09	-.01	.01	-.07
Leader race ¹	.02	.06	.02	.03	.06	.03	.03	.06	.04
Leader gender ²	-.22	.14	-.11	-.15	.15	-.08	-.11	.15	-.06
Leader trait negative affect	-.04	.06	-.05	-.13	.07	-.13	-.13	.07	-.14
Leader job tenure	-.02	.05	-.03	-.04	.05	-.06	-.04	.05	-.06
Step 2									
Leader surface acting				-.17	.07	-.20*	-1.00	.41	-1.16**
Leader trait self-control				.09	.13	.06	-.47	.30	-.32
Step 3									
Leader Surface Acting \times Trait Self-Control							.23	.11	.92*
R ²		.04			.08			.10	
ΔR^2					.03*			.02*	

Note. DV = dependent variable = state self-control resources; N = 184 dyads.

¹ Dummy variable (1 = White, 0 = others). ² Dummy variable (1 = male, 0 = female).

* p < .05. ** p < .01.

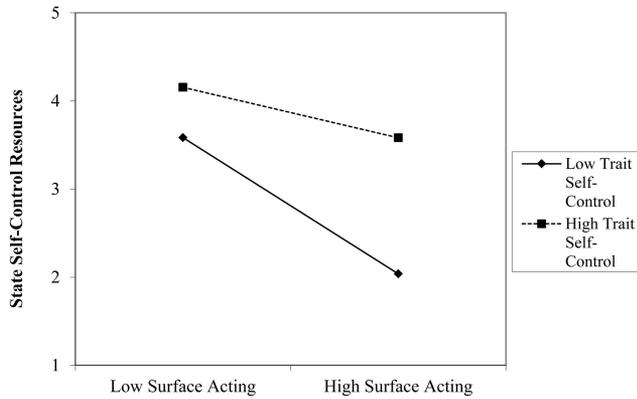


Figure 2. The interactive effect between leader surface acting and leader trait self-control on self-control resources.

by surface acting, and that this in turn is positively associated with abusive supervision, supporting Hypothesis 3.³

Discussion

In this research, we drew from ego-depletion theory to develop and test a model that explains the role of self-control in abusive supervision. We demonstrated that the depleting effect of surface acting has direct implications for leaders' abusive supervision, such that leaders who experience higher levels of depletion via surface acting during customer interactions are more likely to abuse their followers than leaders who are less depleted. Furthermore, we identified leaders' trait self-control as an important moderator of these effects. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our research in the following sections.

Theoretical Contributions

First and foremost, our research contributes to the literature on abusive supervision by highlighting a new mechanism through which leaders are likely to abuse their followers. In contrast to previous research, we argue that abuse stems from leaders' inability to exhibit self-control. Although our focus was on surface acting during customer interactions, the identification of self-control resource depletion as a key factor in the emergence of abusive supervision highlights the importance of maintaining leaders' self-control resource availability over time.

More generally, we suggest that ego-depletion theory holds significant promise as another perspective in understanding many antecedents of abusive supervision. For example, according to past research, abuse itself is depleting to its victims (Thau & Mitchell, 2010). Therefore, it is possible that abuse from upper management might influence lower-level managers' abuse simply because they, as a result of being abused, lack the self-control resources needed to restrain their own abusive supervisory behaviors. Ego-depletion theory can thus provide a complimentary understanding of currently established antecedents of abusive supervision (e.g., factors derived from social learning theory such as upper management abusive behaviors) and open doors to an array of previously unexamined antecedents of abusive supervision (e.g., job demand).

Our research also contributes to the literature on surface acting, particularly as an aspect of emotional labor. Research on surface acting and emotional labor has often emphasized its negative effects on well-being and performance outcomes (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011). Recent research, however, suggests that surfacing acting with customers can spillover to affect family conflict (Wagner, Barnes, & Scott, 2014). In a similar vein, our research suggests that surface acting with customers can spillover to affect leader-follower relationships. In addition to the small number of studies on the spillover effects of emotional labor, there is also a limited amount of research on the effects of surface acting on leadership behaviors. Gardner, Fischer, and Hunt (2009) theorized that surface acting by a leader would be negatively related to (a) the favorability of follower impressions, (b) follower perceptions of leader authenticity, and (c) leader felt authenticity. Unfortunately, few empirical studies have examined both emotional labor's spillover effects and its effects on leadership behaviors. Thus, our investigation on the spillover effects of leader surface acting on follower abusive supervision perceptions represents a first step in these areas of research.

Practical Implications

In terms of practice, we believe that a self-control perspective of abusive supervision opens the door to interventions that organizations may use to mitigate the potential harmful effects of surface acting on leadership. For example, the current research suggests that service organizations might wish to reconsider their policies on "service with a smile" and other indirect calls for surface acting. Whereas organizational practices encouraging emotion suppression might help an organization's image in the short run, such practices also risk compromising the quality of leader-follower relationships in the long run. Given numerous negative consequences of abusive supervision (Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Tepper, 2007) and the documented ineffectiveness of surface acting (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011), organizations might even benefit from explicitly discouraging surface acting.

Furthermore, to the extent that self-control resource availability is an important underlying driver of abusive supervision, our research suggests that abusive supervision can also be attenuated by replenishing leaders' self-control resources. For example, organizations can help employees regain their self-control resources by encouraging them to take short breaks at work (Trougakos, Beal, Green, & Weiss, 2008). Likewise, research has shown that self-affirmation training can enable individuals to replenish depleted resources (Schmeichel & Vohs, 2009). Together, these streams of research point to a wide array of interventions through which organizations can reduce abusive supervision.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This research is not without limitations. For example, although our mediator and dependent variable were reported by different sources, they were collected at the same time. Thus, abusive

³ Although we did not hypothesize direct-effects moderation (i.e., surface acting interacting with trait self-control to predict abusive supervision), we have included a table that examines the direct effects of our variables on abusive supervision upon editorial request (see Table 4).

Table 3
Indirect and Total Effects of Leader Surface Acting via State Self-Control on Abusive Supervision at Low and High Levels of Leader Trait Self-Control

Variables	p_{mx}	p_{ym}	Direct effects (p_{yx})	Indirect effects ($\times p_{mx}$)	Total effects ($p_{yx} + [p_{ym} \times p_{mx}]$)
Low leader trait self-control	-.33**	-.33**	.06	.11**	.17**
High leader trait self-control	-.06	-.33**	.06	.02	.08

Note. $N = 184$ dyads.
 ** $p < .01$.

supervision could be theorized to drive resource depletion. To examine this alternative explanation, we conducted a regression analysis in which abusive supervision was modeled as the independent variable and self-control resources as the dependent variable. Results from this test yielded a nonsignificant main effect ($\beta = .11, p = .28$). Nevertheless, we encourage future research to temporally separate measures of resource depletion and abusive supervision (i.e., utilize a three-wave design), and to examine other potential downstream consequences of abusive supervision for leaders themselves (e.g., feelings of remorse and guilt).

Beyond methodological issues, our research raises some interesting future research questions. Although we only examined self-control resource depletion through the lens of surface acting during customer interactions, there are other behaviors that can likely deplete leaders' self-control resources and lead to abusive supervision. For example, impression management requires leaders to present themselves in a socially desirable way and suppress their true desires and interests when interacting with top management (Bolino, 1999). The constant monitoring of one's image and suppression of undesirable behaviors will likely drain self-control and lead to increased abusive supervision. Interestingly, recent work suggests that engaging in procedurally just behaviors can also be self-control depleting because abiding by rules necessitates

self-control resources (Johnson et al., 2014). Leaders may therefore face a paradox. On the one hand, they may want to be as procedurally just as possible. On the other hand, engaging in such behaviors may lead to self-control depletion and subsequent abusive supervisory behaviors. All of these are important research directions that deserve scholarly attention.

Recent meta-analytic work by Carter and McCullough (2014) suggests that the effects of resource depletion may be overestimated in some contexts. This finding highlights the need for future researchers to carefully consider the dispositional and situational moderators of resource depletion. For example, Scott et al. (2012) found that surface acting is particularly likely to have negative effects for individuals who utilize highly variable surface acting tactics, and thereby are unable to become habituated to them over time. This research suggests that factors related to consistent versus inconsistent use of surface acting may partly explain why surface acting is more closely related to abusive supervision among some leaders rather than others, a research direction that is worthy of future investigations. In addition, although we focused exclusively on lower-level leaders in our studies, it is possible that leaders' job autonomy may moderate this effect, as research suggests that autonomy support may reduce the negative effects of resource depletion (Muraven, Gagné, & Rosman, 2008).

Table 4
Summary of Additional Regression Results (Dependent Variable [DV] = Abusive Supervision)

Variables	DV = Abusive supervision														
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4			Model 5		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Step 1															
Leader age	.01	.01	.09	.01	.01	.13	.01	.01	.13	.01	.01	.08	.01	.01	.10
Leader race ¹	.04	.05	.05	.05	.05	.06	.04	.05	.06	.06	.05	.08	.06	.05	.08
Leader gender ²	-.14	.13	-.08	-.10	.13	-.06	-.07	.13	-.04	-.04	.12	-.02	-.04	.12	-.02
Leader trait negative affect	.15	.05	.23**	.06	.06	.10	.06	.06	.09	.05	.06	.07	-.05	.06	-.07
Leader job tenure	-.05	.04	-.09	-.05	.04	-.10	-.05	.04	-.09	-.06	.04	-.11	-.06	.04	0.11
Step 2															
Leader surface acting				.04	.06	.05	.37	.14	.50*	.07	.06	.06	.11	.34	.15
Leader trait self-control				-.41	.11	-.24**	-.19	.26	-.09	-.27	.11	-.21*	-.19	.25	-.15
Step 3															
Leader Surface Acting \times Trait Self-Control							-.19	.09	-.43**				-.03	.09	-.15
Step 4															
State self-control										-.28	.06	-.33**	-.27	.06	-.31**
R^2	.04			.10			.12			.17			.18		
ΔR^2				.06			.02			N/A			.06		

Note. $N = 184$ dyads. All ΔR^2 were significant. The ΔR^2 in Model 5 was calculated based on the change from Model 3 to Model 5.

¹ Dummy variable (1 = White, 0 = others). ² Dummy variable (1 = male, 0 = female).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Although our results provide support for a self-control perspective in understanding why leaders become abusive, prior research by Lian et al. (2012) provided indirect evidence that social learning theory may have better predictive power over ego-depletion theory. We therefore recommend that future research considers both theoretical perspectives in tandem in understanding the antecedent of abusive supervision.

Finally, just as leaders need self-control resources to refrain from abusive behavior, they also need self-control resources to act as paragons of ethicality (e.g., to resist temptations). Like the abusive supervision literature, the ethical leadership literature has tended to focus on its consequences and neglect its antecedents (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). We therefore encourage future research to examine the utility of a self-control perspective on the study of ethical leadership. This stream of future research is especially important to the extent that a wide range of positive leadership styles require leaders to be ethical (Fehr, Yam, & Dang, 2015). In other words, resource-depleting workplace behaviors might hinder the display of a wide range of positive leadership styles, such as servant leadership and transformational leadership.

Conclusion

Leaders' work can be challenging. In a given day, leaders are likely to face a myriad of difficult tasks that can drain their self-control resources. In this paper, we demonstrated that the resource-draining task of surface acting during customer interactions can have deleterious effects on abusive supervision, depriving leaders of the resources they would otherwise use to rein in their abusive behavior. Through this study we highlight the importance of a self-control perspective on abusive behavior at work, and the importance of a deeper awareness of the unforeseen consequences of a depleted leader.

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