# EXPLORING HOW JOB DEMANDS AND EMOTIONAL LABOR INFUENCE SELF-REGULATION AND UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Psychology

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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By

Allison B. Martir

December, 2017

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## ABSTRACT

Unethical Behavior is a salient workplace issue due to its prevalence and detrimental outcomes. Social cognitive theory (SCT) and conservation of resources theory (COR) are applied to present a conceptualization of unethical behavior in the workplace as a resource defense and allocation strategy, stemmed by self-regulatory processes. Applying the limitations of finite self-regulatory resources as presented in the self-control literature, I suggest that demands relating to information processing and emotional labor can deplete self-regulatory resources and are associated with the use of unethical behavior as a means of resource conservation. As research suggests that self-regulatory failure is more likely when an individual has increased demands on their self-regulatory resources, I also suggest that increased emotional regulation due to low emotional stability will moderate the relationships between both job demands and unethical behavior. Results fail to support the theoretical model. Methodological limitations are discussed as well as applications to future research.

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## Introduction

From Watergate, to the Enron scandal, to Bernie Madoff, unethical behavior has historically dominated the media spotlight, with a continuous stream of corporations and employees dealing with their involvement in and fall-out from such actions. Current headlines are littered with example of similar incidents, such as Pharmaceutical Giant GlaxoSmithKline facing inquisitions from British and Chinese authorities regarding violations of anti-bribery laws (Bray, 2014) and the US air force firing nine officers in response to a cheating scandal at a nuclear site (Londoño, 2014) When such situations are brought public attention, questions inevitably arise asking about why employees engaged in unethical behavior.

Defined by Jones (1991) as actions that are "either illegal or morally unacceptable to the larger community" (p. 367), unethical behavior refers to action by an individual that is either legally prohibited or violates widely accepted social norms. Examples of these behaviors include theft, falsifying information, production deviance, abusive supervision, and unlawful conduct. While there is some behavioral overlap between unethical behavior and other categorizations of counterproductive or deviant work behaviors (e.g., counterproductive work behavior, aggression, and incivility), for behaviors to be considered unethical, an individual's actions must go against societally accepted moral norms of behavior (Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006). As such, behaviors are viewed in reference to violating moral norms and not on their impact on the organization. However, this does not mean that unethical behavior is not damaging to organizations. Unethical behavior affects companies in many ways, including management issues related to employee theft, legal issues related to fraud, and

consumer/public perception related to brand association with disreputable practices. Former Big Five accounting firm Arthur Andersen dealt with these issues after its involvement in the Enron scandal, and saw its $9.3 billion revenue stream evaporate after the federal government indicted the accounting firm (Brown & Dugan, 2002). More recently, the Livestrong Foundation lost one of its largest corporate sponsors, Nike, after the United States Anti-Doping Agency's indictment of Lance Armstrong, the cancer charity's founder and former chairman (Macur, 2013). Less obvious costs associated with unethical behavior include legal costs, theft, recruitment and turnover costs, monitoring costs, reputation costs, and abusive treatment costs (Bennett, & Robinson, 2000; Mitchell, Vogel, & Folger, 2012). In addition to organizational losses, unethical behavior also negatively impacts employees on an individual level. Unethical behavior in the workplace acts as a stressor that negatively affects the physical and psychological well-being of the perpetrator, target, and even employees not directly involved in the behavior (Giacalone & Promislo, 2010; Meier, Semmer, & Spector, 2013). Given the prevalence, relevance and consequences of unethical behavior in the workplace, authors have called for research investigating how individual, moral, and organizational variables are associated with unethical behavior (e.g., Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010).

Building on existing literature, I seek to contribute to the narrative by proposing a new conceptualization of unethical behavior as a resource conservation strategy influenced by job demands and individual differences. To do this I first briefly review the process of ethical decision making and the literature surrounding unethical behavior, as well as the processes that drive and inhibit unethical behavior. Then, using self-regulation and resource theories I suggest a process in which high informational and

emotional labor demands can influence unethical behavior and propose a model to explain the relationship between unethical behavior, job demands, and employee factors. Next, I describe a study designed to investigate this model using an objective measures of job demands, and I close by presenting my findings and implications for research and practice.

## Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

### Unethical Behavior

Unethical behavior and ethical decision making are theoretically intertwined concepts, with ethical decision making encompassing the cognitive and affective process of making decisions with ethical implications, and unethical behavior describing a possible outcome of that decision (Ajzen, 1991; Hunt & Vitell, 2006). Researchers have proposed several models to explain how ethical decision making can lead to unethical behavior. One of the most prominent of which is a four-stage model by Jones (1991) based on the moral decision making framework of Rest (1986). According to the model, when making an ethical decision an individual moves through a four-stage process wherein they: 1) recognize a moral issue, 2) make a moral judgment about the issue, 3) establish intention to act based off that judgment, and 4) act according to their intentions. The stages are intended to be conceptually distinct and sequential; however, advancement to one stage does not guarantee advancement to the next (Jones, 1991). Thus, while an employee may recognize that stealing from the company is wrong (moral judgment) they might not stop doing so or report themselves (moral behavior).

This decision making process and the choice to engage in unethical behavior is thought to be influenced by a combination of individual characteristics and contextual

factors (e.g., Jones, 1991; Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010; Trevino, 1986). While extensive analysis of factors associated with unethical behavior is beyond the scope of this paper, several comprehensive meta-analyses have been conducted (see Ford & Richardson, 1994; Loe, Ferrell, & Mansfield, 2000; O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005; Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006; Treviño, Nieuwenboer, & Kish-Gephart, 2014). Some of the organizational and contextual factors researchers have found to be associated with unethical behavior include: ethical culture (Martin & Cullen, 2006), organizational identification (Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010), ethical climate (Treviño, Butterfield, & McCabe, 1998), ethical leadership (Mayer, Kuenzi, & Greenbaum, 2010), and situational cues (Gino & Margolis, 2011). Individual or within-person factors commonly linked to unethical behavior include: goal setting (Barsky, 2008; Schweitzer, Ordóñez, & Douma, 2004), age (Kelley, Ferrell, & Skinner, 1990), cognitive moral development (Kish-Gephart, et al., 2010; Trevino, & Youngblood, 1990), gender (Betz, O'Connell, & Shepard, 1989), and achievement striving (Elias & Farag, 2011). Interestingly, little focus has been placed on the link between unethical behavior and personality factors outside of narcissism (Brown, Sautter, Littvay, Sautter, & Bearnes, 2010; Brunell, Staats, Barden, & Hupp, 2011) and Machiavellianism (Hegarty, & Sims, 1979). To my knowledge, only one study has looked at unethical behavior using the Big Five model of personality (Goldberg, 1982) traits (Karim, Zamzuri, & Nor, 2009).

In an effort to better understand the relationship between unethical behavior and its associated factors several theoretical models have been proposed to explain how these variables influence the ethical decision making process (e.g., Ferell & Gresham, 1985; Forgas, 1995; Hunt & Vitell, 2006; Rest, 1986; Jones 1991). However, these models are

designed to present general theories of ethical decision making, and while providing an elaborative picture of influences on the decision making process, they do not focus on motivational processes that may specifically drive unethical behavior. Two theories that may elucidate the motivation for engaging in unethical behavior are Social Cognitive Theory (SCT; Bandura, 1986) and Conservation of Resources Theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989).

## Motivations behind Unethical behavior

**Social Cognitive Theory.** Deciding to engage in unethical behavior may seem like an ill-advised conclusion for a person to make. The choice to engage in unethical behavior may result in consequences for the perpetrator that can be legal (e.g., termination, suspension), social (e.g., avoidance, criticism, risk of retaliation), and personal (e.g., guilt over violating social norms, empathy for target). Given the costs, the prevalence of unethical behavior in the modern workplace seems incongruous. However, what can be often overlooked while focusing on negative outcomes of unethical behavior are its potential benefits. Research on aversive behaviors similar to unethical behavior such as deviance, counterproductive work behavior, and aggression provide several benefits to the perpetrator including: acquiring tangible rewards and defending acquired rewards (Buss & Duntley, 2006; Glenn & Raine, 2009), increasing social status (Buss, 2005), reducing aversive treatment (Bandura, 1983), cathartic release of frustration and emotional coping (Buss, 1966; Krischer, Penney, & Hunter, 2010), increasing self-esteem (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996), and raising self-concept (Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000).

The idea that a potentially negative work behavior such as unethical behavior can be used as a means of goal acquisition is not a new one. Using Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) Bandura (1986) described aggression as a learned behavior, which is reinforced through acquisition of rewards, or by viewing others acquiring rewards for the behavior. Social cognitive theory is based upon the idea that that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction between the person, environment, and behavior. Because of this, human behavior and learning is a product of a continuous interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and contextual factors. Therefore, behavior is shaped by 1) factors within the environment, especially the reinforcements and punishments experienced by oneself and by others (vicarious reinforcement, and 2) a person's own thoughts, beliefs and appraisals.

The SCT framework can also be applied to unethical behavior. For example, SCT states that unethical behavior is dependent on: 1) the individual's appraisal he or she can carry out the behavior (self-efficacy), 2) likelihood of behavior to achieve the desired aims, 3) likelihood of the behavior to produce rewards or reduce adverse treatment, and 4) likelihood of the behavior not to produce negative consequences or increase adverse outcomes. Thus, the likelihood of unethical behavior depends on the individual's self-efficacy, experience or social learning, and anticipated outcomes based on past punishment or reinforcement. For example, if an individual is presented with a situation in which unethical behavior is possible and would provide personal gains, and is unlikely to be caught or punished, there would be strong motivational factors driving the unethical behavior. For instance, one common unethical behavior, deceit, has been shown to lead to resource acquisition, individual advancement, and company profit (Steinel, Utz, &

Koning, 2010; van Dijk, de Kwaadsteniet, & Koning, 2012). Thus, SCT allows better understanding of the motivational processes that drive unethical behavior as a means of goal attainment and a way to prevent adverse experiences.

**Conservation of Resources Theory.** Similarly, the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory offers an integrative theory of motivation that considers the impact of external and internal resources on individual behavior (Hobfoll, 1989). COR theory was originally framed to focus on stress (e.g. Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim, & Johnson, 2006), but has since become a central theory in the field of burnout (Shirom, 2003) and been used to explain other workplace outcomes such as work engagement and CWB (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007; Penney, Hunter, & Perry, 2011). In simplest terms, COR theory states that individuals strive to obtain, retain, foster, and protect those things they value (Hobfoll, 1989). Thus, individuals are motivated to act in a way that allows them to maintain, increase, and protect from loss the resources that will enable them to obtain things they need. Less broad than SCT and more tailored to workplace applications, COR can be used to explain the workplace factors that may cause individuals to engage in unethical behavior.

COR theory broadly defines resources as objects, conditions, personal characteristics, and energy that can be used to obtain things of value or meet needs (Hobfoll, 2011). These needs can range from meeting deadlines to approval from peers. For example, having the self-control to focus can serve as a resource in a busy workplace as it allows employees to apply their attention to a task and complete it in an expedient manner. Employees can use resources to address work demands, such as meeting performance requirements and achieving task goals. In addition to meeting needs,

resources are also employed to protect against resource loss, and gain further resources (Hobfoll, 2011). For example, if facing a deadline, an employee can use the resource of seniority to delegate the completion of less important tasks to others, thus allowing the employee to focus the resource of attention to other projects, and protecting the resource of the employee's time.

Past research has applied COR in the prediction of a wealth of psychological and physiological outcomes, such as arousal and emotional exhaustion, but few studies have examined the theory's ability to predict behavioral outcomes (Halbesleben, 2006; Westman et al., 2004). Similar to psychological and physiological outcomes, behavioral outcomes can also occur as the result of resource insufficiency or be used as a deliberate resource investment strategy to protect existing resources (Krischer, Penney, & Hunter, 2010; Penney et al., 2011; Penney & Spector, 2007). For example, Krischer and colleagues (2010) applied COR to suggest that employees may engage in counterproductive work behavior as a coping mechanism to protect and conserve emotional resources when faced with stressors over which they have little control. They found that among employees experiencing low levels of distributive justice (stressor), employees who engaged in high levels of production deviance and withdrawal behaviors (counterproductive work behavior) were less likely to experience emotional exhaustion (emotional resource depletion) than employees who engaged in low levels of these counterproductive work behaviors. Their findings suggest that withdrawal and withholding effort may help employees conserve resources to mitigate burnout associated with job stress.

As the motivation behind COR is to prevent strain outcomes, when facing resource depletion, employees are driven to act in ways that help them acquire or protect existing resources, including the use of unethical behavior. Using the COR framework, unethical behavior can be viewed as a resource allocation or defense strategy, motivated by resource loss and the need to protect resources. Using the previous example of the employee facing a deadline, an employee can use the resource of unethical behavior to lie about the status of less important tasks, thus allowing the employee to focus the resource of attention to other projects, and protecting the resource of the employee's time. Thus, unethical behaviors can have beneficial outcomes for the individual that include resource accrual and defense.

Applying SCT and COR, I propose that unethical behavior in the workplace is motivated by the prospect of goal or resource attainment and conservation, and the desire to avoid disincentives or resource loss. Accordingly, unethical behavior can be viewed as a context-contingent solution to goal attainment and a means to prevent negative outcomes (Koning, Van Dijk, Van Beest, & Steinel, 2009). Unethical behavior can also be a viewed as a context-contingent response to resource loss, driven by the motivation to protect remaining resources and acquire subsequent resources.

**Self-Regulation and Unethical Behavior**

While unethical behavior may have benefits, in addition to the previously stated legal and social costs, unethical behavior is also hindered because it involves making an ethical choice to go against an individual's moral norms. Moral norms refer to expectations of personal behavior that are usually societal in origin (Nielsen & McGregor, 2013). Although moral norms originate from external sources (e.g., society,

religion, science) individuals internalize them resulting in norms influencing the individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Manstead, 2000). These moral norms specify criteria for moral judgments that shape how individuals view and interact with the world (Nielsen & McGregor, 2013).

Conversely, the influence of anticipated costs and moral norms on unethical behavior can be demonstrated in individuals with psychopathic traits. Psychopathy is a disorder in which individuals have a pronounced lack of guilt, remorse, empathy, and fear of negative punishment (Hare, 2008). As such, psychopathic individuals are more likely to engage in unethical conduct, deviant behavior, aggression, and to use more violent forms of behavior to achieve their goals (Blair 2010; Glenn & Raine, 2009). From this small subset of the population we can observe how individuals react when not restrained by moral norms. Fortunately, most individuals without psychopathic traits restrain their behavior by considering both the expected inducements and penalties associated with their actions (Bandura, 1983). This process, in which individuals restrain or control their behavior in order to act in a way that is both socially acceptable and in line with their goals, is commonly referred to as self-regulation or self-control.

Self-regulation can be broadly defined as “those processes, internal and/or transactional, that enable an individual to guide his/her goal-directed activities over time and across changing circumstances” (Karoly, 1993). Self-regulation enables individuals to make choices, control impulses, regulate social conduct, and inhibit unwanted thoughts and behavior (Heatherton & Wagner, 2011).

While self-regulation encompasses a wide variety of processes, inhibition of behavior inconsistent with an individual’s moral standards (such as unethical behavior)

entails a narrower subset of self-regulatory processes: those that aim to override behavioral responses that are incompatible with an individual's goals (Hofmann, Schmeichel, & Baddeley, 2012). Also termed self-control (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996), this subset of self-regulatory processes denotes the capacity for altering behavioral responses that are inconsistent with personal standards (e.g., values, morals, and social expectations), so that they serve goal attainment. For the purpose of this paper the term self-regulation will refer to the effortful subset of self-regulatory processes involved with the inhibition of behavior responses that are incompatible with an individual's goals or standards, also referred to in the literature as self-control (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007).

In addition to the desire to maintain consistency with personal standards that are associated with goal achievement, individuals may also be motivated to self-regulate behavior in order to avoid self-sanctions. Social-cognitive theory posits that as individuals manage and direct their behavior through self-regulatory mechanisms, individuals will refrain from behaviors that violate their personal moral standards as these behaviors bring internalized self-sanctions (Bandura, 1991). For example, a server will refrain from hostile gestures towards a patron because violating her standards will result in self-censure, such as guilt. Thus, anticipatory self-sanctions will guide individuals to cognitively regulate their behavior within internal standards of acceptable behavior.

In summary, while SCT and COR provide a framework to suggest that unethical behavior provides a viable means to gain resources and prevent resource depletion, the use of unethical behavior is usually prevented by an individual's self-regulatory processes. Thus, even if external punishments are absent (i.e., there is no chance of being

caught), employees may still refrain from unethical behavior via self-regulation. The question then arises as to why, in spite of self-regulatory influences, is unethical behavior prevalent in the workplace? Research suggests that individuals may fail at self-regulation due to the limitations of self-regulatory resources.

**The Strength Model and Limits on Self-Regulation.** The idea that an individual's ability to regulate or control their behavior is a personal resource with limited capacity is an established concept in the self-control literature (e.g., Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994). Referred to as the strength model of self-control, Baumeister and colleagues (1994) proposed that the ability to effectively regulate behavior depends on a finite resource consumed by effortful attempts at self-regulation. In the strength model of self-control, the notion that an individual's ability to control his or her behavior deteriorates after effortful self-regulation is compared to a muscle that becomes weaker after previous exertions (Baumeister et al., 2007). When the ability to control one's behavior is impaired due to the expenditure of self-regulatory resources, one experiences a state of "ego depletion" (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998). In line with COR theory, the strength model also states that when individuals notice depletion of their self-regulatory resources they may limit their self-control disbursement (i.e., conserve resources), especially if they anticipate future need for self-regulation (Baumeister et al., 2007; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000).

The strength model of self-control and the concept of finite resources for self-regulation has been supported in numerous experimental studies in which participants' performance on a task requiring self-regulation becomes impaired if they are first asked to perform an action that requires self-control (e.g., Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998).

Called the “dual task paradigm” this experimental model has demonstrated that after engaging in an act of self-control, an individual’s self-regulatory resources are diminished and as a consequence, subsequent self-regulatory performance is impaired. For example, Baumeister and colleagues (1998) found that individuals asked to resist eating chocolates subsequently gave up much faster on a challenging puzzle task than those who had been allowed to eat the chocolates beforehand. In another series of studies, researchers found that participants who engaged in high maintenance interactions (encounters with a confederate whose behavior made social coordination difficult) had poorer self-regulation and performance on an ensuing fine motor control task, than participants who engaged in low maintenance interactions (encounters with a confederate whose behavior made social coordination easy) prior to the fine motor control task (Finkel et al., 2006). While the strength model of self-control has not been universally supported across studies (e.g., Stillman, Tice, Fincham, & Lambert, 2009) a meta-analysis of 83 studies concerning self-regulatory depletion found that the representation of self-regulation  as a finite resource remains the best explanation for the effects found (Hagger, Wood, Stiff, & Chatzisarantis, 2010).

The strength model of self-control has also been used to explore how unethical behavior can result once self-regulatory resources are depleted. Using the dual task paradigm, researchers have found that unethical behavior is more likely when self-regulatory resources are depleted by an initial act of self-control (Mead, Baumeister, Gino, Schweitzer, & Ariely, 2009). These findings have been replicated by a series of studies by Gino, Schweitzer, Mead, and Ariely (2011), in which unethical behavior (falsely reporting higher performance to earn more money) was consistently higher for

participants who had previously engaged in a task designed to deplete self-regulatory resources (e.g., a task that requires sustained focus, self-control, or mental effort), than for participants who had not had previously performed a resource depletion task.

**Resource Depletion and Unethical Behavior.** According to the strength model of self-control, and as demonstrated in previous studies (e.g., Muraven et al., 1998; Vohs & Heatherton, 2000), self-regulatory resources can be depleted by a wide range of activities that draw on common domain-general resources. When these resources are depleted, individuals may fail at self-regulation due to impairment in standards, monitoring, or ability to change behavior. In seeking to better identify these resources, researchers have studied how cognitive demands, or demands on executive functioning, can affect self-regulation. For example, one facet of cognitive ability, working memory, has been linked to updating and retrieving relevant information such as self-regulatory goals and standards (Hofmann et al., 2012). Moreover, sufficient working memory resources have also been associated with greater ability to keep behavior in line with goal standards (Hofmann, Friese, & Strack, 2009). A strong link has also been established between reductions in executive functioning due to cognitive demands and decreased behavioral inhibition (Hofmannet al., 2012). Indeed, cognitive load has been associated with decreased ability to self-regulate behavior in studies looking at dietary restraint (e.g., Ward & Mann, 2000), stereotype inferences (Wigboldus, Sherman, Franzese, & Knippenberg, 2004), and alcohol use (e.g., Houben, K., Wiers & Jansen, 2011). Hence, cognitive resources associated with both executive functioning and self-regulation can be reduced either by concurrent resource demands (Lavie, Hirst, de Fockert, & Viding, 2004) or by previous acts of self-regulation resulting in ego depletion (Baumeister et al.,

1998). For example, a research by Welsh and Ordóñez (2014) found that tasks requiring participants to maintain high levels of focus, motivation, and persistence led to higher rates of unethical behavior than participants who were not asked to engage in behaviors that led to high ego depletion. Their results also supported the role of ego depletion as a moderator between self-regulatory demands and unethical behavior.

**Cognitive Job Demands.**

Unethical behavior would be easier to manage in organizations if it was simply a matter of removing employees without normative moral standards or the ability to regulate their behavior. Given however that the vast majority of employees are able to self-regulate their behavior, why do so many engage in unethical behavior at the workplace? Indeed, some individuals seem to more frequently engage in unethical behavior inside the workplace than they do outside of work. Applying a resource framework, one possibility is that inside the workplace employees have more difficulty conserving resources associated with self-regulation and more commonly find themselves experiencing regulatory resource depletion, which in turn leads to unethical behavior.

Resource conservation can be an issue in the workplace as each job has tasks that place demands on employee resources. Job demands are aspects of a job that require "sustained physical or mental effort" and, therefore, are associated with energetic costs (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Job demands consume employee resources, and studies have shown that the combination of high demands and low resources can lead to high levels of strain (Hobfoll, 1989), exhaustion (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005), and negative behavioral outcomes such as CWB (Penney et al., 2011). However, these studies have generally focused on perceived demands or

threats to resources in the work environment, and few have examined objective demands associated with the job itself. Moreover, demands from the environment generally reflect threats to tangible resources like funding, equipment, or social support. Threats to internal, cognitive resources that are associated with job tasks (e.g., sustained focus, information processing) have been underexplored in workplace settings (Martir, Penney, & Stokes, 2015).

All occupations come with a set of inherent job demands. Certain job demands are occupation specific, such as driving long distances, and some are common to all occupations, such as self-regulation. All jobs have tasks and activities which require the use of cognitive resources such as information processing, self-regulation, focus, etc. We can refer to these aspects of a job that require sustained "mental effort" and are associated with energetic costs as cognitive demands. As cognitive demands increase, there is a greater likelihood of self-regulatory failure due to cognitive resource insufficiency (Bandura, 1991). In addition, as resources dwindle, self-regulatory performance may be preemptively decreased to conserve remaining resources (Baumeister et al., 2007). Facing resource depletion, COR states that employees will seek to engage in behaviors both to acquire and protect resources. However, COR states that resource loss is more salient than resource gain, such that given equal amounts of loss and gain, the loss will have a greater impact, and gains have greater prominence following a resource loss (Westman, Hobfoll, Chen, Davidson, & Laski, 2004). As such, individuals threatened by the potential or actual loss of resources will thus attempt to acquire and protect resources with greater vigor (Hobfoll, 1998). Therefore individuals with high job demands may find themselves more likely to face resource loss or depletion, and therefore engage in

more resource accrual and conservation strategies; I suggest that these strategies include unethical behavior.

While previous studies have looked at the effect of self-regulatory resource depletion on unethical behavior, this research has been done in experimental settings with student participants (Gino et al., 2011; Mead et al., 2009). While this methodology allows for stricter experimental control, this foundational research is not directly applicable to workplace settings. In addition, much of the empirical work on unethical behavior has been conducted primarily at the individual level of analysis rather than at the occupational level. Collecting data from a workplace sample would increase the generalization of the findings, especially if the hope is to produce workplace applications. In addition, while examining the influences of cognitive demands on unethical behavior at an individual-level is informative, to look at the effect of job related cognitive demands on unethical behavior, analysis is more effective at the occupational level. To examine cognitive job demands at an occupational level, assessment of job requirements and characteristics can provide an objective source of information as to the level of resources in a specific area (e.g. physical, emotional, cognitive) required for each occupation (Bhave, & Glomb, 2013; Morgeson, & Humphrey, 2006; Bhave, Kramer, & Glomb, 2010; Glomb, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Rotundo, 2004). Thus, focusing on job activities and characteristics that require cognitive effort provides an objective measure of the cognitive demands associated with the occupation.

Bridging the SCT, COR, self-regulation and unethical behavior literature, I assert that unethical behavior is a possible means for resource allocation and defense that is usually prevented via self-regulation as these behaviors are inconsistent with most

individual's moral standards. However, job demands that require cognitive effort, specifically informational demands which require executive functioning, consume and threaten employees' cognitive and self-regulatory resources leaving few resources available to regulate behavior. Consequently, employees working in jobs with high informational demands, as indicated using objective occupational data gathered from O*NET (Glomb, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Rotundo, 2004), are more likely to experience self-regulatory failure and use unethical behavior to conserve and protect remaining resources (e.g., taking long breaks, deliberately taking short-cuts, intimidating others to get needed resources/information) than employees working in jobs with low informational demands.

*Hypothesis 1: Informational job demands will be positively associated with unethical behavior.*

As I have previously suggested, employees are more likely to engage in unethical behavior for resource conservation when self-regulatory resources are depleted by cognitive demands associated with their jobs, such as informational demands. As previously mentioned, self-regulatory resources can be depleted by a wide range of activities, including emotional regulation (Gross, 1998). The effect of emotional regulation on subsequent self-regulation has also been supported in in laboratory studies where researchers found that participants who watched an emotional film while trying to increase or decrease their emotional response performed worse on a physical stamina test than participant who watched the film without being asked to regulate their emotion (Muraven et al., 2008). Indeed, when discussing self-regulation failure, Baumeister and Heatherton (1996) stated that the most common pattern of misallocating regulatory

resources “involves emphasizing (short-term) affect regulation at the expense of some other, more lasting and substantive aspect” (p. 10). Emotional regulation also acts as a cognitive demand (Hofmannet al., 2012). During emotional regulation, executive functions such as working memory are used for both regulating the emotional experience (Riediger, Wrzus, Schmiedek, Wagner, & Lindenberger, 2011) and suppressing unwanted emotions (Hofmann, Gschwendner, Friese, Wiers, & Schmitt, 2008). It is clear then that frequent emotional regulation can contribute to self-regulatory failure and subsequent unethical behavior by consuming self-regulatory resources and increasing cognitive demands. Thus, employees who have job demands that require more emotional self-regulation may be more likely to experience regulatory resource depletion and engage in more unethical behavior. These job demands that which entail regulating emotions so that they are consistent with organizational or occupational display rules, regardless of internal feelings, are referred to as emotional labor (Grandey, 2000).

Originally developed to describe the effort needed to produce socially appropriate emotional reactions in the service industry (Hochschild, 1983), the concept of emotional labor has been expanded to include the effort required to meet job demands related to the display of organizationally appropriate emotions at work (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993) and during interpersonal transactions (Morris & Feldman, 1996). The process of managing emotions and expressions to meet job demands may involve enhancing, faking, or suppressing emotions (Grandey, 2000), which are all components of emotional regulation (Muraven et al., 2008). Indeed, models of emotional labor also support the role of self-regulatory processes in dealing with emotional labor demands (Grandey, 2000). Studies have also supported the idea that emotional labor demands may influence

cognitive load (Totterdell & Holman, 2003), and lead to resource depletion (Brotheridge, & Lee, 2002; Glomb et al., 2004), as well as emotional exhaustion (Martínez-Iñigo, Totterdell, Alcover, & Holman, 2007), burnout (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002), job stress (Pugliesi, 1999) and decreased employee well-being (Cropanzano, Weiss, & Elias, 2004).

To the best of my knowledge only one published study has examined the relationship between emotional labor and unethical behavior (Lee & Ok, 2014). In their study of 309 hotel hospitality workers, Lee and Ok (2014) found that a facet of emotional labor, emotional dissonance, (the discrepancy between genuinely felt emotion and feigned emotion) was positively associated with service sabotage on the part of the employee. While these finding support a relationship between emotional labor and unethical behavior, limits on the areas of emotional labor and unethical behavior, in addition to the use of a highly specific population, make the generalization of these findings across other occupations difficult.

Drawing from the literature I suggest that, as emotional labor requires emotional regulation, the cognitive effort employees need to deal with emotional labor will deplete their cognitive and self-regulatory resources, leaving few resources available to regulate behavior. Diminished self-regulatory capacity will then lead to unethical behavior as a means to conserve existing resources. Therefore, employees who have jobs with high emotional labor demands, as measured by objective occupational data (O*NET), are more likely to experience self-regulatory failure and employ unethical behavior to conserve and protect remaining resources than employees with low emotional labor demands. In addition, as resources needed to meet both informational job demands and

emotional labor demands draw from the same, finite group of self-regulatory resources, the presence of both will be associated with an increased likelihood of self-regulatory resource depletion and subsequent unethical behavior. Thus, the presence of emotional labor demands will increase cognitive load, resource depletion, and unethical behavior for individuals with existing informational job demands.

*Hypothesis 2: Emotional labor demands will be positively associated with unethical behavior.*

*Hypothesis 3: Emotional labor demands moderate the positive relationship between informational job demands and unethical behavior such that the relationship will be stronger when emotional labor demands are high.*

**Moderating Role of Personality**

Thus far I have argued that job demands may deplete employee resources needed for self-regulation and therefore increase the likelihood of unethical behavior. However, some employees may have fewer resources available for self-regulation than others and thus may be less able to self-regulate and refrain from unethical behavior. As previously discussed, emotional labor increases cognitive demands and depletes self-regulatory resources through demands associated with emotional regulation. However, employees may differ in how frequently they need to engage in self-regulation and in the amount of effort needed to regulate their emotions (Barrett, Gross, Christensen, & Benvenuto, 2001; Judge, Woolf, & Hurst, 2009). These differences in the effort and frequency of emotional regulation between employees affects the extent of the demands on their self-regulatory resources. Because of this, certain employees may be more strongly effected by cognitive and emotional job demands than others. One way to infer differences in

emotional self-regulation between employees is to examine personality factors associated with emotional management.

Emotional stability (ES) is a personality trait that refers to one's proneness to negative emotions and anxiety (Costa & McCrae, 2008). High ES individuals are resilient, stable, and less prone to experiencing negative affect, whereas low ES individuals are worrisome, temperamental, high-strung, and prone to experiencing negative emotions. Employees with low ES need to engage in emotional regulation more often than employees with high ES, causing employees with low ES to have higher cognitive demands and use more self-regulatory resources. This may be one reason why employees with low ES are also more likely to experience strain outcomes associated with high job demands and low resources (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) than those with high ES (Alarcon, Eschleman, & Bowling, 2009).

Overall, ES acts as a resource decreasing the need for employees high in ES to engage in emotional regulation and helping to conserve self-regulatory resources. Conversely, employees with low ES use more cognitive resources regulating emotion and need to apply self-regulatory resources to manage emotions more frequently. This leaves them with fewer self-regulatory resources and increases the likelihood of ego depletion and engaging in resource conservation strategies such as unethical behavior. Therefore, I suggest that because low ES employees use more resources on emotional regulation, they have fewer existing resources to handle informational and emotional job demands. Consequently, they will be more likely than high ES employees to experience self-regulatory failure and use unethical behavior to conserve or protect resources in occupations with high informational or emotional demands.

*Hypothesis 4: ES will moderate the positive relationship between informational job demands and unethical behavior such that the relationship will be stronger when ES is low.*

*Hypothesis 5: ES will moderate the positive relationship between emotional labor job demands and unethical behavior such that the relationship will be stronger when ES is low.*

## Methods

### Sample and Procedures

For this paper two participant samples were used. For each sample participants were eligible if they met all of the following criteria: 1) over 18 years of age, 2) employed and working more than 20 hours per week, 3) employed at their current job for at least 6 months, and 4) currently reside in the U.S.

**Sample 1.** Participants for this sample were recruited from the StudyResponse Project (2011) an online research panel conducting web-based surveys with over 95,000 participants primarily in the United States. StudyResponse members were invited via an email to participate in the study in exchange for entry into a random drawing for one or more dollar-valued incentives. Online surveys have previously been used by a number of published studies to measure unethical behavior (e.g., Penney et al., 2011). To reduce common method bias, data were collected in two phases, approximately four weeks apart. The recruitment notice for the first survey, which included the measures of ES and demographic information, was sent to 988 individuals, of which 522 (52.8%) responded. For the second survey, which included the criterion measure, 368 of the 522 original participants (70.5%) responded.

Of these 124 cases were dropped based on responses to items designed to detect non-conscientious responding and an additional 78 cases were dropped because of missing data (less than 90% of items completed, incomplete occupational information, or no match to occupation on O*NET), leaving 166 usable cases. The final sample consisted of 45% men and 55% women, who were predominately Caucasian (92%), with mean age of 40.98 ($SD$ = 9.78) and worked an average of 41.63 hours per week ($SD$ = 8.05). Sample one participants represented over 100 different occupations in a variety of industries (illustrated in Figure 1), with diverse levels educational achievement: 14% high school, 26% some college, 11% associate degree, 27% college degree, 11% master's degree, 5% doctoral degree.

I found no significant differences between participants who answered only the initial survey and those who answered both surveys with respect to age $t(506) = 1.28$, $p = .20$, hours worked $t(447) = 1.34$, $p = .18$, and emotional stability $t(477) = .457$, $p = .67$). Respondents who did not complete the second survey and respondents who answered both surveys were also similar with respect to gender, education, and occupation.

**Sample 2.** Participants were recruited from Qualtrics via the Respondents On-Demand feature which allows survey participants to be selected based on the pre-established criteria. Participants meeting criteria were identified by Qualtrics, and a random selection of these individuals was invited to the take the web-based survey on Qualtrics. Survey completion took approximately 20-30 minutes, and participants were nominally compensated by Qualtrics for their participation. Cross sectional data was collected from the sample.

A total of 321 responses were obtained from Sample 2. Of these, 14 cases were dropped based on responses to items designed to detect non-conscientious responding, and an additional 38 cases were dropped because of missing data (less than 90% of items completed, incomplete occupational information, or no match to occupation on O*NET), leaving 269 usable cases. The final sample consisted of 45% men and 56% women, who were predominately Caucasian (81%), with mean age of 44.37 (SD = 10.83). Sample 2 also included participants from over 100 different occupations working in a variety of industries (Figure 2), with similarly diverse levels educational achievement: 12% high school, 22% some college, 20% associate degree, 30% college degree, 10% master's degree, 1% doctoral degree.

I found no significant differences between participants who responded to the survey and those who provided usable data with respect to the criterion variable, unethical behavior $t(319) = -.76$, $p = .45$.

**Measures**

While both samples contained identical measures of the predictor variables, samples differed in the method used to assess the criterion variable (unethical behavior). I provide a description of each measure below.

**Informational Job Demands and Emotional Labor Demands.** Data on informational job demands and emotional labor demands were collected at the occupation level from the Occupational Network (O*NET; United States Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration, 2001). Participants were asked to provide information regarding their job title, job industry, and managerial status. That information was then used to match participant jobs to one of over 900 corresponding

occupations on O*NET. Occupation listings in O*NET provide job characteristics information by listing occupational requirements, in the form of work activities and work context, for each job. Each work context or work activity variable is given a score ranging from 0 to 100, which allows for identification of job demands specific to that occupation. To form a composite of informational job demands and emotional labor demands I used the methods outlined in Glomb et al. (2004) using work context and work activity items that relate to informational job demands (e.g., 'Processing Information' and 'Organizing Planning and Prioritizing Work') and emotional labor demands (e.g., 'Establishing and Maintaining Relationships' and 'Deal with Unpleasant-Angry People'). This approach for identifying informational job demands and emotional labor demands is consistent with other studies that have categorized occupations based on their particular job demands (e.g., Bhave, Kramer, & Glomb, 2010; Diefendorff & Croyle, 2006).

When forming the composites, I first selected the work context and work ability items found to load on the factors of Emotional Labor and Information Demands in the Glomb et al. (2004) article. Due to the evolving nature of O*NET, some of the work context and work activity items were no longer provided, as they had been eliminated or absorbed into other items. A complete list of the available O*NET items used in each composite is provided in Appendix A.

All items specified to load on informational and emotional labor demands were combined to form a composite variable giving the scores from all selected items equal weighting. This created the variables informational job demands (IJD) and emotional labor demands (ELD). High values reflect high levels job demands.

**Emotional Stability.** Emotional Stability was measured using the 8-item scale from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg, 1999). Scale reliability coefficients for all measures presented in Table 1 (sample 1) and Table 2 (sample 2). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which items describe them using seven-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Sample items included, 'I worry about things', and 'I get stressed out easily'. These scales have demonstrated internal consistencies and criterion-related validity on par with that of the NEO PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 2008). High values reflect high levels of emotional stability.

**Unethical Behavior.** While unethical behavior is often measured though behavioral outcomes to experimental manipulations (e.g., comparing number of reported correct responses to observed number of correct responses) this methodology is not compatible with online modes of data collection designed to survey a large number of working adults with differing occupations. The use of ethical intention measures is common in unethical behavior research as individuals generally behave in manner a consistent manner with their espoused values (e.g., Jones & Kavanagh, 1996; Treviño & Weaver, 2003; Weber, 1992), and evidence suggests that relationships between predictors of unethical behavior and both unethical intentions and unethical behaviors are similar in direction and significance (Detert, Treviño, & Sweitzer, 2008). Additionally, individuals may be reticent to admit to engaging in unethical acts in the workplace, and be more honest about how they would act in hypothetical situations. Even given that an individual's unethical intentions are consistent, or at least highly indicative of their and unethical behavior, the two are still distinct, so to strengthen my findings I alternated

using measures of unethical intention or unethical behavior as the criterion variable between samples. Therefore, in this study unethical behavior was measured using self-reported frequency of past unethical behaviors (sample 1) and self-report measures of ethical intentions (sample 2).

***Sample 1.*** Unethical behavior was measured using items from the 33-item CWB Checklist (Spector, Fox, Penney, Bruursema, Goh, & Kessler, 2006) which measures counterproductive work behaviors such as abuse, sabotage, theft, and withdrawal. Sample items include "Blamed someone at work for error you made" and "Stole something belonging to someone at work." Responses were presented on a five-point scale, anchored at "never" and "every day." High values reflect high levels of unethical behavior.

By using the CWB scale as a way to capture unethical behavior I am not proposing that the two are commutable, but rather that there is significant overlap between the two concepts. CWB is defined as behavior "that is intended to have a detrimental effect on organization and their members" (Neuman and Baron, 2005, p. 27). While many such behaviors would be deemed unethical (e.g. lying about productivity, stealing from the organization), there are actions which harm the organization, but may not necessarily violate the social norms of moral behavior (e.g., speaking poorly of the organization) and be considered unethical (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010). To assess if the behaviors captured on the 33-item CWB Checklist would be considered unethical, eight I/O Psychology graduate students (4 male, 4 female) were asked to review the measure and decide which items captured unethical behavior. To prevent bias each student was provided with a written copy of the definition of unethical behavior to use when assessing

the items. Data from the rating found the majority of the 33 CWB Checklist items asked about behaviors that were both counterproductive and unethical. Only one item received no endorsement as unethical ("Started an argument with someone at work") and only two items ("Told people outside the job what a lousy place you work for", "Ignored someone at work") were endorsed by less than three raters as unethical. Given these findings and the existing literature supporting the overlap between these items, I felt the data from CWB Checklist would provide an accurate measure of frequency of unethical behavior. The full 33-item measure was used to maximize construct validity and allow for comparisons between findings from other studies which used the full scale

***Sample 2.*** Unethical behavior was measured using The Unethical Decision Making Scale created by Detert, et al. (2008). The Unethical Decision Making Scale asks respondents about their likelihood of engaging in unethical behavior described in of eight ethically charged scenarios. The original scale was designed for use in a student population, thus items were revised to make them appropriate for a non-student population. For example, references to "teacher" were changed to "supervisor" (e.g., "After turning in a report to your supervisor, you realize some of the information you provided was incorrect. The supervisor doesn't notice your mistake and you know it would take a week to correct the problems and redo the report. You say nothing.") Respondents answered using a 7-point scale ranging from 0 (not at all likely) to 6 (highly likely). High values reflect high levels of unethical behavior.

## Results

Descriptive statistics, intercorrelations, and scale reliabilities of all study variables are presented in Table 1 for sample 1 and Table 2 for sample 2. The distribution of all the variables for both samples were examined for outliers and other distribution factors

which might influence analyses. The distribution of the dependent variable for sample 1 contained two outliers that were greater than three standard deviations from the mean. Running the models with and without removing these scores did not affect the significance of any results, so data presented includes all participant scores.

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between IJD and unethical behavior. I tested it by looking at the bivariate correlation between the two variables in SPSS. As the hypothesis was directional, a one-tailed test of significance was used. No significant relationship was found for sample 1 ($r$ = .07, $p$ = .17) or sample 2 ($r$ = .09, $p$ = .14). Thus, hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted a positive relationship between ELD and unethical behavior, this was also tested by looking at the bivariate correlation between the two variables in SPSS using a one-tailed test. No significant relationship was shown for sample 1 ($r$ = .02, $p$ = .396) or sample 2 ($r$ = -.06, $p$ = .32). Thus, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

I tested hypothesis 3 and 4 in SPSS using hierarchical multiple regression, a variant of the

basic multiple regression procedure that allows specification of a fixed order of entry for variables in order to control for the effects of covariates or to test the effects of certain predictors independent of the influence of others (Cohen, 2001). To determine whether a moderating effect exists I used a standard method of determining moderation, which entails the addition of an (linear) interaction term in the multiple regression model (e.g., Jaccard, & Turrisi, 2003). A significant interaction term would indicate moderation. For each hypothesis, I entered the predictor variables in the first step, followed by the

interaction in the second step. Before the interaction term was calculated, predictors were mean-centered to reduce non-essential multicollinearity among the independent and interaction terms (all VIF <1.1) and to facilitate interpretation of the interaction effects (Aiken & West, 1991).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that ELD would moderate the IJD and unethical behavior relationship such that the relationship will be stronger when emotional labor demands are high. As shown in Table 3, none of the predictors were significant for sample 1 or sample 2. For sample 1, ELD ($\beta$ < -.01, $p$ = .96), IJD ($\beta$ = .08, $p$ = .36), and the interaction of IJD and ELD ($\beta$ = .01, $p$ > .86) all fell short of significance. For sample 2, ELD ($\beta$ = -.08, $p$ = .22) IJD ($\beta$ = .09, $p$ = .15), and the interaction of IJD and ELD ($\beta$ = -.03, $p$ = .61) were also not shown to be a significant predictor of unethical behavior. Thus, hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that ES would moderate the IJD and unethical behavior relationship such that the relationship will be stronger when ES is low. For sample 1, ES ($\beta$ = -.18, $p$ = .02) was the only significant predictor of unethical behavior and displayed the predicted negative relationship (Table 4). IJD ($\beta$ = .11, $p$ = .18) was not a significant predictor of unethical behavior, nor was the interaction of IJD and ES ($\beta$ = -.13, $p$ = .09). Similarly in sample 2, only ES ($\beta$ = -.32, $p$ < .01) was a significant predictor of unethical behavior. Neither IJD ($\beta$ = .09, $p$ = .12), or the interaction of IJD and ES ($\beta$ = -.07, $p$ = .22) were significant predictors of unethical behavior. Thus, hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that ES would moderate the ELD and unethical behavior relationship such that the relationship will be stronger when ES is low. (Table 5). For

both samples, ES was found to negatively predict unethical behavior [sample 1 ES ($\beta$ = -.19, $p$ = .01); sample 2 ES ($\beta$ = -.32, $p$ < .01)]. For sample, 1 the interaction of ELD and ES ($\beta$ = -.31, $p$ < .01) was significant. To explore the nature of the interaction, we conducted a simple slope analysis and plotted the interaction (see Figure 1) using moderator values one standard deviation above and below the mean (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). ELD was found to positively relate to UB among participants low in ES ($\beta$ = .03, $t$(165) = 2.80, $p$ =.01), and negatively relate to those high in ES, ($\beta$ = -.03, $t$(165) = -2.72, $p$ =.01.The interaction was not significant in sample 2 ($\beta$ = -.003, $p$ = .96). ELD was not a significant predictor for sample 1 ($\beta$ < -.01, $p$ = .93) or sample 2 ($\beta$ = -.05, $p$ = .43). Thus, hypothesis 5 was only partially supported.

**Supplemental model testing**

Per the suggestion of my committee, I tested two additional models. This first model tested if ELD and ES concurrently moderate the relationship between IJD and unethical behavior. I examined this using model 2 in PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, A. F., 2012), with ELD and ES both entered as moderators of the relationship between IJD and unethical behavior. As shown in Table 6, there was no significant interactions for this model in either sample. For sample 1, ES ($\beta$ = -.18, $p$ = .02) was the only variable found to be a significant negative predictor of unethical behavior, and the same was found for sample 2 ($\beta$ = -.32, $p$ < .01) Thus, the model was not supported.

The second additional model tested for a three-way interaction between ES, ELD, and IJD predicting unethical behavior. I examined this using model 3 in PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, A. F., 2012), with ES as a moderator of ELD, which in turn moderated the relationship between IJD and unethical behavior. As shown in Table 7,

there were no significant three-way interactions found in either sample. For sample 1 the only significant predictor of unethical behavior was the interaction of ELD and ES ($\beta$ = -.31, $p$ < .01). For sample 2, the only variable found to be a significant predictor of unethical behavior was ES ($\beta$ = -.31, $p$ < .01). As such, the 3-way interaction model was not supported.

## Discussion

This study sought to explore the relationship between cognitive demands placed on employees, based on their occupation, and unethical behavior. Applying SCT and COR I proposed that unethical behavior in the workplace is motivated by the prospect of goal or resource attainment and conservation, as well as the desire to avoid disincentives or resource loss. The use of unethical behavior as a means to gain resources and prevent resource depletion is inhibited in the employee by self-regulatory processes that constrain the urge to engage in unethical behavior. However, the strength model of self-control asserts that an individual's ability to regulate or control their behavior is a personal resource with a finite capacity. Consequently, if an individual's self-regulatory ability is over taxed or depleted, then they have fewer self-regulatory resources available to prevent them from engaging in unethical behavior. Previous research has shown that cognitive demands (such as emotional and informational demands) can deplete this personal resource, thus I predicted that individuals working in jobs with high cognitive demands should have less available self-regulatory capacity and perform more unethical behavior. Moreover, I expected that the impact of high levels of both emotional and informational job demands on unethical behavior would be multiplicative because both of those demands tax self-regulatory systems which prevent unethical behavior. Finally, I

anticipated ES to act as a resource that reduces employees need to cope in unethical ways when faced with high cognitive and emotional job demands. Analysis of data collected from two national samples of working adults add to the literature supporting a relationship between ES and unethical behavior, but interestingly fail to support a direct relationship between unethical behavior and cognitive job demands or emotional labor demands. Theoretical, and practical implications of these findings are discussed next.

**Theoretical Implications**

As previously mentioned, the findings of this study fail to substantiate a relationship between unethical behaviors and either cognitive (IJD) or emotional (ELD) demands. This is surprising given the theoretical support for the relationship between cognitive demands, emotional labor, and ethical decision making, as well as past research in the area of self-regulation and COR. In the following section I suggest four possible reasons for the lack of significant findings for this study and how this might reflect on existing theory and past research: (1) proximity of ego depletion to unethical behavior, (2) O*NET evolution, (3) analysis by occupation, and (4) use of an objective measure to assess mental demands.

In past studies, there has been a consistently demonstrated link between activities which tax self-regulatory resources and a subsequent decrease in self-control, such as engaging in unethical behavior (e.g., Hagger et al., 2010; Welsh & Ordóñez, 2014). However, this research was done primarily using a sequential dual-task paradigm where participants participated in an activity that taxed their self-regulatory resources, and afterwards participated in an activity in which they demonstrated unethical behavior. While this might suggest that individuals who have their self-regulatory resources more

heavily taxed by their job might then be more likely to engage in unethical behavior, perhaps the ego depletion-unethical behavior relationships only occurs at the workplace if two such activities (self-regulatory depletion and opportunity for unethical behavior) are presented to the employee in a sequential manner. It is also possible that the state of ego depletion that leads to unethical behavior is more temporary than initially thought. As such, if there is a delay between the ego depleting event and behavior that requires self-regulatory resources (an opportunity for unethical behavior) the resources needed for self-regulation might no longer be diminished. Additionally, there may be a self-selection component in place where employees who choose jobs with high cognitive or emotional labor demands may have greater self-regulatory resources, be less affected by cognitive/emotional labor demands, or be more adept at restoring self-regulatory resources at work without using unethical behavior. Also, any employees in jobs with high cognitive or emotional labor demands that engages in unethical behavior as a result of or to manage self-regulatory depletion, might be more likely to be let go and selected out by their employer.

Another difference between this study and most of the previous research on cognitive demands and emotional labor is the usage of the data from O*NET to measure informational job demands and emotional labor demands for each participant. These composite variables were constructed based on information Glomb et al. (2004) who used 560 O*NET occupations in a principal components analysis (with direct oblimin rotation) and identified four factors accounting for 73.3% of the variance in all the items. The formation of the variables was largely data driven and therefore there is a possibility that some of the items assigned to each factor could be a result of the sample selected and

effect content validity. For example, in the Glomb et al. (2004) article, the O*NET job activity “Resolving conflict, negotiating with others” was not found to load on the emotional labor variable, which is curious as job related interpersonal conflict is a component of emotional labor (e.g., Morris & Feldman, 1996). This may indicate a limitation of the O*NET or the factor loadings in Glomb et al. (2004) to adequately capture the construct of interest. Additionally, one of the reasons why O*NET is a valuable resource for collecting information on job demands and characteristics is that the site is constantly updating its data, occupational listings and job characteristics. Given the influx of new data and the recategorizing of existing data, it is possible that the activity scores used in the Glomb et al. (2004) article are different than the ones available at the time data was collected for this study. As such, there is a possibility that the four factor data driven structure used in the 2004 article might no longer be replicable with current O*NET data.

This study is also distinctive in that it included employees from a wide range of industries and occupations, which allows for generalizability to a broader spectrum of jobs than studies with data from a single occupation. However, while generalizability is increased, the process of classifying job demands by their associated O*NET occupation does not account for how cognitive and emotional labor demands may differ between different jobs within the same occupational category. For example, a retail salesperson may have different emotional labor demands based on the clientele of the store, the number of customers interacted with, or if she or he works on commission. As the study design did not assess within-job differences in emotional labor and cognitive demands,

not accounting for the variation in occupational demands within the same job title may have limited the study findings.

Another possibility is that the issue lies within the usage any objective measure (such as O*NET data) to quantify cognitive and emotional labor demands. The assessment of theoretical criteria is always a challenge, as there are difficulties assuring that the entire construct of interest is captured, while preventing any criterion contamination. In this study the composites used to measure cognitive demands and emotional labor were composed from Work Context and Work Activity data from O*NET. While it is important to note that the data on O*NET is composed of information collected by surveying a broad range of job incumbents, the questions focus not on the employee's subjective experience with the job, but on job characteristics (e.g., "How often are conflict situations a part of your current job?") making them objective measures. While there is a precedent for using objective measures to assess a job's cognitive demands and emotional labor, both of these constructs have a strong psychological component which might better lend itself to a subjective measure. For example, the construct of emotional labor describes the process of managing feelings and expressions to meet the emotional requirements of the job (Hochschild, 1983). Thus, while objective measures might be able to quantify the emotional requirements of the job, it would be difficult to enumerate the employee's process of managing feelings and expressions through objective means. Consequently, any objective data collected may not assess emotional labor, but the emotional requirements of the job. This provides the researcher with information on a factor of the job related to emotional labor, but not the construct of interest. In contrast, a well-constructed subjective measure, such as a

validated self-report questionnaire, could conceivably capture the entire construct of emotional labor. Therefore, it is possible that the data collected did not properly represent the cognitive demands or emotional labor for each occupation, which may have limited the findings.

Recognizing the possible limitations of objective measures, or the potential advantages of subjective measures is a timely consideration as there has been a call for an increase in increase in multi-source data citing the limitations of data assessed via common method, especially where the predictor and criterion variables are perceptual and from the same source (Bono & McNamara, 2011; Chang, Van Witteloostuijn, & Eden, 2010). While the debate over the significance of common method variance in research is currently ongoing (e.g., Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003; Spector, 2006) a potential consequence of the drive toward avoiding common method variance might be a push towards using objective measures to estimate criteria better assessed with subjective measures which may have been the case here.

**Practical Implications**

While the results of this study did not find that the assessed job demands were associated with unethical behavior, employees still endorsed unethical behavior and unethical intentions, both associated with organizational costs. As past research demonstrates a link between self-regulatory demands and subsequent unethical behavior, employers may benefit from considering if there are discrete events that might lead to ego depletion (such as the emotional labor required to deal with an irate customer) and how they might allow employees to replenish their self-regulatory resources after such an event. For example, strategies such as providing employees greater discretion over when

they take breaks may allow employees to engage in an activity that replenishes personal resources before resource scarcity leads to unethical behavior (Van de Ven, van den Tooren, & Vlerick, 2013). However, such strategies may not be feasible in all jobs or at all times. Moreover, progressively more organizations are using personality-based tools for selection purposes, including measures of emotional stability. The results suggest there may be some benefit to selecting high ES employees for jobs as they may possess qualities that attenuate the demand on self-regulatory resources that can lead to unethical behavior. This study also demonstrates how O*NET may be a valuable tool for employers or individual job seekers who are curious about, or may not have other means of assessing the cognitive or emotional labor demands of different positions. While my findings suggest potential limitations with using objective data to measure such factors, using the O*NET data in such a way may, nonetheless, highlight jobs that may have higher cognitive or emotional labor demands.

**Limitations**

I addition to the methodological issues discussed above there are additional limitations that have influenced the study's results. The finding that ES is negatively associated with unethical behavior could indicate that employees with low ES engage in more unethical behavior, as those employees' attentional resources may be consumed with regulating negative emotions of other job demands. However, I did not assess the perception of resource availability and acknowledge there may be alternate explanations for my findings. Future research in this area could help with further examination of this issue. Specifically, research to explore the efficacy of objective measures of cognitive job

demands, and research assessing the relationship between resource availability and unethical behavior.

Another potential limitation of this study is the use of self-reported unethical behavior, as individuals may be hesitant to reveal such behavior either due to fear of discovery, or as such behavior is dissonant with their self-concept. However, using self-reports of unethical behavior has been supported as employees are most aware of their own misbehavior (Ashton, 1998). Given the evidence on the convergence of self- and non-self -reports of unethical behavior (e.g., Fox, Spector, Goh, & Bruursema, 2007), I felt that using self-reported unethical behavior was appropriate. However, if underreporting did occur, then potential range restriction in our criterion may have attenuated the results, suggesting that the estimates might actually be conservative.

As previously discussed, by using objective indicators to measure emotional labor demands and cognitive job demands, I reduced the probability that systematic method variance may have artificially inflated the results. However, intention based measures of unethical behavior only measure simulated unethical decision making and not unethical behavior. Also, conditions proposed to affect unethical behavior (e.g., high cognitive job demands) may not influence unethical intention as strongly as unethical behavior. Combined, these issues may limit the ability to detect relationships between predictor and criterion variables in my model.

**Future Research**

When seeking to reduce unethical behavior the broad question often asked is: What causes individuals to act this way? While several theoretical explanations for the behavior exist, they are often unconnected across professional disciplines or fields of

study. To increase the further understanding of this topic there needs to be more integration of the unethical behavior, organizational deviance, counterproductive work behavior, aggression and incivility literature. While the concepts are distinct, there may be significant overlap in terms of antecedents, influencers, and theoretical rational. Likewise, research in this area can also benefit in the exploration and potential union of different theoretical models to explain behavior. For this study social cognitive theory, conservation of resources, and the strength model of self-control were all used to attempt to understand some of the processes that drive unethical behavior in the workplace. Even in situations where the research itself may not yield fruitful results, finding connections between theories can only serve to advance the field. Based in the findings of this study, future studies might evaluate the proposed model using alternative measures or explore other applications for O*NET data in research.

**Conclusion**

This study was unique in that collected data from two national samples of working adults, and used an objective measure to quantify of job demands for over 100 different occupations, working in a variety of industries. Also, two methods were used to assess unethical behavior, a frequency measure of counterproductive work behavior and an adapted measure of ethical intention. Building upon existing SCT, COR, and self-regulatory theory this paper suggested that the need to conserve cognitive resources, and the depletion of such resources might lead individuals in jobs with high informational and emotional labor demands to engage in unethical behavior. While the findings were not able to support this model, this study still proves a valuable contribution to the literature in this area. The lack of findings allowed for the discussion of potential methodological

issues which will expand the foundational knowledge for future studies – a valuable but often overlooked part of research development. Moreover, this study was the first to suggest the integration of social cognitive, conservation of resources, and self-regulatory theory to explain potential causes of unethical behavior at the workplace. In sum, this study seeks to promote both the continued refinement of research design, and the integration research theories to advance the understanding of what drives unethical behavior in the workplace.

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Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics, Intercorrelation Matrix, & Scale Reliabilities for Sample 1*

| | Variable | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Emotional Stability | 40.66 | 8.97 | (.91) | | | |
| 2. | IJD | 1131.02 | 197.85 | 0.05 | (.93) | | |
| 3. | ELD | 475.22 | 65.74 | -0.04 | 0.31** | (.81) | |
| 4. | Unethical Behavior (CWB) | 28.06 | 5.90 | -0.17* | 0.07 | 0.02 | (.90) |

*Note:* N = 166; IJD = Informational Job Demands; ELD = Emotional Labor Demands; CWB = counterproductive work behavior. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) are listed on the diagonal. *$p < .05$ (one-tailed); **$p < .01$ (one-tailed).

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics, Intercorrelation Matrix, & Scale Reliabilities for Sample 2*

| | Variable | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Emotional Stability | 28.97 | 6.25 | (.87) | | | |
| 2. | IJD | 1035.37 | 163.29 | 0.01 | (.92) | | |
| 3. | ELD | 349.51 | 65.74 | 0.48 | 0.12* | (.78) | |
| 4. | Unethical Behavior (UI) | 24.66 | 9.86 | -0.32** | 0.09 | -0.61 | (.84) |

*Note:* N = 269; IJD = Informational Job Demands; ELD = Emotional Labor Demands; UI = unethical intentions. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) are listed on the diagonal. *$p < .05$ (one-tailed); **$p < .01$ (one-tailed).

Table 3

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Informational Job Demands and Emotional Labor Demands Predicting Unethical Behavior.*

| | *Sample 1* | | | *Sample 2* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | *B* | *SE* | *β* | *B* | *SE* | *β* |
| *Predictors* | | | | | | |
| Emotional Labor Demands | < 0.01 | 0.01 | < -0.01 | -0.01 | 0.01 | -0.08 |
| Informational Job Demands | < 0.01 | < 0.01 | 0.08 | 0.01 | < 0.01 | 0.09 |
| *Interaction* | | | | | | |
| Emotional Labor Demands X Informational Job Demands | < 0.01 | < 0.00 | 0.14 | < -0.01 | < 0.01 | -0.03 |
| $R^2$ | | 0.006 | | | 0.01 | |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | | -0.013 | | | < 0.01 | |

*Note:* Sample 1 N = 166. Sample 2 N = 269. Criterion variable for both samples is unethical behavior. **p* < .05 (two-tailed); ***p* < .01 (two-tailed).

Table 4

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Informational Job Demands and Emotional Stability Predicting Unethical Behavior.*

| | Sample 1 | | | Sample 2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | *B* | *SE* | *β* | *B* | *SE* | *β* |
| *Predictors* | | | | | | |
| Emotional Stability | -0.18* | 0.08 | -0.18 | -0.50** | 0.09 | -0.32 |
| Informational Job Demands | < 0.01 | < 0.01 | 0.11 | 0.01 | < 0.01 | 0.09 |
| *Interaction* | | | | | | |
| Emotional Stability X Informational Job Demands | < -0.01 | < 0.01 | -0.13 | < -0.00 | < 0.00 | -0.07 |
| $R^2$ | | 0.05 | | | 0.12 | |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | | 0.03 | | | 0.11 | |

*Note:* Sample 1 N = 166. Sample 2 N = 269. Criterion variable for both samples is unethical behavior. *$p$ < .05 (two-tailed); **$p$ < .01 (two-tailed).

Table 5

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Emotional Labor Demands and Emotional Stability Predicting Unethical Behavior.*

| | Sample 1 | | | Sample 2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | *B* | *SE* | *β* | *B* | *SE* | *β* |
| *Predictors* | | | | | | |
| Emotional Stability | -0.19** | 0.08 | -0.19 | -0.50** | 0.09 | -0.32 |
| Emotional Labor Demands | -0.01 | 0.01 | < -0.01 | -0.01 | 0.01 | -0.05 |
| *Interaction* | | | | | | |
| Emotional Stability X Emotional Labor Demands | < -0.01** | < 0.01 | -0.31 | < -0.01 | < 0.01 | < -0.01 |
| $R^2$ | | 0.13** | | | 0.10 | |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | | 0.11 | | | 0.09 | |

*Note:* Sample 1 N = 166. Sample 2 N = 269. Criterion variable for both samples is unethical behavior. *$p$ < .05 (two-tailed); **$p$ < .01 (two-tailed).

Table 6

*Summary of PROCESS Regression Analysis for Informational Job Demands, Emotional Labor Demands, and Emotional Stability Predicting Unethical Behavior*

| | Sample 1 | | | Sample 2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | *B* | *SE* | *β* | *B* | *SE* | *β* |
| *Predictors* | | | | | | |
| Informational Job Demands | < 0.01 | < 0.01 | 0.11 | 0.01 | < 0.01 | 0.09 |
| Emotional Labor Demands | < -0.01 | 0.01 | -0.02 | -0.01 | 0.01 | -0.05 |
| Emotional Stability | -0.18* | 0.08 | -0.18 | -0.50** | 0.09 | -0.32 |
| *Interaction* | | | | | | |
| Informational Job Demands X Emotional Labor Demands | < 0.01 | < 0.01 | 0.01 | < -0.01 | < 0.01 | -0.02 |
| Informational Job Demands X Emotional Stability | < -0.01 | < 0.01 | -0.13 | < -0.01 | < 0.01 | -0.07 |
| $R^2$ | | 0.05 | | | 0.12 | |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | | 0.02 | | | 0.10 | |

*Note:* Sample 1 N = 166. Sample 2 N = 269. Criterion variable for both samples is unethical behavior. *$p$ < .05 (two-tailed); **$p$ < .01 (two-tailed).

Table 7

*Summary of PROCESS Regression Analysis for Informational Job Demands Predicting Unethical Behavior, Moderated by Emotional Labor Demands, with Emotional Labor Demands Moderated by Emotional Stability*

| | Sample 1 | | | Sample 2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | *B* | *SE* | *β* | *B* | *SE* | *β* |
| *Predictors* | | | | | | |
| Informational Job Demands | < 0.01 | < 0.01 | 0.10 | 0.01 | < 0.01 | 0.10 |
| Emotional Labor Demands | < -0.01 | 0.01 | -0.06 | -0.01 | 0.01 | -0.06 |
| Emotional Stability | -0.14 | 0.08 | -0.14 | -0.50** | 0.09 | -0.31 |
| *2-Way Interactions* | | | | | | |
| Informational Job Demands X Emotional Labor Demands | < -0.01 | < 0.01 | -0.01 | < 0.01 | < 0.01 | -0.01 |
| Informational Job Demands X Emotional Stability | < 0.01 | < 0.01 | -0.05 | < -0.01 | < 0.01 | -0.08 |
| Emotional Labor Demands X Emotional Stability | < -0.01** | < 0.01 | -0.31 | < -0.01 | < 0.01 | -0.01 |
| *3-Way Interaction* | | | | | | |
| Informational Job Demands X Emotional Labor Demands X Emotional Stability | < -0.01 | < 0.01 | -0.13 | < 0.01 | < 0.01 | -0.04 |
| $R^2$ | | 0.15 | | | 0.12 | |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | | 0.11 | | | 0.10 | |

*Note:* Sample 1 N = 166. Sample 2 N = 269. Criterion variable for both samples is unethical behavior. *$p$ < .05 (two-tailed); **$p$ < .01 (two-tailed).

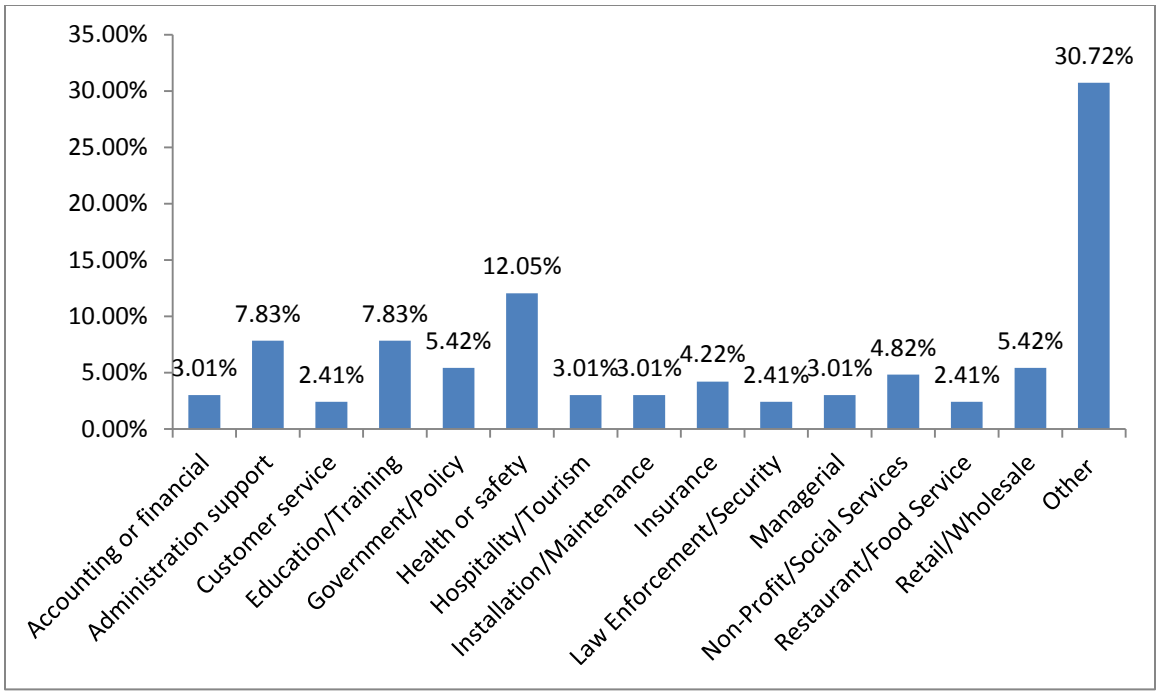


*Figure 1.* Bar chart representing the percentage of participants belonging to each industry in sample 1, as reported by participants. *Note:* N = 166.

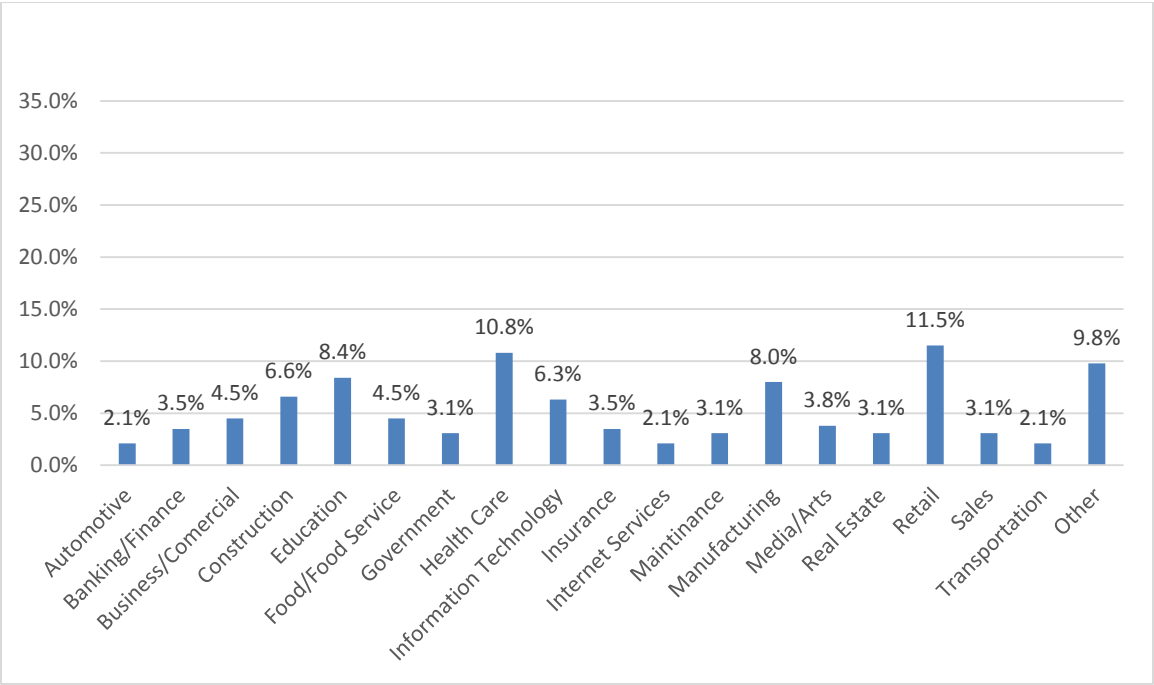


*Figure 2.* Bar chart representing the percentage of participants belonging to each industry in sample 2, as reported by participants. *Note:* N = 269.

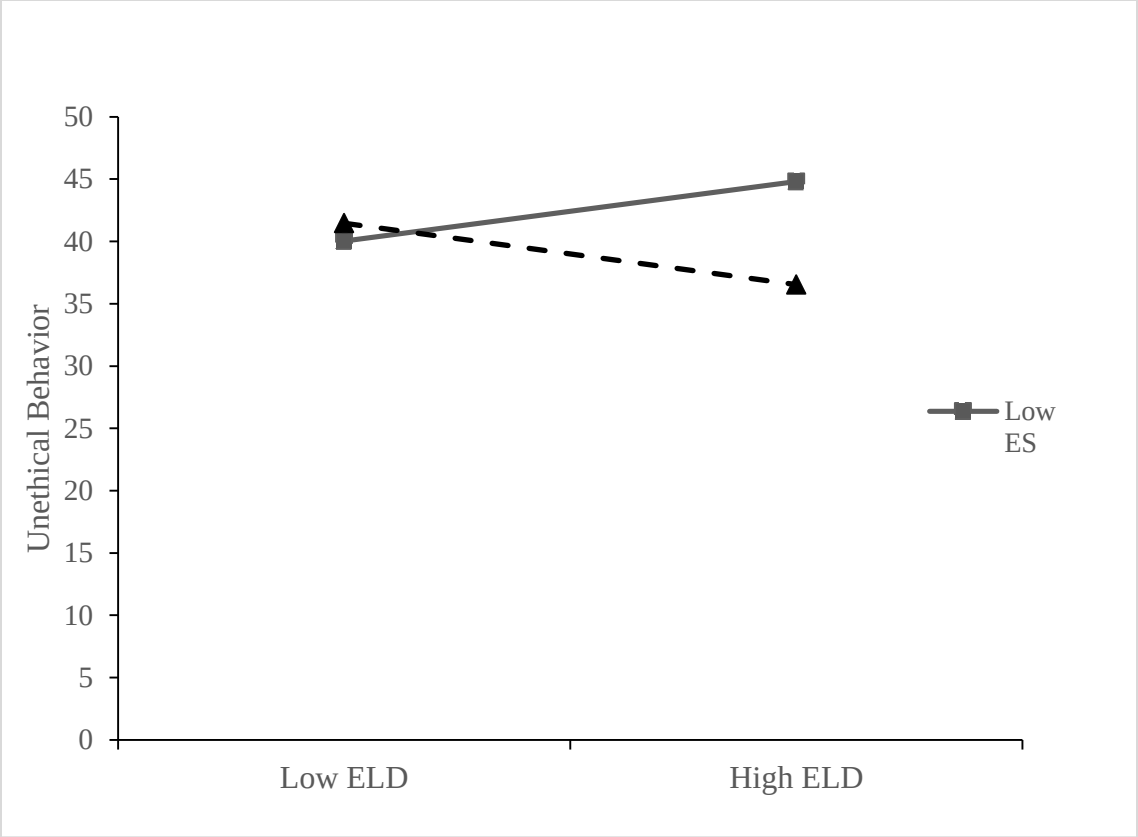


*Figure 3.* Emotional stability (ES) as a moderator of the relationship between Emotional Labor Demands (ELD) and Unethical Behavior in sample 1. N = 166.

## Appendix A

## O*NET Items Used to Form Job Demand Composites

*Work Activities included in Informational Job Demands (IJD)*

1. Analyzing Data or Information
2. Communicating with Supervisors, Peers, or Subordinates
3. Documenting/Recording Information
4. Drafting, Laying Out, and Specifying Technical Devices, Parts, and Equipment
5. Estimating the Quantifiable Characteristics of Products, Events, or Information
6. Evaluating Information to Determine Compliance with Standards
7. Getting Information
8. Identifying Objects, Actions, and Events
9. Interacting With Computers
10. Interpreting the Meaning of Information for Others
11. Judging the Qualities of Things, Services, or People
12. Making Decisions and Solving Problems
13. Monitor Processes, Materials, or Surroundings
14. Processing Information
15. Provide Consultation and Advice to Others
16. Thinking Creatively
17. Updating and Using Relevant Knowledge

*Work Activities and Work Context (WC) items included in Emotional Labor Demands (ELD)*

1. Assisting and Caring for Others
2. Deal With External Customers (WC)
3. Deal With Unpleasant or Angry People (WC)
4. Establishing and Maintaining Interpersonal Relationships
5. Frequency of Conflict Situations (WC)
6. Performing for or Working Directly with the Public

Appendix B

Emotional Stability from BFI (V44)

Prompt: Please select a response to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. I see myself as someone who…

1. Is depressed, blue (R)
2. Is relaxed, handles stress well
3. Can be tense (R)
4. Worries a lot (R)
5. Is emotionally stable, not easily upset
6. Can be moody (R)
7. Remains calm in tense situations
8. Gets nervous easily (R)

*Note:* (R) = Reverse scored item

Response options: Disagree strongly = 1; Disagree a little = 2; Neither agree nor disagree = 3; Agree a little = 4; Agree strongly = 5

Appendix C

Counterproductive Work Behavior Checklist (CWB-C) (33-item)

Prompt: How often have you done each of the following things on your present job?

1. Purposely wasted your employer's materials/supplies
2. Told people outside the job what a lousy place you work for
3. Purposely did your work incorrectly
4. Came to work late without permission
5. Stayed home from work and said you were sick when you weren't
6. Purposely damaged a piece of equipment or property
7. Purposely dirtied or littered your place of work
8. Stolen something belonging to your employer
9. Started or continued a damaging or harmful rumor at work
10. Been nasty or rude to a client or customer
11. Purposely worked slowly when things needed to get done
12. Taken a longer break than you were allowed to take
13. Purposely failed to follow instructions
14. Left work earlier than you were allowed to
15. Insulted someone about their job performance
16. Made fun of someone's personal life
17. Took supplies or tools home without permission
18. Put in to be paid for more hours than you worked
19. Took money from your employer without permission
20. Ignored someone at work
21. Blamed someone at work for error you made
22. Started an argument with someone at work
23. Stole something belonging to someone at work
24. Verbally abused someone at work
25. Made an obscene gesture (the finger) to someone at work
26. Threatened someone at work with violence
27. Threatened someone at work, but not physically
28. Said something obscene to someone at work to make them feel bad
29. Did something to make someone at work look bad
30. Played a mean prank to embarrass someone at work
31. Looked at someone at work's private mail/property without permission
32. Hit or pushed someone at work
33. Insulted or made fun of someone at work

Response options: Never = 1, Once or Twice = 2, Once or Twice per month = 3, Once or twice per week = 4, Every day = 5

Appendix D

The Unethical Decision Making Scale

Prompt: How likely is it that you would engage in the behavior described?

1. You work in a fast-food restaurant in downtown [City X]. It's against policy to eat food without paying for it. You haven't had time to eat today and are therefore hungry. Your supervisor isn't around, so you make something for yourself and eat it without paying.

2. You work as an office assistant for a [Business Y]. You're alone in the office making copies and realize you're out of copy paper at home. You therefore slip a ream of paper into your backpack.

3. You're a student preparing for the final exam in a class where the professor uses the same exam in both sections. Some of your friends somehow get a copy of the exam after the first section. They are now trying to memorize the right answers. You don't look at the exam, but just ask them what topics you should focus your studying on.

4. You've waited in line for 10 minutes to buy a coffee and muffin at Starbucks. When you're a couple of blocks away, you realize that the clerk gave you change for $20 rather than for the $10 you gave him. You savor your coffee, muffin and free $10.

5. After turning in a report to your supervisor, you realize some of the information you provided was incorrect. The supervisor doesn't notice your mistake and you know it would take a week to correct the problems and redo the report. You say nothing.

6. Your employer requires you to purchase a software package that sells for $90. Your coworker, has already bought the software and offers to lend it to you. You take it and load it onto your computer.

7. Your boss asks you to get confidential information about a competitor's product. You therefore contact the competitor's company and pose as a potential client to find out the product information.

8. You are part of a team working on a presentation for a client. Your team waits until the last minute to begin working. Several team members suggest using an old presentation they found, from a previous team. You go along with this plan.

Response Options: Not at all likely = 0 to Highly Likely = 6