

## UNEASY LIES THE HEAD THAT BEARS THE TRUST: THE EFFECTS OF FEELING TRUSTED ON EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION

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The construct of *feeling trusted* reflects the perception that another party is willing to accept vulnerability to one's actions. Although this construct has received far less attention than *trusting*, the consensus is that believing their supervisors trust them has benefits for employees' job performance. Our study challenges that consensus by arguing that feeling trusted can be exhausting for employees. Drawing on Stevan Hobfoll's conservation of resources theory, we develop a model in which feeling trusted fills an employee with pride—a benefit for exhaustion and performance—while also increasing perceived workload and concerns about reputation maintenance—burdens for exhaustion and performance. We test our model in a field study using a sample of public transit bus drivers in London, England. Our results suggest that feeling trusted is a double-edged sword for job performance, bringing with it both benefits and burdens. Given that recommendations for managers generally encourage placing trust in employees, these results have important practical implications.

There is a clear consensus that *trusting*—being willing to accept vulnerability to the actions of another party based on positive expectations about their attributes (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995)—is a beneficial component of work relationships (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Gambetta, 1988; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Meta-analyses have reinforced this consensus, finding that employees who trust their supervisors tend to have better job performance, more frequent citizenship behavior, and higher job satisfaction (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). That same consensus extends to research addressing *feeling trusted*—the perception

that another party is willing to accept vulnerability to one's actions. Scholars have suggested that placing trust in employees is a signal to them that they are valued (Pfeffer, 1998)—a key to employee empowerment and engagement (Kahn, 1990; Mishra & Mishra, 2012) and a foundational element of high-involvement workplaces (Lawler, 1992). In support of such arguments, three different empirical studies have linked feeling trusted to increased levels of job performance (Brower, Lester, Korsgaard, & Dineen, 2009; Deutsch Salamon & Robinson, 2008; Lau, Lam, & Wen, 2014).

Although the consensus about feeling trusted is intuitive, we believe it is incomplete and potentially problematic. Indeed, feeling trusted may be both a benefit and a burden to employees. To illustrate,

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consider what it is like to be a bus driver. They are expected to maintain tight schedules while also providing safe, professional, and courteous service. Delays due to traffic congestion are typically blamed on them, yet getting back on schedule often requires ignoring traffic laws—an unsafe and illegal proposition (Evans & Johansson, 1998; Tse, Flin, & Mearns, 2006). Moreover, they must generally tackle these stressful demands without support from coworkers or supervisors (Evans & Johansson, 1998). Now consider that managers' trust in employees often takes the form of additional assignments and responsibilities (Lawler, 1992; Mayer et al., 1995; Mishra, 1996). For bus drivers, these requests are likely a taxing addition to an already stressful job.

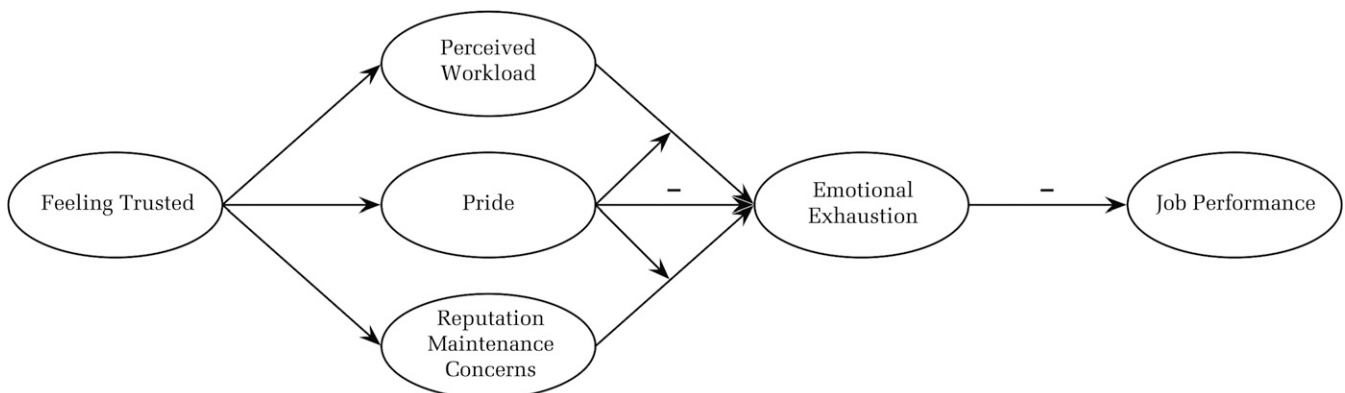
Drawing on conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001), which outlines the causes and outcomes of stress, we develop a model that portrays feeling trusted as a double-edged sword for emotional exhaustion and job performance (see Figure 1). On the one hand, feeling trusted by a supervisor can trigger employee pride; on the other, it can increase perceived workload while signaling a reputation that requires effort to maintain. Exploring the double-edged nature of feeling trusted is important, given that scholars have generally touted the benefits of managerial practices that place trust in employees (Lawler, 1992; Mishra & Mishra, 2012; Pfeffer, 1998). If feeling trusted is also a stressful experience that contributes to emotional exhaustion, scholars may need to include recommendations for addressing its negative side effects. Our study of these relationships with a sample of bus drivers highlights the potential costs of stress and the resulting emotional exhaustion, given that bus driver fatigue can lead to serious and costly accidents (Taylor & Dorn, 2006).

Our study makes a number of theoretical contributions. By challenging the consensus that feeling trusted is uniformly beneficial, we advance knowledge about trust dynamics and effective managerial practices. Promoting feelings of trust is a core aspect of many prescriptive and normative discussions of organizational effectiveness (e.g., Lawler, 1992; Pfeffer, 1998). Yet, trusting employees may tax them to the point where their performance suffers. Our study aids our understanding of that phenomenon in a way that could not be extrapolated from existing work. In so doing, we add to the nascent literature on feeling trusted, which has drawn a fraction of the attention given to the phenomenon of trusting. Finally, by using conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001) to inspire our choice of variables and aid in the development of our theory, we bring a novel and useful lens to the study of trust dynamics. We discuss how our research informs both our understanding of the theory and its future applications.

## CONTEXT

We tested our model in a sample of bus drivers in London, England. All bus services within London are overseen by Transport for London (TfL)—a public sector organization. Some of TfL's key areas of direct responsibility include planning all bus routes, specifying service levels, operating an emergency control center, and awarding contracts to operate the bus routes. All of the buses that provide service within London are operated by private sector companies, which are required to carry the traditional red color scheme and conform to the same fare schedules. These companies must meet TfL's guidelines and service levels in order to retain current route contracts

**FIGURE 1**  
Theoretical Model



and acquire new routes. Although TfL has oversight of these private companies, the day-to-day operations and human resource management are the responsibility of the individual businesses.

Our study was undertaken in one of these companies, and it provided an interesting setting for examining feeling trusted and its potential impact on emotional exhaustion and job performance. Although the work of drivers may seem solitary, our conversations revealed meaningful interactions with supervisors that created opportunities to demonstrate trust. Supervisors described asking drivers to mentor junior employees, provide input into others' performance appraisals, and comment on traffic routes and timing issues. Drivers described being asked to do supervisors' tasks, such as putting out route cards or handling schedule swapping, while being kept "in the know" about sensitive information (e.g., new routes, upcoming changes, thoughts on upper management). One bus driver commented on the frequency of these requests, noting, "Sometimes, it feels like I'm the supervisor and my supervisor is the driver! I get asked a lot about stuff when I'm on the road, which makes sense as I'm my supervisor's eyes and ears, I guess."

Drivers suggested that they viewed these assignments and information sharing as signals of their supervisors' trust in them, and that they felt affirmed by those signals. One driver commented, "I feel I am taken into their trust with certain duties. When there are drivers not coming in, [my supervisor] trusts me to get the job done." Similarly, another driver observed:

I've been here for over 30 years and I know this place and industry well—even better than the managers here. I am asked for advice sometimes by management, so, despite all the challenging things that go on, I do feel respected.

One driver specifically reflected on the trust placed in him by being asked to mentor junior drivers:

Some drivers hate being asked to mentor. They can't be bothered to help out. But, I think it's quite an honor. It shows I can represent the company and good driving well. We don't get valued here much at times, it feels, but being asked to mentor is quite satisfying.

Although these drivers focused on the positive aspects of feeling trusted, their comments also indicated that their supervisors' trust frequently took the form of additional demands on their time and energy.

Our observations and conversations revealed that these demands were in addition to an already difficult

job. To this point, one driver observed, "Some people might think bus driving is easy, but have you seen London roads over the years? It's a bloody nightmare!" The managing director of the bus company acknowledged that drivers also face substantial pressure from management to meet performance targets:

We are under pressure to meet demands of TfL—buses have to run on time, passengers' complaints have to be virtually non-existent. To meet these demands, we have to run a tight ship, with targets. Performance has to be set and measured. If these aren't met, then there are consequences for routes, depots, and, oftentimes, drivers. We don't want to lose routes, but this does happen. To avoid this, we have to meet stringent targets. It's not a free lunch.

Given the already stressful environment of bus driving, the additional workload associated with feeling trusted had the potential to significantly impact employees' well-being and performance. This additional workload was keenly felt by some drivers, as evidenced by one driver's remark:

I feel tired at the end of a busy week from doing my work—and then some more on top of it. I enjoy it though, so I'm not complaining, but sometimes I do wish that management would ask others to step in. I know why they don't, but there's only one of me!

The potentially exhausting effects of feeling trusted were highlighted by another driver who, in the previous week, had been asked to extend his shifts to fill in for late drivers and mentor new drivers. He commented:

These days, every and any job can make you feel used up at the end of the day, can't it? This week, I'm more tired because I've had to do more than my share. I don't mind it, don't get me wrong, but we're only human. I guess this is part and parcel of work these days, isn't it?

Trusted drivers may also feel pressure to retain their supervisors' good opinion, as illustrated by a driver who explained:

I do well around here, and it's important for me to be seen as good at my job, otherwise what's the point, right? So, if I get asked to do extra cover, then I often step in, and I'm always keen to make sure that I prevent accidents and complaints from coming in against me.

This driver's willingness to "step in" when needed likely contributed to an increased workload and, subsequently, to feelings of being worn out at the end of the day. In sum, these drivers' experiences suggested that feeling trusted may be accompanied by

drains on employees' time and energy—drains that may go unnoticed and unaddressed by management.

Although feeling trusted is likely a relevant experience for employees at all levels of an organization, it may have a more significant impact on employees at lower levels—like bus drivers. In common with many other lower-echelon employees (Karasek, 1979; Westman, 1992), bus drivers have relatively low control over how they accomplish their tasks (Evans & Johansson, 1998; Tse et al., 2006). In lower-echelon jobs, increased job demands may be more stressful, given that these employees generally have fewer coping options (Karasek, 1979; Van Yperen & Hagedoorn, 2003). Yet, research also suggests that, in lower-echelon jobs, increased decision latitude and support may also be more uplifting, given that these employees start from a lower position of these resources (Van Yperen & Hagedoorn, 2003; Westman, 1992). Thus, our sample provides an opportunity to examine feeling trusted in a context in which it has a meaningful impact on emotional exhaustion and job performance.

### THEORY DEVELOPMENT

To understand the construct of feeling trusted, one must first understand the construct of trust. Mayer et al. (1995) described “trust” as a willingness to be vulnerable based on perceived trustworthiness. For example, a supervisor might trust an employee by being willing to delegate an important task to her. That willingness reflects trust, with the actual delegating reflecting risk taking in the relationship (Mayer et al., 1995). The distinction between trust and risk taking matches what McKnight, Cummings, and Chervany (1998) termed “trusting intentions” versus “trusting behavior.” The willingness to delegate is a trusting intention; the act of delegating is trusting behavior.

Against that backdrop, feeling trusted reflects the perception that another party is willing to accept vulnerability by engaging in risk taking. For example, an employee might sense that a supervisor has delegated an important task to her. That perception reflects feeling trusted. Deutsch Salamon and Robinson's (2008) “felt trust” measure asked employees whether they were trusted by management in a general sense. Lau et al. (2014) assessed “feeling trusted” by asking employees whether their supervisors were willing to rely on their judgments and share personal feelings with them. For their part, Brower et al. (2009) examined “being trusted” by asking supervisors whether they were willing to make decisions that increased their vulnerability to their employees. Given that only the trustors can

truly “know” that they are willing to be vulnerable to an employee (Lau & Lam, 2008), employee ratings of supervisor trust are more appropriately termed “feeling trusted” to reflect the perceptual nature of the construct (Lau et al., 2014; Lau, Liu, & Fu, 2007).

Regardless of these operational differences, feeling trusted has been viewed solely as having a positive relationship with job performance in empirical studies (Brower et al., 2009; Deutsch Salamon & Robinson, 2008; Lau et al., 2014) and conceptual discussions (Lawler, 1992; Mishra & Mishra, 2012; Pfeffer, 1998). A more complex—and more mixed—picture emerges when feeling trusted is viewed through a stress lens. Put simply, feeling trusted can be exhausting. *Emotional exhaustion*—the central component of burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001)—is a chronic feeling of emotional and physical depletion. Employees who are emotionally exhausted feel drained and “used up” from their work (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Emotional exhaustion is a critical concern in a number of jobs, with bus drivers among them. Indeed, bus driving has been described as “an unhealthy occupation” with demands and conditions—for example, noise, exposure to toxic fumes, low levels of physical activity, irregular eating habits, prolonged sitting, poor cabin ergonomics—that “portend ill health” (Evans & Johansson, 1998: 99; see also Tse et al., 2006).

Our theorizing about feeling trusted and emotional exhaustion is informed by Hobfoll's (2001) conservation of resources theory (see also Hobfoll, 1988, 1989). We theorize that feeling trusted can be exhausting in addition to energizing, and conservation of resources theory is well suited to explaining these countervailing forces (Bono, Glomb, Shen, Kim, & Koch, 2013). Whereas many theories of stress solely address those things that increase stress (Hobfoll, 1989), conservation of resources theory notes that many things—what Hobfoll calls “resources”—actually reduce stress. This theory presents resources as being vital to managing stress in a threatening world. Resources are defined as “objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued in their own right, or that are valued because they act as conduits to the achievement or protection of valued resources” (Hobfoll, 2001: 339). Hobfoll, Lilly, and Jackson (1992) identified a set of resources valued by most individuals, including, for example, adequate housing (an object), self-discipline (a personal characteristic), healthy family and friends (a condition), and optimism (an energy).

Conservation of resources theory argues that stress will increase whenever resources are lost or

threatened, or whenever investment of time and effort does not yield suitable resource gains (Hobfoll, 2001). Stress will decrease whenever resources are gained, though such gains will be less salient than equivalent amounts of loss. Using the examples above, an employee would feel more stress if some failure reduced or threatened optimism, or if a period of hard work failed to yield deeper levels of optimism. The employee would feel less stress if success restored some optimism, but that gain would not offset the loss and threat already experienced. Given these dynamics, the theory argues that stress is best managed by judiciously conserving and investing resources to nurture gains while guarding against losses and threats.

We used conservation of resources theory to inspire our choice of mediators as we developed a model linking feeling trusted to emotional exhaustion. Although we are not aware of this theory having been applied previously in a trust context, a supervisor accepting vulnerability to an employee should have implications for the theory's three central mechanisms: resource gains, resource losses, and resource threats. We therefore focused our theorizing on constructs that should be predicted by feeling trusted, and that have implications for the objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that comprise resources. We used *pride* to capture the resource gain dynamic because it represents both psychological and emotional gains that may occur as a result of feeling trusted. We used *perceived workload* to capture the resource loss dynamic because the risk-taking behaviors associated with feeling trusted often take the form of additional assignments that are given to an employee. We used *reputation maintenance concerns*—a new construct reflecting employees' desires to retain the positive image that others have of them—to capture the resource threat dynamic because the value of reputation in the workplace should make threats to that resource a salient concern for most employees.

Studies employing conservation of resources theory have typically focused on resources, or indicators of resources, that are relevant to the research question. To illustrate, recent articles have operationalized resource gains and losses as structural support (Parker, Johnson, Collins, & Nguyen, 2013), positive and negative workplace events (Bono et al., 2013), organizational inducements and psychological resilience (Shin, Taylor, & Seo, 2012), customer mistreatment of employees and supervisory support (Wang, Liao, Zhan, & Shi, 2011), and job satisfaction (Chen, Ployhart, Thomas, Anderson, & Bliese, 2011). Our focus was on identifying mediators that evoked

the resources identified by Hobfoll et al. (1992) while also being relevant to our research question and our research context.

### Feeling Trusted and Emotional Exhaustion

*Pride* is a positive, uplifting emotion that results from taking credit for a valued achievement or from being a valued person (Lazarus, 1991). It is an expansive or swelling emotion, though displays of it are subject to customs about modesty and humility. Relative to other positive emotions such as happiness, pride tends to have more relevance to a person's ego (Lazarus, 1991). Research has shown that pride is strongly related to self-esteem (Brown & Marshall, 2001; Tracy & Robins, 2007). Indeed, Tracy and Robins (2007) proposed that pride is the key affective component of self-esteem, providing a boost to self-evaluations while conveying that increased status is merited. Scholars have noted that pride is also similar to self-efficacy, in that it represents an emotional response to a person's cognitive appraisal that she has increased skills or self-mastery in a given context (Tracy & Robins, 2004; Williams & DeSteno, 2008). Pride is also similar to the competence dimension of empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995), in that both represent an appraisal of personal mastery (Bandura, 1989; Spreitzer, 1996).

Feeling trusted should trigger pride for a number of reasons. Having a supervisor delegate an important task, take a more hands-off leadership style, or share sensitive information signals some level of achievement. The employee has presumably achieved enough that such risk taking is reasonable. Those supervisory actions also signal the employee's status, as trust is an ingredient that separates a leader's in-group from their out-group (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Indirect support for this assertion comes from Lau et al.'s (2014) study on feeling trusted. In a sample of 18 schools in southern China, the authors showed that teachers who perceived that principals trusted them reported higher levels of organization-based self-esteem. Relatedly, Mishra and Mishra (2012) proposed that leaders who trust their employees will enhance employees' feelings of competence.

Conservation of resources theory suggests that increased pride should have beneficial consequences for emotional exhaustion. Pride has implications for a number of the resources identified by Hobfoll et al. (1992), including feeling successful, feeling valuable to others, and having positive feelings about oneself. To the extent that pride represents a resource gain, emotional exhaustion should decrease as a result.

Indeed, the resource value of pride has been addressed in the affect literature. Fredrickson (2001) suggested that pride leads to broadened thinking that enhances the ability to cope with stress. She further noted that pride can increase psychological resiliency while functioning as an emotional reserve in times of need.

*Hypothesis 1. Feeling trusted has a negative indirect effect on emotional exhaustion through pride.*

*Perceived workload* reflects a subjective judgment about the volume of work required by an employee (Spector & Jex, 1998). Employees who perceive a high workload believe they have to work very hard and are expected to do a lot of work. Of course, perceived workload is imperfectly correlated with objective indices such as hours worked, the pace of the work, or the number of assigned tasks. Two employees may have jobs that are “objectively” identical but still have widely varying perceptions of workload as a function of aptitude, personality, or environmental support. Ultimately, it is perceptions of workload that wind up best predicting most stress- and strain-based outcomes (Sonnentag & Frese, 2003).

A substantial amount of theoretical and empirical research applying conservation of resources theory to the workplace has classified job demands—for example, perceived workload, role conflict, and role ambiguity—as resource losses (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Luchman & González-Morales, 2013; Westman, Hobfoll, Chen, Davidson, & Laski, 2005). Perceived workload is classified as a resource loss because addressing it drains the personal resources of emotional capability, physical power, and mental agility (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001; Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001).

Feeling trusted should be associated with perceived workload for a number of reasons. Much of the risk taking involved with feeling trusted represents additional tasks that an employee is being asked to perform. For example, Mishra (1996) proposed that, when managers trust lower-echelon employees, they engage in risk-taking behavior that includes delegating responsibilities and decision-making authority. Similarly, Lawler (1992) theorized that placing trust in employees allows management to delegate tasks such as scheduling, training, and quality control. Having a supervisor delegate an important task or allow for more input into key decisions should alter the perceived job breadth of an

employee (Morrison, 1994), enlarging their job role (Tepper, Lockhart, & Hoobler, 2001). Although having a supervisor share sensitive information may not introduce new tasks per se, it could still broaden the mental responsibilities associated with the job. When repeated day after day, such supervisor actions should cause employees to feel that they are working harder, and that they are expected to do more work.

Conservation of resources theory suggests that increases in perceived workload can have detrimental consequences for emotional exhaustion. Perceived workload has implications for a number of the resources identified by Hobfoll et al. (1992), including adequate sleep, free time, time for work, a feeling that life is peaceful, and stamina and endurance. To the extent that perceived workload represents a resource loss, emotional exhaustion should increase as a result. In support of that proposition, Lee and Ashforth's (1996) meta-analysis showed that workload is one of the strongest predictors of emotional exhaustion.

*Hypothesis 2. Feeling trusted has a positive indirect effect on emotional exhaustion through perceived workload.*

Reputation is a set of beliefs, perceptions, and evaluations that a group forms about one of its members (Bromley, 1993). The value of reputation can be seen in its impact on self-esteem and social interactions. To a large extent, self-esteem is based on people's perceptions of how they are evaluated by others (Leary, 1999; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary & Downs, 1995). Reputation also has implications for exchange relationships at work. Effective exchanges may depend on reputation, which signals an employee's character and future behavior (Bromley, 1993; Ferris, Blass, Douglas, Kolodinsky, & Treadway, 2003). A positive reputation makes social exchanges more likely while also decreasing the transaction costs involved in those exchanges (Ferris et al., 2003; Granovetter, 1985; Tyler & Kramer, 1996). Such dynamics can have material value, as positive exchange relationships can bring promotions, pay, and security (Doby & Caplan, 1995).

Given the benefits of a positive reputation, it is not surprising that employees are concerned about their image (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Leary and Kowalski (1990) observed that impression management consists of two components: impression motivation and impression construction. Impression motivation is the desire to create a particular impression; impression construction is the behaviors people use to

create that impression. Certain situations increase people's awareness of the reputation they have and the impressions they are making (Bromley, 1993; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). In situations in which reputation and image become more salient, people experience a heightened psychological concern about their reputation (Bolino, 1999; Bromley, 1993; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, 1980). Although previous research has identified behaviors related to protecting reputations (Bromley, 1993; Fombrun, 1996; Hochwarter, Ferris, Zinko, Arnell, & James, 2007), psychological concerns about maintaining reputations have not been operationalized.

We introduce the concept of *reputation maintenance concerns* to reflect and operationalize these concerns. Employees with high reputation maintenance concerns feel the need to preserve others' opinions of them, worry about holding on to their present status, and are preoccupied with keeping others' views intact. We argue that feeling trusted is a salient and visible signal that employees have earned a positive reputation. The "bigger" that trust is, the "harder" one's reputation could fall if trust were to be violated. Bromley (1993: 193) argued that employees are "sensitive, perhaps over-sensitive" to signals about their reputation, pointing to a sensitivity to feeling trusted.

Conservation of resources theory suggests that reputation maintenance concerns can have negative consequences for emotional exhaustion. Such concerns represent a resource threat, which requires employees to mobilize energies to protect against resource losses. Although such mobilization can prevent further losses, the mobilization itself constitutes a loss in the short term (Doby & Caplan, 1995; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001). Reputation maintenance concerns also have implications for a number of the resources identified by Hobfoll et al. (1992), including a sense of status at work, an acknowledgment of one's accomplishments, and a sense of affection from others. Indeed, research suggests that reputational threats can lead to an increase in state negative affect (Doby & Caplan, 1995).

*Hypothesis 3. Feeling trusted has a positive indirect effect on emotional exhaustion through reputation maintenance concerns.*

### **Moderating Effects of Pride**

The hypotheses above lay out both sides of the double-edged sword of feeling trusted for emotional exhaustion. There are also reasons to expect those two edges to interact, however, and exploring such

effects can aid our understanding of feeling trusted. Conservation of resources theory proposes that resource gains can attenuate the stress associated with resource losses (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001). For example, a gain in health may help buffer the detrimental effects of a reduction in financial stability. Empirical research has supported such proposals, finding that personal resources had a buffering effect on the relationship between resource loss and postpartum depression (Wells, Hobfoll, & Lavin, 1999).

In the context of Figure 1, we theorize that pride can attenuate the effects of perceived workload on emotional exhaustion. Feeling successful and valuable should be energizing to employees, which could help offset any reductions in free time, peacefulness, or sleep triggered by perceived workload. Fredrickson (2001) argued that pride can act as a reserve of positive energy. Moreover, the broadened thinking that results from pride can open up additional coping strategies (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2001). Research has shown that coping strategies buffer the detrimental effects of work demands with varying degrees of effectiveness (Parkes, 1990). Employees who are experiencing pride may be more likely to select more effective coping strategies, thereby decreasing perceived workload's effect on exhaustion.

*Hypothesis 4. The positive indirect effect of feeling trusted on emotional exhaustion through perceived workload is moderated by pride, such that the effect is weaker when pride is high than when pride is low.*

Pride may also moderate the relationship between reputation maintenance concerns and emotional exhaustion, although there are reasons to believe it will have an amplifying rather than neutralizing effect. According to conservation of resources theory, resource threats are stressful because mental, emotional, and physical energies are depleted when addressing them (Hobfoll, 1989). The stress associated with resource threats should grow in proportion to the value of the resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, London, & Orr, 1988). To illustrate, consider the resource of coworker assistance. Because helpful coworkers are a resource, the theory argues that employees will expend effort to protect that resource, perhaps by maintaining a good rapport with a number of coworkers. Those efforts are themselves stressful. Moreover, those efforts should be more intense when coworker assistance is more vital, as in cases where employees are less capable or when their work is especially interdependent.

We argue that employees who feel more pride should be more likely to view reputation as a valuable resource. Affect scholars argue that the feeling of pride is associated with a striving to protect and maintain the feeling (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2001; Lazarus, 1991). Given that a positive reputation should bring with it a certain pride, it follows that such individuals will be more concerned about maintaining that reputation. Unfortunately, those more intense maintenance efforts should themselves cost resources. Indirect support for that premise comes from research on self-esteem. Baumeister (1982) found that, when individuals experienced a threat to their image, self-esteem magnified those individuals' efforts to combat the threat.

*Hypothesis 5. The positive indirect effect of feeling trusted on emotional exhaustion through reputation maintenance concerns is moderated by pride, such that the effect is stronger when pride is high than when pride is low.*

### Implications for Job Performance

One of the most salient outcomes of emotional exhaustion for both employees and their organizations is a decrease in job performance. The depletion of physical and emotional resources leads employees to distance themselves emotionally, cognitively, and physically from their work (Maslach et al., 2001). That distancing limits their ability to effectively perform their job. Indeed, several studies have shown a negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and job performance (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003; Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). Additional evidence comes from a meta-analysis between strain and job performance in which emotional exhaustion was one index of strain (LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005).

The countervailing effects of feeling trusted on emotional exhaustion have important implications for organizations. Research has typically touted the performance benefits that come from placing trust in employees (e.g., Brower et al., 2009; Lau et al., 2014; Lawler, 1992; Mishra & Mishra, 2012; Pfeffer, 1998). Our theorizing suggests those benefits may be tempered by emotional exhaustion. The hypotheses below summarize both sides of the double-edged sword described in our theorizing by predicting serial indirect effects (independent variable → mediator → mediator → dependent variable) through the various paths illustrated in Figure 1.

*Hypothesis 6. Feeling trusted has a positive serial indirect effect on job performance through pride and emotional exhaustion.*

*Hypothesis 7. Feeling trusted has a negative serial indirect effect on job performance through perceived workload and emotional exhaustion.*

*Hypothesis 8. Feeling trusted has a negative serial indirect effect on job performance through reputation maintenance concerns and emotional exhaustion.*

## METHOD

### Sample

Our sample for this study comprised 219 bus drivers from a large transportation company in London, England. Participants were based in four different bus depots across the city. Participants' average age was 46 years ( $SD = 10.42$ ), and they had worked for the company for an average of 7.93 years ( $SD = 7.91$ ). Ninety-four percent of the participants were male. Employment records identified the participants as White European (53%), Black African (14%), Black Caribbean (11%), Asian (11%), White Other (5%), and Other (6%).

Although drivers spent most of their time on their buses, they interacted with their supervisors at the beginning and end of their shifts, and at depot canteens during their breaks. They were also in regular radio contact with their supervisors throughout the day. Their "supervisor contact time" therefore wound up resembling the time in many white-collar jobs. Bus drivers have served as samples in recent management studies in top journals (e.g., Scott & Barnes, 2011; Scott, Barnes, & Wagner, 2012), and are a particularly appropriate sample in studies that utilize a stress lens (Evans & Johansson, 1998).

### Procedure

We collected data in three waves. Prior to the first wave, potential participants were identified using the transportation company's records. We limited potential participants to bus drivers because the structure of the company was such that the supervisors of the depot office staff, mechanics, and support staff were often not located in the same depot. We assigned all eligible employees a unique code that allowed us to match data from the three waves of data collection. At Time 1, a member of the research team visited the bus depots to hand out surveys to the employees. All employees received



a sealed envelope that was labeled with their name. The survey inside the envelope was marked with the unique code. This procedure allowed employees to deposit their completed surveys in a collection box with the assurance that their responses would only be known to the research team. We distributed surveys to 1,195 employees at Time 1. We received responses from 508 employees (a response rate of 43%). Employees who participated at Time 1 were entered into a draw to win cash prizes of £50 (\$80), £100 (\$160), and £150 (\$240). A second survey, administered six weeks after the completion of the Time 1 survey, was completed by 251 employees (a response rate of 49%). Employees who participated at Time 2 received a canteen voucher for a free coffee/tea and a biscuit (approximately £1.50 [\$2.40] per employee). The respondents and non-respondents at Time 2 did not differ significantly on gender or tenure with the company. Respondents were, on average, 3.1 years older than non-respondents. With respect to race, there were two significant differences: respondents were 51% White European and 10% Black Caribbean; non-respondents were 39% White European and 20% Black Caribbean. None of these demographic variables exhibited significant main or moderating effects in our analyses. We also conducted a one-way analysis of variance on the only one of our substantive variables collected at Time 1—feeling trusted—to test for a difference between respondents and non-respondents at Time 2. The test indicated that there was not a significant difference ( $F = .36, p = .55$ ).

At Time 3, we distributed surveys to the supervisors of all the employees who completed a Time 2 survey. The supervisors of these employees were identified by the general managers of the bus depots. Twenty supervisors participated in the study. Supervisors' average age was 46 years ( $SD = 10.47$ ), and they had worked for the company for an average of 16.29 years ( $SD = 8.20$ ). Sixty-five percent of the supervisors were male. Employment records identified the supervisors as White European (70%), Black Caribbean (25%), and Black African (5%). We received a Time 3 survey from the supervisors for 245 of the 256 employees (a response rate of 96%). After listwise deletion of missing data across the two sources and three waves of data collection, complete data were available for 219 employees.

The Time 1 survey included employee measures of feeling trusted and age—the only demographic variable not available from company records. The Time 2 survey included employee measures of pride, perceived workload, reputation maintenance

concerns, and emotional exhaustion. Measures were counterbalanced within the survey in order to avoid item context effects (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The six-week temporal separation between Time 1 and Time 2 was included to minimize the effects of transient sources of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Doty and Glick (1998) noted that temporal separation is one of the most effective ways to reduce common method bias, and is as effective as source separation. The Time 3 survey included the measure of employee job performance.

## Measures

**Feeling trusted.** Feeling trusted was measured using an adapted version of Mayer and Gavin's (2005) ten-item measure of trust, which is an update of their earlier scale (Mayer & Davis, 1999). All items were adapted to reflect employees' beliefs that their supervisors had accepted vulnerability to them. Sample items included, "My supervisor doesn't feel the need to 'keep an eye on' me," "My supervisor lets me have significant influence over how I do my job," and "My supervisor lets me have an impact on issues that are important to them" ( $\alpha = .86$ ; 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

**Pride.** Pride was measured using Tracy and Robins's (2007) seven-item measure. Employees were asked to indicate the extent to which they "generally feel this way" when thinking about or interacting with their supervisor. Sample items included "Accomplished," "Like I am achieving," and "Like I have self-worth" ( $\alpha = .94$ ; 1 = *very slightly/not at all* to 5 = *extremely*).

**Perceived workload.** Our four-item measure of workload included the two perceived workload items from Rodell and Judge's (2009) measure of stressors, supplemented with two items from Bolino and Turnley (2005). Sample items included "My job requires me to work very hard" and "I am expected to do a lot of work" ( $\alpha = .71$ ; 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

**Reputation maintenance concerns.** Reputation maintenance concerns were evaluated using a measure created for this study. We developed the measure using creation and validation procedures recommended by Hinkin and Tracey (1999) (see also Hinkin, 1998). We first created four items designed to reflect the conceptual definition of the construct outlined earlier. Next, we recruited 141 undergraduates from a large university in the southeastern United States to quantitatively assess the extent

to which the items matched the conceptual definition. Complete and valid data were provided by 130 of those undergraduates (a response rate of 92%). The undergraduates were asked to rate the extent to which items were consistent with the definition of reputation maintenance concerns using a seven-point scale (1 = *Item does an extremely bad job of measuring reputation maintenance concerns* to 7 = *Item does an extremely good job of measuring reputation maintenance concerns*). The mean level of definitional correspondence for our four items was 5.92 out of 7. That level compares favorably to other uses of this technique (e.g., Hinkin & Tracey, 1999; Rodell, 2013). Scholars have argued that the only requirement for a content validation exercise of this nature is sufficient mental ability to evaluate a match between items and definitions, making undergraduates an appropriate sample for this procedure (Hinkin & Tracey, 1999; Schriesheim, Powers, Scandura, Gardiner, & Lankau, 1993). The validated items included “I’m concerned about maintaining my image,” “I worry about protecting my reputation,” “I feel the need to preserve the opinion others have of me,” and “I’m pre-occupied with keeping others’ views of my character intact” ( $\alpha = .87$ ; 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

**Emotional exhaustion.** Emotional exhaustion was measured using the nine-item emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Sample items included “I feel emotionally drained from my work” and “I feel used up at the end of the workday” ( $\alpha = .93$ ; 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

**Job performance.** Employee job performance was assessed by supervisors using a four-item measure adapted from MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Fetter (1991). Supervisors were asked the extent to which they agree with several statements about the employee. The items

included “All things considered, they are outstanding at their job,” “Compared to their peers, they are an excellent worker,” “They are one of the best at what they do,” and “They are very good at their daily job activities” ( $\alpha = .90$ ; 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to verify the factor structure of our survey measures. All latent factors were modeled using item-level indicators. Our hypothesized six-factor model provided an adequate fit to the data:  $\chi^2(650) = 1328.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ; comparative fit index (CFI) = .94; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .07. All factor loadings were significant, and averaged .74 ( $p < .05$ ). Our hypothesized six-factor model fit the data better than alternative models that included five-, four-, three-, two-, or one-factor structures.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations for our variables are shown in Table 1. Coefficient alphas are shown in parentheses on the diagonal.

### Tests of Hypotheses

We tested the model in Figure 1 with structural equation modeling using Mplus 6.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010). Following recommendations for testing structural equation models that include latent variable interactions, we modeled the latent factors for pride, perceived workload, and reputation maintenance concerns using scale scores as single indicators (Cortina, Chen, & Dunlap, 2001; Mathieu, Tannenbaum, & Salas, 1992). Because the ratio of sample size to number of estimated parameters is an

TABLE 1  
Correlations and Descriptive Statistics<sup>a</sup>

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Feeling trusted	2.65	0.85	.86					
2. Pride	3.08	1.03	.36*	.94				
3. Perceived workload	3.23	0.82	.17*	.12	.71			
4. Reputation maintenance concerns	3.03	0.98	.20*	.14*	.26*	.87		
5. Emotional exhaustion	2.69	0.94	-.04	-.21*	.34*	.18*	.93	
6. Job performance	3.32	0.69	.07	.14*	-.12	-.02	-.17*	.90

<sup>a</sup>  $N = 219$ . Coefficient alphas are on the diagonal.

\*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed

important concern in structural equation modeling (Kline, 2011; Williams, Vandenberg, & Edwards, 2009), we used parcels as indicators of feeling trusted and emotional exhaustion. Parcels combine items from each scale into subsets that are used as indicators of the latent variable. We used four parcels as indicators of feeling trusted and four parcels as indicators of emotional exhaustion. For job performance, we used all four items as indicators because using parcels would have given job performance only two indicators, which can lead to an under-identified model (Kline, 2011). Pride was modeled as a moderator according to suggested procedures (Cortina et al., 2001; Mathieu et al., 1992). First, we mean-centered pride, perceived workload, and reputation maintenance concerns to remove the nonessential multicollinearity between the variables and their product terms (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003; Cortina et al., 2001). Next, we created the product terms, which were used as single indicators of our latent interaction variables. The error variances for the latent variable interactions were set to  $(1 - \alpha) * \text{variance}$  (Kline, 2011). Following recommendations by Cortina et al. (2001) and Mathieu et al. (1992), we calculated the alphas for the product terms using the formula proposed by Bohrnstedt and Marwell (1978). The direct effects of feeling trusted on emotional exhaustion and job performance were also modeled, as those paths are necessary when testing for indirect effects (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). We investigated including several control variables, including the employee's perceived ability (as rated by the supervisor), the employee's tenure with the organization, the employee's tenure with the supervisor, and other demographics. Following recent admonitions, we did not include any of these control variables in our final model because they did not alter the results of our hypothesis testing (Becker, 2005; Carlson & Wu, 2012).

Given that each supervisor assessed job performance for an average of 11 drivers, there was the possibility that clustering would result in non-independence for those data (Bliese, 2000). We evaluated the degree of independence by calculating the intraclass correlation coefficient ICC(1) for job performance. That value was .18, suggesting some non-independence for performance ratings. We therefore conducted our analyses using the Huber-White sandwich estimator of variance within Mplus to correct for this issue (Huber, 1967; White, 1982). The resulting model provided good fit to the data:  $\chi^2(95) = 138.77$ ,  $p < .01$ ; CFI = .97; RMSEA = .05. The

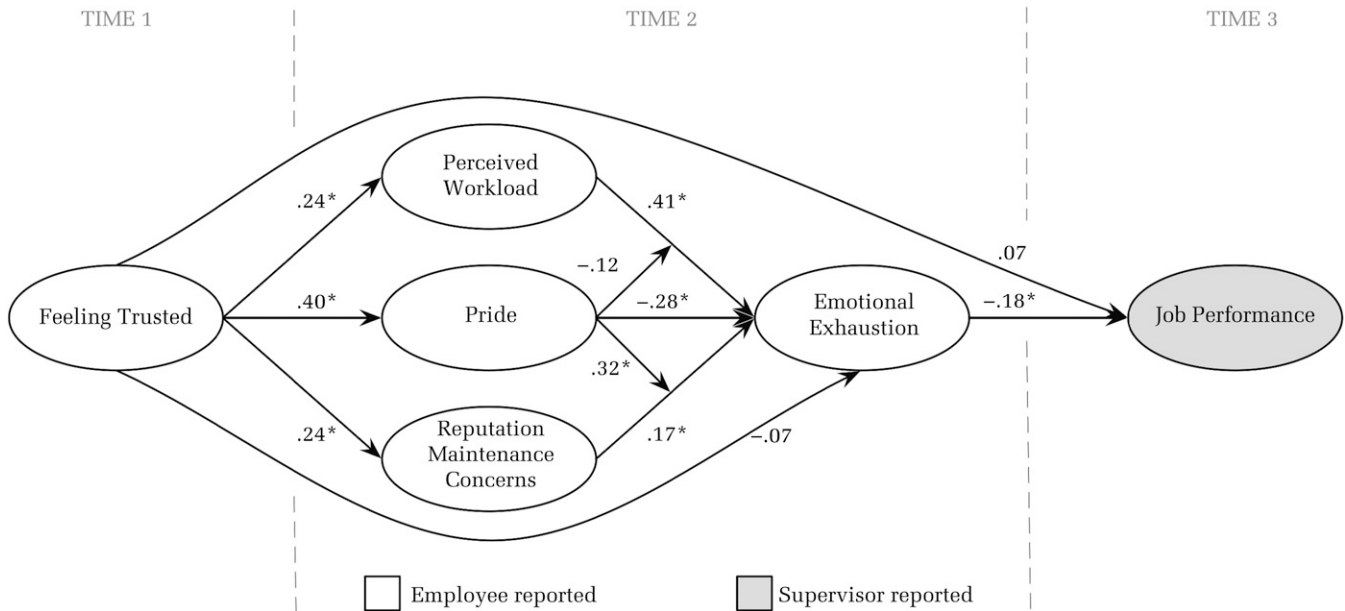
standardized path coefficients from the Mplus output are shown in Figure 2.<sup>1</sup>

Hypotheses 1–3 predicted that feeling trusted would have indirect effects on emotional exhaustion. We tested for indirect effects using the product of coefficients approach described by MacKinnon et al. (2002). With a product of coefficients approach, indirect effects are indicated when there is a significant product of the independent variable → mediator and mediator → dependent variable path coefficients while the direct path is also modeled. Because the products of path coefficients are generally not normally distributed, researchers have suggested that the significance of indirect effects should be tested using resampling methods such as bias-corrected bootstrapping or Monte Carlo (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004). MacKinnon et al. (2004) (see also MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007) have noted that this approach exhibits more power and more accurate Type I error rates. The effect decomposition results from these tests are shown in Table 2.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that feeling trusted would have a negative indirect effect on emotional exhaustion through pride. That prediction was supported by the  $-.11$  indirect effect listed in Table 2, which is consistent with past research emphasizing beneficial consequences of feeling trusted. Hypothesis 2, in contrast, predicted that feeling trusted would have a positive indirect effect on emotional exhaustion through perceived workload. That prediction was also supported, this time by the  $.10$  indirect effect

<sup>1</sup> To provide evidence of our hypothesized causal order, we tested an alternative model in which emotional exhaustion mediates the effects of feeling trusted on pride, perceived workload, and reputation maintenance concerns. Non-nested alternative models can be compared using the Akaike information criterion (AIC). Models with lower values of AIC are considered to be a better fit to the data and are more likely to replicate (Kline, 2011). The results indicated that our hypothesized model is a better fit to the data ( $\Delta\text{AIC} = 62.30$ ). Additionally, pride, perceived workload, and reputation maintenance concerns did not have significant effects on job performance, indicating those effects are more appropriately modeled as being transmitted through emotional exhaustion. To provide further evidence of our causal ordering, we tested our hypothesized model controlling for neuroticism—an individual difference that could predict emotional exhaustion (Bakker, van der Zee, Lewig, & Dollard, 2006). Our analyses showed that, although neuroticism was related to emotional exhaustion, our results were unaffected by this relationship. Thus, we did not include neuroticism as a control variable in our final model.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Structural Equation Modeling Results<sup>a</sup>**



<sup>a</sup> Path coefficients are standardized.  
\*  $p < .05$ , two tailed

shown in Table 2. Similarly, Hypothesis 3 predicted that feeling trusted would have a positive indirect effect on emotional exhaustion through reputation maintenance concerns. That prediction also received support, as evidenced by the .04 indirect effect. Taken together, these two indirect effects illustrate the more detrimental edge of the feeling trusted sword.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the indirect effect of feeling trusted on emotional exhaustion through perceived workload would be weaker when pride was high than when pride was low. Our moderation predictions were tested using Edwards and Lambert's (2007) procedure for conditional indirect effects. Their procedure provides equations and a bootstrapping technique that decompose the impact of moderators on the direct, indirect, and total effects in mediation models. Their framework classifies our hypotheses as "second-stage moderated mediation" because the moderator affects the mediator → dependent variable stage of the indirect effect. We estimated the conditional indirect effects using the parameter estimates from our structural equation models and the reduced form equations given by Edwards and Lambert (2007) in their equations 3 and 10 (pp. 3, 8). Following Edwards and Lambert's (2007) procedure, the significance of the conditional

indirect effects, and the difference between those effects, was calculated using bootstrapped confidence intervals. The results in Table 3 indicate that, although the indirect effect of feeling trusted on emotional exhaustion through perceived workload was smaller at high (.07) than at low (.13) levels of pride, the difference between the two effects was not significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that the indirect effect of feeling trusted on emotional exhaustion through reputation maintenance concerns would be stronger when pride was high than when pride was low. As shown in

**TABLE 2**  
**Effect Decomposition Results<sup>a</sup>**

Effects of Feeling Trusted on Emotional Exhaustion	
<i>Indirect effect through...</i>	
pride	-.11*
perceived workload	.10*
reputation maintenance concerns	.04*
Direct effect	-.07
Total effect	-.04

<sup>a</sup>  $N = 219$ .  
\*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed

**TABLE 3**  
**Effect Decomposition Results at Low and High Levels of Pride<sup>a</sup>**

Effects of Feeling Trusted on Emotional Exhaustion			
Through...	Effect		
	Indirect	Direct	Total
<i>Perceived workload</i>			
Low pride	.13*	-.07	.06
High pride	.07	-.07	.00
Differences	-.06	.00	-.06
<i>Reputation maintenance concerns</i>			
Low pride	-.04	-.07	-.11
High pride	.12*	-.07	.05
Differences	.16*	.00	.16*

<sup>a</sup> The low and high values of pride were -1.03 (1 SD below the centered mean) and 1.03 (1 SD above the centered mean). Moderation for the relationship occurred at the second stage (Edwards & Lambert, 2007).

\*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed

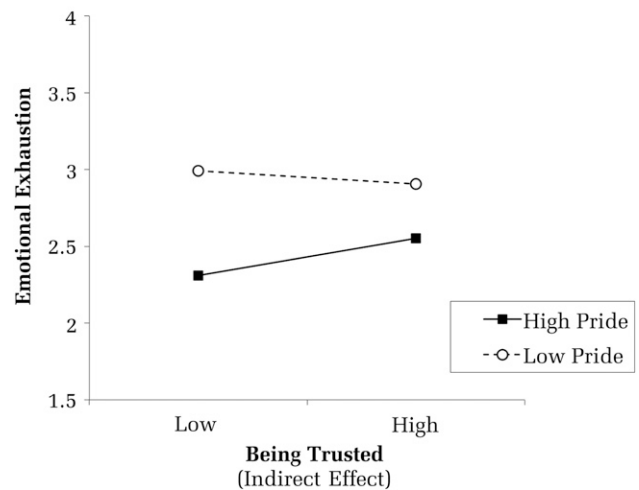
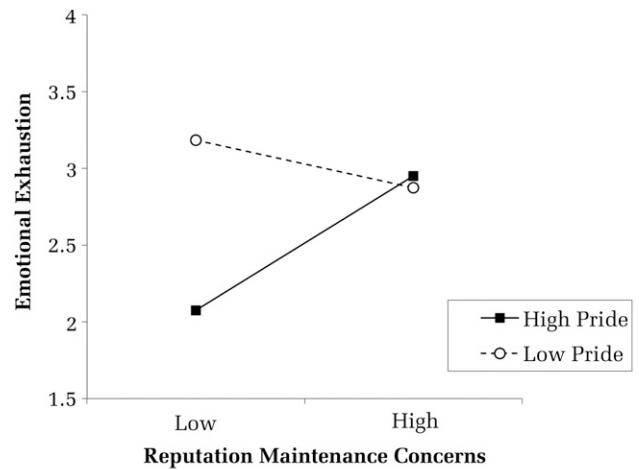
Table 3, the indirect effect was indeed larger at high (.12) rather than low (-.04) levels of pride, with the difference between the two effects (.16) being significant. This effect is unpacked graphically in Figure 3. The top panel reveals that the relationship between reputation maintenance concerns and emotional exhaustion was stronger when pride was high than when it was low. By extension, the bottom panel reveals that the indirect effect of feeling trusted on emotional exhaustion through reputation maintenance concerns was stronger when pride was high than when it was low. Taken together, these results supported Hypothesis 5.

Hypotheses 6–8 integrated our predictions by predicting serial indirect effects of feeling trusted on job performance through the pride, perceived workload, and reputation maintenance concerns mediators, along with emotional exhaustion. All three serial indirect effects were significant. The indirect effect of feeling trusted on job performance was significant through pride and emotional exhaustion (.02), perceived workload and emotional exhaustion (-.02), and reputation maintenance concerns and emotional exhaustion (-.01). Taken together, these results suggest that emotional exhaustion is a useful lens for examining the benefits and burdens of feeling trusted for job performance.

**DISCUSSION**

There are good reasons for supervisors to trust their employees. Feeling trusted may make employees feel better about themselves and their organizational

**FIGURE 3**  
**Moderating Effects of Pride on Direct and Indirect Effects**



membership (Lau et al., 2014). It may also make them feel more responsible for their work, giving them a sense of ownership over their jobs (Deutsch Salamon & Robinson, 2008). In some circumstances, those reactions may boost employee job performance (Brower et al., 2009; Deutsch Salamon & Robinson, 2008; Lau et al., 2014). Of course, trusting employees may have benefits for the supervisors themselves. It may allow them to focus on other aspects of their work (Mayer & Gavin, 2005) while fostering more effective exchange relationships with employees (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). For all these reasons, it is intuitive that feeling trusted has been portrayed as “a good thing” by both the nascent literature on feeling trusted (Brower et al., 2009; Deutsch Salamon & Robinson, 2008; Lau et al.,

2007, 2014) and conceptual discussions of the issue (Lawler, 1992; Mishra & Mishra, 2012; Pfeffer, 1998).

However, our results challenge that consensus in a number of respects. On the one hand, our study shows that feeling trusted can make employees feel more proud of themselves and their work—a feeling that can have a number of cognitive and affective benefits (Fredrickson, 2001). On the other hand, it shows that feeling trusted can make employees perceive a greater workload; it can bring more to do and more to think about. Our study also shows that feeling trusted can make employees more concerned about maintaining their reputations. It signals that a positive image has been attained, but how can that image be preserved moving forward? Taken together, concerns about workload and reputation maintenance can make employees feel more emotionally exhausted—a sense of depletion that negatively impacted job performance.

We believe these findings provide an understanding of feeling trusted that could not be anticipated from extrapolations of existing work. Because prior work did not explore any detrimental aspects of feeling trusted, the understanding of the phenomenon was incomplete. These findings were also grounded in a theoretical lens that is new to the trust literature—conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2001). This lens flowed from our decision to focus on stress—operationalized as emotional exhaustion—as the linchpin for unpacking the effects of feeling trusted. In developing our theory, we cast pride, perceived workload, and reputation maintenance concerns as relevant to Hobfoll's (2001) resource gain, resource loss, and resource threat mechanisms, respectively. From this perspective, the mediators in our theorizing have implications for how employees judiciously conserve and invest their energy, characteristics, conditions, and objects as they manage stress. That pride seems to benefit job performance by decreasing exhaustion supports the importance of resource gains. That perceived workload and reputation maintenance concerns seem to hinder job performance by increasing exhaustion points to the importance of resource losses and resource threats.

Conservation of resources theory also suggests that resource gains can help buffer the effects of resource losses. We did not find such an interaction in our data, as pride does not seem to moderate the relationship between perceived workload and emotional exhaustion. It may be that the resources associated with pride (e.g., feeling successful, feeling valuable to others) do not easily substitute for the resources lost through workload (e.g., adequate sleep, free time, a feeling of

peacefulness). It is possible, however, that these losses can be attenuated through other means, such as empowerment, supervisor support, or coworker support. The resources associated with those behaviors (e.g., understanding from a boss, help with tasks at work, support from coworkers, feeling in control) may more directly address workload-related losses.

We did find an interaction relevant to resource gains and resource threats. Our results suggest that pride amplifies the linkage between reputation maintenance concerns and emotional exhaustion. We suspect that the resources associated with pride make reputation loss all the more threatening. Employees who feel more successful and more valuable have “more to lose” from a reputation perspective. If those employees more intently mobilize resources to guard against reputation loss, that mobilization would itself be emotionally exhausting. Tests of conservation of resources theory have rarely examined these sorts of resource gain  $\times$  resource threat interactions, in part because resource threats are operationalized less frequently than resource gains and losses (for a review, see Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014).

Our findings also enrich the understanding of conservation of resources theory. A recent review noted that the literature has not typically differentiated between resource losses and resource threats (Halbesleben et al., 2014). As a result, the three primary mechanisms of conservation of resources theory—gains, losses, and threats—have rarely been simultaneously operationalized. By operationalizing all three mechanisms, and exploring the interactions between them, we provide a more comprehensive test of the theory's propositions. Consequently, this more comprehensive application of the theory contributed to a richer understanding of the relationships between our constructs. Our results suggest that future applications of conservation of resources theory may similarly benefit from differentiating between resource losses and threats, and by investigating the interactive effects of resource gains, losses, and threats.

Examining feeling trusted through the lens of conservation of resources theory provides a more robust look at employees' side of the supervisor–employee trust relationship. At first look, feeling trusted appears to be an experience with a positive net impact. Conservation of resources theory proposes, however, that an experience does not need to have a negative net impact in order to be stressful. Rather, experiences may have a detrimental impact by “chipping away” at a person's resources. The framework of conservation of resources

theory allows feeling trusted to be examined as an experience that affects employees in both positive and negative ways. Those negatives may adversely affect employees even if the experience as a whole is positive. Our approach—using a stress lens—provides insights into feeling trusted that may help managers reduce the negative effects.

How, then, should managers handle these feeling trusted dynamics? One important ingredient is awareness, as managers may look at trusted employees as indefatigable “rocks” who can take on ever more responsibility. Simply realizing that emotional exhaustion can be an issue—even for the most trusted—can open up steps for addressing it. One such step would be accentuating the positives of feeling trusted. Those accents could often be an exercise in rhetoric, with managers pausing to acknowledge their trust, along with the actions that earned it. Research on transformational leadership illustrates the energizing power of rhetoric, when applied effectively (Judge, Woolf, Hurst, & Livingston, 2008).

Another step would be to limit the negatives associated with feeling trusted. As the acceptance of vulnerability brings additional responsibilities for a given employee, chores that could be allocated elsewhere (or eliminated altogether) could be subtracted. In this way, feeling trusted might result in a different “work mix” without resulting in a higher workload. With respect to reputation, managers could pause when trusting employees with important tasks to note that an employee’s image need not rise and fall with every performance event. Research has shown that a fear of failure can result in ineffective emotional states and self-regulation approaches (Conroy, Willow, & Metzler, 2002). Reassuring trusted employees that their hard-earned reputation is not at risk with every stretching assignment could ease an unnecessary burden. Of course, an additional step is simply to offer social support. Reviews of the stress literature continue to show that support—whether from work or nonwork sources—can reduce emotional exhaustion and other forms of strain (Maslach et al., 2001).

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

More research is needed to expand our understanding of the important dynamics of feeling trusted. As a nascent area of inquiry, the number of studies pales in comparison to the literature on trusting, which has been meta-analyzed on at least two occasions (Colquitt et al., 2007; Dirks & Ferrin,

2002). Given the early focus on understanding the effects of feeling trusted on job performance, it makes sense to continue to broaden our understanding of that relationship. Are there other dynamics at play in the double-edged sword that was the subject of our study? On the positive side, it may be that feeling trusted has motivational effects, perhaps by fostering a sense of psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995). On the negative side, feeling trusted may give employees the sense that they have accrued idiosyncrasy credits (Hollander, 1992). Employees tempted to “spend” those credits might have some lapse in job performance.

There are likely additional mediators of the relationship between feeling trusted and emotional exhaustion. Trust is demonstrated through risk-taking behaviors (Mayer et al., 1995). For supervisors, those behaviors might include delegating critical tasks, relying on the employee’s expertise, promoting the employee’s ideas to upper management, providing stretch assignments, and increasing requests for favors. Although all of these behaviors are manifestations of trust, they likely have differential impacts on employee outcomes. For example, requests for favors might simply be exhausting, while promoting an employee’s ideas to upper management might lead to increased citizenship behavior. Future research could operationalize multiple types of managerial risk-taking behavior to determine their effects.

Of course, feeling trusted may be relevant to outcomes that go beyond traditional measures of job performance. Studies of creative performance have shown that supportive leadership can foster insights (Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004). It may be that feeling trusted is even more predictive of the divergent, risk-taking actions that represent creativity. The risk-fostering nature of feeling trusted may also make it vital to adaptive performance, which reflects responses to demands that are unusual and unpredictable (Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000). If such findings emerge, the nature of employees’ tasks may become a critical factor in understanding the dynamics of feeling trusted. The beneficial aspects of the construct may loom larger in environments that demand novel, unscripted, and unplanned actions.

The relationships between feeling trusted and emotional exhaustion may depend on how much control employees have over their jobs. Lower-echelon employees, like bus drivers, generally have lower levels of control over how the work gets done (Karasek, 1979; Westman, 1992). For these

employees, the resource losses and gains associated with feeling trusted may be amplified. In higher-level, higher-control jobs, employees may have access to more organizational resources, enabling them to more easily cope with additional demands (Westman, 1992). For these employees, feeling trusted may also have a smaller impact on pride, given that higher-level employees may feel their position within the company implies a higher baseline of trust. Although higher-level employees may have a similar pattern of results as lower-echelon employees, future research should examine whether the impact of feeling trusted varies based on the level of the job.

The effects of feeling trusted may also depend on how it is dispersed within the unit. On the one hand, if all members of a work unit are trusted by the manager, then responsibilities and workload may be evenly dispersed, thereby reducing the negative effects of perceived workload. On the other hand, if all members of a work group are trusted, then feeling trusted may not carry the same sense of status and accomplishment, thereby reducing the positive effects of pride. After all, if everyone is special, then is no one special? Future research should examine these potential group-level effects of feeling trusted.

Individual differences may also play an important role in the relationship between feeling trusted and emotional exhaustion. For example, conscientious employees may be better equipped to handle the additional assignments and responsibilities that accompany feeling trusted. Similarly, employees with motives such as prosocial values and organizational concern (Rioux & Penner, 2001) may see the additional responsibilities associated with feeling trusted as enriching rather than burdensome. Thus, individual differences and motives may attenuate the relationship between perceived workload and emotional exhaustion. Conversely, conscientious employees are also more likely to impression manage (Barrick & Mount, 1996; Bolino, 1999). They may devote more effort to addressing their reputation maintenance concerns, thereby increasing the relationship between those concerns and emotional exhaustion. Conscientious employees may also be more likely to take credit for feeling trusted, thereby enhancing the relationship between feeling trusted and pride. Providing support for this proposal, research indicates that conscientious people are more likely to experience pride (Carver, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2010; Tracy & Robins, 2007).

## Limitations

Our study has some limitations that should be noted. Its design included two sources and three data collection waves, allowing us to use temporal separation and source separation to manage common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The linkages between pride, perceived workload, reputation maintenance concerns, and emotional exhaustion could have been subject to some inflation, however. Thus, ideally, our data would have been collected in four waves. We should note, though, that all of our indirect effect hypotheses crossed times, sources, or both. In addition, although our data were collected over time to establish temporal precedence, we did not gather data on all variables at all time periods. A panel design would have allowed us to speak to issues of causality with more authority. Such a design would have allowed us to investigate how changes in resources gains and losses across time affect emotional exhaustion, as well as any feedback loops that might exist between job performance and feeling trusted.

Additionally, our sample was predominantly male. Fortunately, primary studies and meta-analyses have revealed small and/or non-significant main and moderating effects of gender in studies on trust (Brower et al., 2009; Korsgaard, Brodt, & Whitener, 2002; Levin, Whitener, & Cross, 2006; Mayer & Davis, 1999) and emotional exhaustion (Cropanzano et al., 2003; Grandey, 2003; Grandey, Fisk, & Steiner, 2005; Johnson & Spector, 2007; Purvanova & Muros, 2010). Such results suggest that gender homogeneity should not hinder the generalizability of our results. Finally, our final sample size was around 200 participants. Research replicating these relationships with larger samples would provide stronger evidence for the generalizability of our findings.

## CONCLUSION

Our conversations with the authors of the quotes in our study were not long enough to explore all of the constructs in our theorizing. Moreover, the confidentiality promised in our data collection makes it impossible (and unethical) to look up those particular participants' survey data. It was clear to us, however, that they viewed their supervisors' trust in them as a mixed blessing. We suspect that trust made them feel special, but also that it was tiring at times. Given the important role that trust plays in social relationships (Blau, 1964; Gambetta, 1988; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985; Rousseau et al., 1998), these issues are vital in virtually any job, in almost any employment context. We therefore hope that our



study spurs further explorations of this other side of the trustor–trustee coin.

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