

# Ego Depletion a jak koncept obhajuje Roy F. Baumeister

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- Ego depletion findings have been widely replicated, and so it gradually became one of the most influential theories about the self. **Success in scientific research often has two consequences.** First, many others join in, extending the work into other domains of interest to them. Second, others seek to criticize, question, and even attack it. Ego depletion has seen plenty of both.

# two attacks; 1. the alternate explanations

- criticism and attacks, they fall into two categories. Several researchers have put forward alternative theories to account for some of the findings, typically seeking to get rid of the limited-energy aspect and replace it with more conventional psychological phenomena (e.g., **change in motivation**). And several others have questioned whether ego depletion actually occurs at all. As noted by Baumeister, Tice, and Vohs (2018), these two attacks contradict each other, so at least one of them must be completely wrong. After all, an alternative theory cannot be correct if there is no phenomenon to explain.
- In my view, **the alternate explanations are far more plausible than the denial of phenomenon**. I have followed the alternate theories carefully and sometimes integrated key points from them into my thinking.

## 2. there is **no ego depletion** phenomenon

- Nevertheless, [we] will focus on the less plausible challenge, namely the suggestion that there is no ego depletion phenomenon (in other words, no such thing as limited willpower constraining self-control).

# the new uncivil norms and online hostility

- Consistent with the new uncivil norms and online hostility, the dispute turned quite nasty, such as accusing each other of dishonesty. My sense is that there has been some dishonesty on both sides (...) On the other hand, there are also sincere and honest researchers on both sides. Unfortunately, perhaps, many scholars now rely increasingly on social media to get their information about the field, and **social media can be dominated by bullies and ad hominem attacks, thereby intimidating others from speaking out.** People who put much of their time into dominating Twitter exchanges are perhaps less active than others at actually doing research, so the **field becomes overly influenced by outspoken critics who lack experience and investment in the general research** enterprise. Ego depletion is a clear case of this.

# null results can mean many different things

- null results can mean many different things, only one of which is that the hypothesis is false. Measures may be insensitive. Research participants may be indifferent, distracted, unmotivated, or otherwise unresponsive. The procedures may be poorly calibrated to them.
- Suppose you have a hypothesis that ego depletion will make people perform worse at anagrams, and you succeed at manipulating ego depletion — but your anagrams are the wrong length. If they are too hard, nobody will solve them, so your experiment will fail. If they are too easy, everyone will solve them, and again it will fail. Crucially, this occurs even if your hypothesis is entirely correct.

- It is inappropriate to speak of failed replication if the follow-up study does not succeed at manipulating the independent variable. *If the independent variable is not successfully manipulated, then the study does not provide a test of the hypothesis.* My impression is that many ostensible failures to replicate ego depletion fall into this category. If research participants do not expend a good deal of effort on mental control during the first part of the study, then they are not depleted, and their data tell us nothing about whether ego depletion affects the dependent variable.

# many researchers want to use something quick and easy

- One of the early studies that provided dramatic evidence for ego depletion involved having participants refrain from eating for several hours, then have their hunger prompted by exposure to the delicious smell of freshly baked cookies, and the requiring them to sit at a table with those cookies but eat only radishes instead (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998). The article **has been cited over five thousand times**, yet researchers rarely choose to use this time-costly, intensive procedure. It takes a fair amount of work to use that manipulation. Instead, **many researchers want to use something quick and easy**. (I get a fair number of requests for a manipulation that can be done in under five minutes, or for manipulations that can be used without any contact between participant and experimenter, so that the study can be run easily and cheaply online.) Using minimalist manipulations will produce weaker, more unreliable effects.



# many labs hand off the replication study to

- Anecdotally, many labs hand off the replication study to undergraduate research assistants or others who have little incentive to ensure that the manipulation is actually creating the **optimal differences on the independent variable** that enable a strong test of the hypothesis.

# effect size in the replication studies tends to be small

- my impression is that many writers **seeking to discredit ego depletion** tend to acknowledge that the mass of supportive evidence is too big to dispute, so they retreat into **griping that** the effect size in the replication studies tends to be small. To me, this is a silly argument. My view is that **effect sizes for laboratory experiments mean almost nothing**, apart from shop talk to help other researchers run other studies. **The size of a causal effect outside the laboratory may be much larger or much smaller than in the laboratory.**
- It is absurd even to talk about a true effect size for ego depletion. **Ego depletion is a form of fatigue**, so saying there is a single effect size is akin to **saying that there is an effect size of tiredness**. If one were to ask, “How big is the effect on behavior of someone being tired?” the reply would almost certainly be, “which behaviors, and how tired?”

# Reference

- Prepared for A. Mele (Ed.), *Surrounding self-control*. New York: Oxford. (Appendix to Chapter 2)
- *Staženo 5. 9. 2019*

