

The University of Hong Kong  
Department of Psychology

*Departmental Seminar*

***Social Inclusion Counteracts the Ego Depletion Effect***

Date: June 12, 2015 (Friday)  
Time: 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon  
Venue: Room 813, 8/F, The Jockey Club Tower, Centennial Campus, HKU  
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Self-control is a fundamental resource that humans rely on in daily functioning. It enables people to monitor and regulate their goal-pursuit behaviors. The finite resource can be depleted upon repeated usage, an effect known as ego depletion. The implicit bargain theory (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005) proposed that one major purpose of self-control exertion is to gain social acceptance and satisfy belongingness need. Supporting this, research has reported that self-control can be impaired or depleted when one is socially excluded by others. The theory also implied that social inclusion would benefit self-control performance. However, the effect of inclusion experiences on self-control has mostly been nonsignificant and received little attention in the literature.

This paper aims to address the unspoken half of the implicit bargain by studying the recovery effect of social inclusion after prior ego depletion. In four experiments, participants were exposed to a depletion procedure (depletion/ nondepletion), followed by a social condition (inclusion/ exclusion/ non-social control). The experiments reported a consistent depletion-by-inclusion interaction effect. In Experiments 1 and 2, the ego depletion effect was observed among people who recalled an exclusion experience, but

not among those who recalled an inclusion experience. Comparison with the non-social condition further confirmed that the effect was triggered by social inclusion, but not social exclusion. Experiments 3 and 4 generalized the recovery effect to a direct inclusion experience through a simulated ball-tossing game. Self-control recovery was demonstrated in word puzzle tasks (anagram, Exp. 1-3) and a handgrip persistence task (Exp. 4). Mediation analyses supported that the recovery effect was due to the satisfaction of belongingness need.

The paper provides pioneering data showing that brief social inclusion experiences can recover depleted self-control. It also highlights the satisfaction of belongingness need as a mechanism governing the recovery process, which supports a more mechanistic view on the depletion and recovery of self-control. The application and theoretical implications of these findings are discussed.