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RESEARCH ARTICLE

After-work unhealthy eating, work-induced ego depletion and abusive supervision: The moderating role of narcissistic admiration and rivalry

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Abstract

Abusive supervision, a harmful pattern of leadership behaviour, has consistently been found to have negative effects in the workplace. Drawing on self-regulation and the work-home resources model, we investigate the daily antecedents of abusive supervision from the work (ego depletion) and nonwork (unhealthy eating) domains. We examine leaders' narcissistic personality as an important boundary condition of the relationship between after-work unhealthy eating and next-day abusive supervision. Using Dynamic Structural Equation Modelling, we analysed daily diary data from 112 leaders and 225 followers across five organizations in China over 10 working days. We find that the work-induced ego depletion of leaders predicts their after-work unhealthy eating behaviours. The relationship between after-work unhealthy eating and next-day abusive supervision is contingent on leader narcissism: it is negative only at high levels of leader narcissistic admiration and positive at all levels of leader narcissistic rivalry, with the effect being stronger at higher levels of rivalry. Leader narcissism also moderates the indirect link between ego depletion and next-day abusive supervision through after-work unhealthy eating (moderated mediation). Our findings demonstrate the work–nonwork–work resource depletion spiral, provide insights into the interplay between daily factors and individual traits, and reveal some nuanced precursors of abusive supervision.

KEYWORDS

abusive supervision, leader narcissism, narcissistic admiration, narcissistic rivalry, unhealthy eating, work-induced ego depletion

Anna Topakas and Kristin Hildenbrand contributed equally to this article.

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Practitioner points

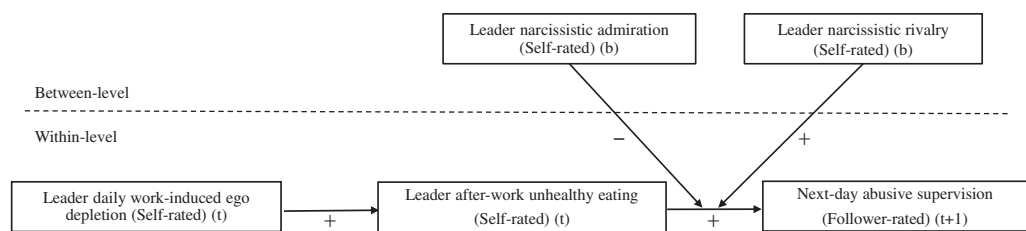
- After a difficult day at work, leaders may feel depleted, leading to unhealthy eating behaviours, such as late evening meals or excessive portions. To avert such depletion among managers, employers should actively manage work demands, encourage regular breaks, set realistic deadlines and provide support to enable them to cope with their daily work requirements.
- Unhealthy eating is particularly problematic for leaders high on narcissistic rivalry. Following unhealthy eating, such leaders are more likely to engage in abusive supervisory behaviours on the next day. To avoid this, organizations can support better eating behaviours and overall healthy lifestyles by providing wellbeing support within the workplace.
- Narcissism is a complex and multifaceted trait that influences managers' differing responses to work and nonwork experiences, according to their specific form of narcissism. For organizations, a personalized approach to supporting leaders may be more appropriate than a one-size-fits-all method. However, preventing ego depletion through policies and practices that prioritize work-related wellbeing and a healthy work-life balance is likely to benefit all leaders, irrespective of personality.

INTRODUCTION

While all employees expect to be treated with fairness and dignity, many experience problematic behaviours from the line managers, to whom they report directly. Media reports are rife with stories of managerial workplace toxicity (Costa, 2025). In broad terms, workplace toxicity refers to negative self- or other-directed emotional states resulting from harmful organizational conditions, processes, or interpersonal interactions (Tomprou et al., 2024). Abusive supervision is one such trigger of negative affect in the workplace (Tepper et al., 2017). Abusive supervision is defined as employees' perceptions of the extent to which their leader engages “in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). It involves overt behaviours, such as belittling, criticizing, humiliating, or isolating employees (Tepper, 2000). Given the deleterious effects of abusive supervision, organizations have a moral obligation to protect employees' wellbeing and safety. Therefore, it is imperative to establish a strong base of evidence for the causes of abusive supervision and recommend ways to avert it.

Abusive supervisory behaviours have a range of known antecedents, including organizational (e.g., organizational norms; Fischer et al., 2021), follower-related (e.g., poor performance; Li et al., 2024) and leader-related (e.g., personality traits; Breevaart & Schyns, 2025) factors. Abusive supervision varies both between and within individuals, with significant daily fluctuations in such behaviours (Barnes et al., 2015). Accordingly, scholars have turned their attention to the daily precursors of abusive supervision from both the work (e.g., coworker incivility, Foulk et al., 2018) and nonwork (e.g., sleep, Barnes et al., 2015; commuting stress, Chen et al., 2023; air pollution, Khan et al., 2024) domains.

Self-regulation “involves the self acting on itself to alter its own responses with the (conscious or unconscious) goal of producing a desired outcome” (Baumeister & Vohs, 2003, p. 199). Abusive supervision often stems from a failure to self-regulate (Tepper et al., 2017), which can arise from temporary resource depletion across work and nonwork domains (Courtright et al., 2016). Therefore, the joint examination of work and nonwork dynamics is key to explaining daily fluctuations in abusive supervision (Courtright et al., 2016; Dionisi & Barling, 2019). We extend this line of enquiry by investigating the effect of work-induced ego depletion on after-work unhealthy eating, and subsequently, on next-day abusive supervision (Figure 1). According to the work-home resources model (W-HR; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), this daily work–nonwork–work chain of effects reflects a cross-domain resource loss spiral. We further consider leader narcissism as a boundary condition of the effect of unhealthy eating



Note. t = focal day; t+1 = following day; b = baseline survey.

FIGURE 1 Hypothesised theoretical model.

on next-day abusive behaviour. This is because of the pertinent role of self-regulation in the behavioural expressions of grandiose narcissism (Campbell et al., 2011) and the distinct self-regulatory strategies associated with its dimensions of narcissistic admiration and rivalry (Back et al., 2013).

Ego depletion is “a temporary reduction in the self’s capacity or willingness to engage in volitional action (including controlling the environment, controlling the self, making choices and initiating action) caused by prior exercise of volition” (Baumeister et al., 1998, p. 1253). It commonly results from work strain and demands from managerial roles (Lin et al., 2016). According to the W-HR model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), such contextual demands could result in a reduction in volatile resources: that is, transient resources that cannot be replenished and which immediately impact nonwork behaviours. Leaders’ after-work unhealthy eating is a maladaptive nonwork-domain behaviour defined as the consumption of foods high in sugar and calories, snacks and fast food, overeating, excessive drinking and late-night eating (Cho & Kim, 2022). We focus on unhealthy eating as the focal nonwork behaviour because food choices are affected by a person’s level of self-regulatory resource depletion (Liu et al., 2017; Vohs & Heatherton, 2000). In turn, unhealthy eating can further reinforce the resource loss spiral with downstream behavioural implications. Cho and Kim (2022) conceptualize unhealthy evening eating behaviour as a resource-depleting nonwork stressor because it gives rise to both physical and emotional strain. Extant evidence indicates that abusive supervisory behaviour can arise when depleted managers fail to suppress their urge to be aggressive or abusive towards others at work (Barnes et al., 2015) and that leader self-regulatory resource depletion on one day has negative effects on their leadership on the following day (Lin et al., 2016). However, little is known about what occurs during the intervening non-work period, which forwards these effects to the next day. Our study is an early attempt to examine this process through after-work eating behaviours. Therefore, we contribute to the literature on abusive supervision by considering intrapersonal dynamics across the full cycle of day-to-day work-nonwork-work experiences that cause resource loss spirals and lead to abusive supervisory behaviours.

We extend our model to consider the role of leader narcissism as a boundary condition of the effect of after-work unhealthy eating on abusive supervision, because it is a personality trait associated with abusive supervision (Breevaart & Schyns, 2025) and has significant implications for self-regulation (Campbell et al., 2011). We adopt a two-dimensional conceptualization of grandiose narcissism, namely narcissistic admiration and rivalry (Back et al., 2013), which allows us to study the different self-regulatory strategies that narcissistic leaders may adopt in response to daily resource demands. The two self-regulation strategies involved in narcissistic admiration and rivalry are described as ‘the tendency to approach social admiration by means of self-promotion (assertive self-enhancement) and the tendency to prevent social failure by means of self-defence (antagonistic self-protection)’, respectively (Back et al., 2013, p. 1015). Accordingly, different regulatory pathways will become activated for individuals high in admiration compared to those high on rivalry, along affective-motivational, cognitive and behavioural lines (Back et al., 2013). We develop and test hypotheses that treat leader narcissistic rivalry as a booster, and admiration as a buffer, of the positive effect of after-work unhealthy eating on next-day abusive supervision, in line with prior research (Gauglitz et al., 2023; Gauglitz & Schyns, 2024). In doing so, we contribute to discussions on the potential adaptive versus maladaptive nature of narcissism in the

leadership context (Blickle et al., 2023) and add some clarity as to why existing research reports mixed effects of leader narcissism on abusive supervision (e.g., Nevicka et al., 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Work-induced ego depletion, after-work unhealthy eating and next-day abusive supervision

The W-HR model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012) is an extension of the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 2002) which explains how different types of resources and demands crossover between work and nonwork domains to create resource gain or loss spirals. The model distinguishes between short- and long-term processes, offers a framework for theorizing causal effects that takes into account the duration and sequencing of resource depletion and replenishment in work–nonwork transitions and accounts for potential key resources arising from individuals' personality traits. Personal resource depletion in one domain will sequentially impact performance and outcomes in the other, in a process known as work-home conflict, while work-home enrichment will arise when contextual resources from one domain generate or increase personal resources in the other (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

We propose that a work-home conflict process ensues when leaders experience work-induced ego depletion. This is because ego depletion entails a temporary reduction in self-regulation resources (Baumeister et al., 1998), which are a type of volatile cognitive personal resource (Hobfoll, 2002; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Much like a muscle, self-regulation is a resource that can become depleted or fatigued when used to regulate cognitive, affective and behavioural responses (Baumeister & Vohs, 2003). That is, expending self-regulatory resources results in fewer resources being available for subsequent tasks or decisions that require self-regulation (Vohs et al., 2021; Vohs & Heatherton, 2000). Therefore, leaders who experience work-induced ego depletion become more susceptible to unhealthy eating after work because of the lack of self-regulation resources required for impulse control and resistance to temptation (Mann & Ward, 2025). Thus, when volatile personal resources are further depleted because of unhealthy eating, the cross-domain resource loss spiral is likely to continue, resulting in leaders experiencing diminished personal resources on the following working day. As abusive supervision is closely linked to self-regulatory failure (Mawritz et al., 2017), we anticipate that the outcome of prior-day self-regulation resource depletion would be increased abusive supervision behaviours through unhealthy eating.

The availability of self-regulatory resources varies from day to day, depending on the requirement to engage in self-regulation on a focal day (Gerpott et al., 2022). Workplace factors such as surface acting (Trougakos et al., 2015) and person-organization value incongruence (Deng et al., 2016) may drain individuals' self-regulation resources, ultimately contributing to work-induced ego depletion. With regard to leadership, work-induced ego depletion is likely to occur as leaders frequently deal with intense and complex work-related activities that require self-regulation and consume regulatory resources, leading to ego depletion spirals (DeWall et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2014). Lin et al. (2016) show that even engaging in ethical leadership on a given day leads to ego depletion on the following day. Germeyns and De Gieter's (2018) study demonstrates that daily work-induced ego depletion crosses over to the nonwork domain, with negative implications for individuals and their families.

Food consumption is a pertinent behaviour in the daily cross-domain resource loss/gain spiral because it is enacted by necessity on a daily basis (Mann & Ward, 2025), draws on self-regulatory resource reserves (Haynes et al., 2016) and has downstream implications for key personal resources, including physical health and energy levels (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). The effects of unhealthy eating are well-documented for both physical (e.g., cardiovascular disease, diabetes, inflammation; Noble et al., 2017; World Health Organization, 2025) and cognitive or mental health (memory, depression; Noble et al., 2017; Firth et al., 2020). Moreover, evidence shows that the type and nutritional quality of

food consumed has implications for the experience and response to stressors (Lee & Hong, 2025) and is negatively affected by stress (Hill et al., 2022).

The relationship between work-related stressors and demands, and eating behaviours is unclear. For example, Headrick and Park (2022) do not find an association between depletion (operationalized as burnout) and unhealthy eating at the same time point; however, they demonstrate that over several weeks, workplace surface acting, which depletes self-regulation resources, leads to unhealthy eating via negative affect. Furthermore, Liu et al. (2017) show that work-related ego-depleting experiences (job demands and customer mistreatment) lead to after-work unhealthy eating, across two daily diary studies. Sonnentag et al. (2017) also report that work that depletes self-regulation resources is associated with more unhealthy food choices, mediated by negative affect. However, Vasiljeva et al. (2023) did not find significant effects of work-related stressors (workload and conflict), emotional exhaustion, or negative affect on unhealthy snacking after work. Their findings point to a nuanced relationship between stress and food, but conclusions about the effects of work-related ego depletion on broader unhealthy eating behaviours cannot be readily drawn. This is because of Vasiljeva et al.'s (2023) selective focus on unhealthy snacks, and the exclusion of foods consumed as part of meals, or other unhealthy eating behaviours, such as late-night food consumption.

Our theorizing points to a positive effect of work-induced ego depletion on leaders' after-work unhealthy eating as a maladaptive nonwork-domain behaviour. Eating behaviour requires the exertion of self-control (Mann & Ward, 2025), which is a narrow form of self-regulation that involves impulse control (Baumeister & Vohs, 2003). Leaders who are already feeling depleted from work on a given day will be less able to self-regulate away from unhealthy eating behaviours. Unhealthy eating will in turn contribute to the resource loss spiral, because it will likely reduce self-regulatory resources due to the negative physiological and psychological consequences of unhealthy food consumption (Cho & Kim, 2022).

Previous studies have consistently shown a positive association between ego depletion and impulsive behaviours characterized by immediate gratification, including eating (Rafael & Lopes, 2023). The evidence supports the role of self-regulatory resource depletion in influencing what and when individuals eat (e.g., Mann & Ward, 2025). Classic experiments have demonstrated that after investing self-regulatory resources on a task to, for example, suppress emotional responses or resist temptation, individuals showed a reduced capacity to control their eating, that is, they consumed greater amounts of unhealthy food (Liu et al., 2017; Vohs & Heatherton, 2000).

Drawing on the work–nonwork conflict process that involves a regulatory resource loss spiral, the effect of ego depletion on self-regulation-requiring behaviours, and unhealthy eating behaviours in particular, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1. Leaders' daily work-induced ego depletion is positively related to their after-work unhealthy eating.

As discussed above, the overall negative health implications of poor diet are well-documented. However, the short-term effects of eating behaviours are potentially less straightforward. Similar to other forms of health behaviours (ten Brummelhuis et al., 2022), healthy eating can be regarded as both a resource-draining and a resource-replenishing activity. The requirement for self-regulation in eating behaviours may exacerbate self-regulatory resource drain leading to negative outcomes; although it could potentially also increase self-efficacy with a positive crossover to the work domain, similar to the processes involved in physical exercise (ten Brummelhuis et al., 2022). This is supported by empirical findings indicating that healthy eating has a replenishing effect on employees, leading to improved performance (van der Put et al., 2023). Unhealthy eating, however, is associated with next-day withdrawal behaviours at work and reduced helping behaviour through emotional (i.e., shame and guilt associated with unhealthy eating) and physiological (i.e., headache and indigestion) strain (Cho & Kim, 2022), pointing to a depleting short-term effect with next-day implications. Healthy eating is commonly regarded as socially desirable and indicative of self-discipline and health consciousness (Watkins et al., 2022). Therefore, unhealthy eating may represent a violation of societal norms or individual internalized goals and is associated with physical and emotional distress (Cho &

Kim, 2022). Coping with these negative experiences may further consume leaders' self-regulation resources (Baumeister et al., 1998), ultimately contributing to self-regulation failure.

Continuing our argumentation along the lines of the W-HR model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), we anticipate that leaders who engage in unhealthy eating behaviours after work, as a result of work-induced ego depletion, will, in turn, fail to replenish their self-regulation resources, making them more likely to engage in abusive supervision the next day. A short-term resource loss spiral will therefore occur, which, according to the W-HR model, involves volatile and temporal resources or demands leading to changes in energy availability which, in turn, affects daily outcomes in general (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), and abusive supervisory behaviour in particular.

In their synthesis of the literature, Tepper et al. (2017) identify three theoretical pathways that predict abusive supervision: social learning, identity threat and self-regulation impairment. The most relevant pathway for exploring the effects of nonwork predictors of abusive supervision is self-regulation impairment or ego depletion. This is because nonwork experiences will either deplete or replenish managers' self-regulatory resources, with implications for their capacity to inhibit inappropriate behaviours at work. That is, when managers experience resource depletion outside of work, they will suffer from self-regulatory impairment during work, leaving them susceptible to impulsive toxic behaviours, such as abusive supervision. This theoretical lens has been effectively utilized in prior empirical studies. For example, evidence from this body of literature has demonstrated that family-to-work conflict (Courtright et al., 2016) and sleep quality (Barnes et al., 2015) are associated with abusive supervision through ego depletion. Similarly, Dionisi and Barling (2019) found that family-to-work conflict and conflict with one's romantic partner led to abusive supervision via diminished cognitive functioning and depressive symptoms, both of which are indicative of personal resource depletion. Sheng et al. (2025) reported that sleep quality is associated with abusive supervision, but only when subordinates exhibit negative behaviours. This evidence points to the significance of nonwork factors in contributing to abusive supervision as a result of self-regulation resource depletion. We extend this body of literature to propose that unhealthy eating is an equally important nonwork influence on abusive supervision because it acts on abusive supervision through the same self-regulatory depletion pathway.

Abusive supervision has been linked to self-regulation failure for several reasons. Depleted self-regulation resources compromise individuals' ability to control counter-normative behaviours such as verbal abuse, bullying, or manipulation (DeWall et al., 2007), behaviours that are characteristic of abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000). Feeling physically and emotionally depleted on a given day makes it harder for leaders to self-regulate away from abusive behaviours during difficult interactions and frustrating work experiences, which are common in managerial roles (Barnes et al., 2015; DeWall et al., 2007). In fact, leaders with depleted self-regulation resources are likely to overexert themselves to achieve the desired task performance (DeWall et al., 2011), leaving little self-regulatory capacity for managing interactions and suppressing abusive impulses. Thus, leaders would engage in selective resource optimization (Hobfoll, 2002; Mawritz et al., 2017) by prioritising expending self-regulatory resources on core tasks that are visible to their seniors; potentially neglecting behaviours towards their followers and further exacerbating the effects of depletion caused by unhealthy eating on abusive supervision. Ergo, fatigued leaders with limited self-regulation resources due to prior unhealthy eating behaviours will be more likely to exhibit abusive supervision at work, a result of nonwork-to-work conflict and resource loss spiral from one day to the next. We hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2. Leaders' after-work unhealthy eating is positively related to their next-day abusive supervision.

Bringing together the above arguments under the W-HR model and cross-domain resource loss spirals in the form of work-nonwork-work conflict (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), we conclude that after-work unhealthy eating is a nonwork mechanism through which leaders' work-induced ego depletion on one day drives their next-day abusive behaviours. This is because on days when leaders are ego-depleted from work, they will be more likely to engage in after-work unhealthy eating, as their work

has drained the self-regulatory resources needed to resist unhealthy foods (Liu et al., 2017). In turn, unhealthy after-work eating further consumes individuals' self-regulatory resources and prevents their overnight regeneration, as it is associated with physiological discomfort (e.g., disrupted sleep and indigestion) and negative emotions (e.g., guilt and shame; Cho & Kim, 2022). As such, leaders who engage in unhealthy eating as a consequence of work-induced ego depletion will start their working day feeling worse, with lesser-than-usual self-regulation resources. In turn, this will make them more likely to act abusively towards their followers (Lin et al., 2016; Tepper et al., 2017) as these resources are needed to curb counter-normative behaviours. We therefore propose:

Hypothesis 3. Leaders' after-work unhealthy eating mediates the relationship between daily work-induced ego depletion and next-day abusive supervision.

The moderating role of leader narcissistic admiration and rivalry

The basic premise of ego depletion, that reduction in self-regulation resources results in poorer performance in subsequent tasks requiring self-regulation, has received scrutiny, with evidence showing that ego depletion effects may not be as strong and ubiquitous as previously thought (Vohs et al., 2021). Similarly, the effects of ego depletion on abusive supervision have been shown to be conditional on contextual and individual factors, which sometimes render the overall effects statistically non-significant (e.g., Courtright et al., 2016; Lam et al., 2017). Comprehensive explanations of behaviour tend to involve both the situation (i.e., daily triggers) and the person (Breevaart & Schyns, 2025). In line with Eissa and Lester's (2017) study, and our resource-based framework (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), which proposes that resource processes are both dynamic and shaped by individual differences, we contend that this is also the case for abusive supervision. The W-HR model conceptualizes individual differences as key resources that attenuate or worsen cross-domain depletion or enrichment (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). We turn to the identity threat lens (Sheng et al., 2025; Tepper et al., 2017) to identify a leader-related boundary condition that may modify when and how depletion from the nonwork domain influences the self-regulation strategies deployed by leaders in the work domain, that is, leader trait narcissism.

Narcissism is a stable individual trait that encompasses grandiosity, self-adoration and inflated self-perceptions (Campbell et al., 2011). Narcissists strive to maintain a positive self-image (Rauthmann, 2011), making them reactive to ego threats (Gaughlitz et al., 2023), that is, threats to one's self-esteem or self-image, commensurate to identity threats targeting the value ascribed to one's identity (e.g., Petriglieri, 2011). Trait narcissism has mixed and complex associations with leadership outcomes. For example, it predicts leader emergence but not leader effectiveness (Grijalva et al., 2015) and has been linked to both destructive and charismatic leadership (Nevicka et al., 2018). These divergent consequences can be attributed to the dualistic nature of trait narcissism, as it is associated with both positive (e.g., charm and extraversion) and negative (e.g., self-importance, hostility and low empathy) attributes (Nevicka et al., 2018). The narcissistic admiration and rivalry dimensions (Back et al., 2013) capture this duality and offer a nuanced lens for studying narcissism through the two distinct self-regulation mechanisms narcissists use to maintain their grandiose self-views: assertive self-enhancement through agentic self-promotion (admiration) and antagonistic self-protection through self-defence (rivalry). Specifically, when faced with threats to their inflated self-image (Campbell et al., 2011), individuals high in narcissistic admiration aim to bolster their self-image and regain social validation (Back et al., 2013), by engaging in self-promotion, such as prosocial behaviours (Martin et al., 2019). Conversely, the self-image of individuals high in narcissistic rivalry depends on external validation; they fear social failure (Geukes et al., 2017), leading them to engage in defensive mechanisms, such as aggression and devaluing others (Wurst et al., 2017). Evidence points to differences between narcissistic admiration and rivalry, with the

former associated with better overall social functioning, more positive affect, but poorer overall mental health (Grove et al., 2019).

Leader narcissism has frequently been linked to abusive supervision, but the findings are mixed (i.e., positive or no association; Breevaart & Schyns, 2025; Nevicka et al., 2018) and context-dependent (Gauglitz et al., 2023; Gauglitz & Schyns, 2024): narcissists seem to exhibit abusive supervision predominantly under conditions of resource depletion (Sheng et al., 2025), which is consistent with our theoretical argument. Given that unhealthy eating is associated with negative self-referential emotions, such as guilt (Cho & Kim, 2022) and the overall positive traits and stereotypes associated with individuals who eat healthily (Watkins et al., 2022), we posit that narcissistic leaders experience identity threat from within (Tepper et al., 2017) following unhealthy eating. That is, their assessment of their own value and superiority will be diminished which will result in narcissistic leaders engaging in self-regulation to restore their grandiose self-view. Such self-regulatory responses will differ for leaders high on narcissistic admiration versus rivalry.

We propose that after-work unhealthy eating should yield a self-regulatory response, with leaders' engagement in abusive supervision on the next day diverging along the lines of admiration and rivalry. Specifically, we argue that when leaders high in narcissistic admiration give in to the urge to eat unhealthy food after a depleting work day, they respond to this resource loss spiral and identity threat by engaging in self-promotional strategies, such as showcasing their achievements and ingratiating themselves with others at work (in line with assertive self-enhancement self-regulation strategies; Back et al., 2013). Given that the main priority of such leaders is to bolster their desired self-image and gain social validation (Back et al., 2013), they will be less likely to resort to abusive supervisory tactics and assert dominance. Such behaviour would contradict their need for positive acknowledgement and validation (Gauglitz et al., 2023; Grove et al., 2019). Therefore, leaders' narcissistic admiration will act as a buffer against the positive effect of unhealthy eating on next-day abusive supervision.

In contrast, when leaders high in narcissistic rivalry engage in after-work unhealthy eating, they may interpret it as a form of personal failure (Geukes et al., 2017) given that individuals who eat healthily are generally perceived to be in control (Watkins et al., 2022). When experiencing self-regulation resource depletion as would result from a work–nonwork–work resource loss spiral, such leaders would fail to monitor and self-regulate the negative tendencies linked to their narcissistic rivalry. Thus, they engage in degrading others as a form of antagonistic self-protection self-regulatory strategy (Back et al., 2013), increasing their likelihood of exhibiting abusive supervision the next day. This aligns with their aggressive tendencies and serves as a manifestation of self-regulatory strategies focused on self-preservation in the face of identity threat (Gauglitz et al., 2023). Therefore, leaders' narcissistic rivalry will augment the positive effect of unhealthy eating on next-day abusive supervision.

Indirect empirical support for our conclusion on the different moderating effects of leaders' narcissistic rivalry and admiration comes from previous research on the effects of unhealthy eating. Cho and Kim (2022) demonstrate that trait emotional stability has a buffering effect on next-day physical and emotional strain following unhealthy eating. Since high emotional stability co-occurs with narcissistic admiration, and low emotional stability co-occurs with narcissistic rivalry (Rogoza et al., 2016), we anticipate that leaders high on narcissistic rivalry will find it harder to regulate their emotions and suppress their urge to act abusively towards their followers, whereas leaders high on narcissistic admiration may be less affected by prior unhealthy eating.

Returning to the W-HR model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012), we posit that the work–nonwork–work resource loss spiral will be more consequential in terms of abusive supervision behaviours for leaders high on narcissistic rivalry and less so for leaders high on narcissistic admiration.

Hypothesis 4. The indirect positive effect of leaders' daily work-induced ego depletion on next-day abusive supervision, via after-work unhealthy eating, is moderated by leaders' (a) narcissistic admiration and (b) narcissistic rivalry. Specifically, higher levels of narcissistic admiration will weaken the effect of after-work unhealthy eating on next-day abusive supervision, while higher levels of narcissistic rivalry will strengthen it.

METHOD

Sample and procedure

Multisource (i.e., leaders and their followers) daily diary data were gathered over 10 consecutive working days from five organizations in China, with workforces ranging from 50 to 100 employees, in the retail, hospitality, banking and construction industries, located in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Zhejiang. To be eligible for the study, participants needed to be employed full-time and followers were required to have daily face-to-face interactions with their leaders.

Recruitment was conducted using the first author's personal network. Invitations were emailed to potential participants, containing a summary of the study and access links to the baseline surveys, accessible after consent. The baseline survey collected demographic information from leaders and followers and leaders' self-rated narcissism. Two weeks later, respondents received links to the daily surveys. Leaders reported work-induced ego depletion and daily unhealthy eating at 9 pm, whereas followers rated their leaders' abusive supervision after work at 6 pm. Daily surveys were distributed via text messages through *Wenjuanxing*, a survey platform equivalent to *Qualtrics*. Respondents were given a small monetary incentive per survey and those who completed all surveys qualified for a prize draw (see [Supplementary Materials](#) for further details). This study was approved by the University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee in May 2021.

Two hundred and twenty-five leaders and 378 followers were invited to participate. At baseline, 175 and 290 usable responses were obtained from leaders (response rate = 77.8%) and followers (response rate = 76.7%), respectively. To ensure sufficient data for testing the time-lagged relationships in our model, we included only participants who completed at least three daily surveys (e.g., Cho & Kim, 2022). To avoid overreliance on the perception of single followers, we excluded leaders with only one matched follower from the final sample (e.g., Barnes et al., 2015). This yielded a final sample of 112 leaders and 225 followers. Of the leaders, 44 were women (39.3%) and most (53.6%) were 31–40 years old, followed by 34.8%, 12% and one participant who were in the 21–30, 41–50 and 51–60 age brackets, respectively. Most leaders had undergraduate degrees (88%) and were married or cohabiting (92%), rather than single (8%). The leaders' average organizational tenure was 9 years. The follower sample included 120 women (52%), averaging 31–40 years. Most (82%) had undergraduate degrees and an average organizational tenure of 8 years. The majority were married (64%), with 19% single and 17% divorced.

Measures

To ensure validity, we used the existing Chinese versions of the scales (narcissism, work-induced ego depletion and next-day abusive supervision) or employed the commonly used back-translation procedure (after-work unhealthy eating) (Brislin, 1983). To assess scale reliability, we used McDonald's omega (ω), which addresses tau-equivalence issues (Hayes & Coutts, 2020). A list of all survey items is provided in the [Supplementary Materials](#).

Leaders' narcissistic admiration ($\omega = .92$) and rivalry ($\omega = .91$)

We measured leader narcissism in the baseline survey using the 18-item Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire (Back et al., 2013) with responses rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Example items include: 'Being a very special person gives me a lot of strength' (admiration) and 'I secretly take pleasure in the failure of my rivals' (rivalry).

Daily work-induced ego depletion ($\omega = .80$; 9 pm)

We used five items from Twenge et al.'s (2004) state self-control capacity scale to measure leaders' daily work-induced ego depletion; it ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item is: 'Today after work, I feel drained'.

After-work unhealthy eating ($\omega = .78$; 9 pm)

We used a four-item daily food consumption measure to assess leaders' after-work unhealthy eating (Liu et al., 2017), with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item is: 'Today, I had a lot of unhealthy snacks after work'.

Leaders' next-day abusive supervision ($\omega = .94$; 6 pm)

We used a modified version of Tepper's (2000) abusive supervision scale, as adapted and previously used in daily diary studies (e.g., Courtright et al., 2016), to measure followers' perceptions of abusive supervision. An example item, rated from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) is: 'Today, my leader ridiculed me'. We calculated the average daily score for each leader by aggregating follower ratings based on evidence that team members adopt a shared mental model of the level of a leader's abusive supervision (Barnes et al., 2015). Our aggregation was empirically justified by a meaningful within-group agreement ($ICC(1) = .13, p < .01$), indicating that 13% of the variance in abusive supervision could be attributed to differences between leaders. Our $ICC(2)$ value (.23) is expectedly modest, given the small average group size (two followers per leader).

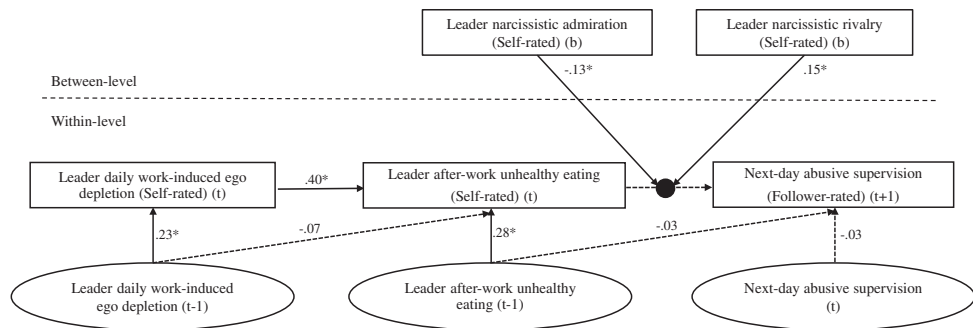
Control variables

We controlled for leaders' age, gender and marital status (married/cohabiting versus single) at baseline. The theoretical significance of marital status is also reflected in previous research, showing that single individuals tend to eat alone more frequently (Sobal & Nelson, 2003) and that those who eat alone tend to have a poorer overall diet (Chae et al., 2018).

Analytical strategy

Data¹ were treated as days (Level 1) nested in leaders (Level 2) and analysed using Dynamic Structural Equation Modelling (DSEM) in Mplus Version 8.7 (Asparouhov et al., 2018; Muthén & Muthén, 2017). DSEM incorporates four data modelling approaches: time series, multilevel, structural equation and time-varying modelling (Asparouhov et al., 2018), allowing between-person variation to be modelled alongside intensive longitudinal data. DSEM is suited to our design because it allows for the handling of missing data in a way that accommodates unequal time intervals (i.e., irregular measurement occasions; McNeish & Hamaker, 2020; McNeish & MacKinnon, 2025). This is done using the Kalman filter which uses observed lagged data to predict values at the next time interval and update such predictions based on available observed data (McNeish & MacKinnon, 2025). Thus, DSEM enables the investigation of dynamic relationships among latent variables, while accommodating

¹All data and Mplus syntax are available through Open Science Framework: https://osf.io/j6f3a/overview?view_only=ce5b37eb47c54453986dca262ccc29c4.



Note. t = focal day; t+1 = following day; b = baseline survey; ● = random within-person slope.

FIGURE 2 Dynamic structural equation model with autoregressive paths.

unequal intervals between observations. In daily diary research, uneven intervals may occur because of participants missing scheduled assessments (Hamaker et al., 2021). Furthermore, it enables us to model autoregressive² lagged effects, which account for the non-independence of observations. DSEM also allows for the modelling of potential between-person differences in within-level relationships (i.e., random slopes; Asparouhov et al., 2018). Figure 2 represents the intuitive autoregressive paths in our DSEM.

We used Bayesian methods for model estimation, which offer a more flexible model specification and more stable inference when dealing with complex hierarchical data and random effects (Asparouhov et al., 2018). We estimated DSEM using the Bayesian Markov chain Monte Carlo method. Bayesian estimation combines the likelihood of data with diffuse prior distributions for each unknown parameter to yield a posterior probability distribution over the parameter space, rather than the single-point estimate produced by maximum likelihood (Asparouhov et al., 2018). For each parameter, we report the median of the posterior distribution as the point estimate and 90% posterior credible intervals (CrIs). When the 90% CrI excludes zero, the posterior probability that the true value and point estimates lie on the same side of zero exceeds .95. We treat an effect as supported when its 90% CrI excludes zero.

The Level 2 variables (i.e., admiration and rivalry) were grand-mean centred in line with standard practice (McNeish & Hamaker, 2020). We allowed same-level variables within the model to covary.

To test the hypothesized indirect effect, we followed the multilevel mediation guidelines by Preacher et al. (2010) to calculate the indirect and total effects at the within-level.

We followed the suggestions of Aguinis et al. (2013) and Preacher et al. (2016) to test our cross-level moderations. In line with Aguinis et al.'s (2013) recommendation to unambiguously identify cross-level effects, we specify that we do not rely on interaction (product) terms for our analysis; rather, we test our cross-level moderation at the person level (Level 2) by regressing the random slope (Level 2) of the within-person relationship between after-work unhealthy eating and next-day abusive supervision (both Level 1) on narcissistic admiration and rivalry (Level 2). A coefficient with 90% CrI that excludes zero indicates a moderating effect which can be explored by inspecting the Johnson-Neyman plot. This plot identifies the moderator regions in which the 90% CrI for the conditional effect of the predictor on the outcome excludes zero.

For the cross-level moderated mediation, we formed an index by multiplying the moderated relationship by the Level 1 relationship between daily work-induced ego depletion and after-work unhealthy

²Although we did not specifically hypothesise autoregressive effects, their inclusion in the DSEM was essential to make confident inferences about the direction of causality and address temporal dependence. This is often overlooked in longitudinal studies, but enhances confidence in our results (Asparouhov et al., 2018).

eating (Bauer et al., 2006) to examine whether the 90% CrI for the moderated mediation effect excluded zero at different levels of the moderators.

RESULTS

We conducted a multilevel confirmatory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors. Our model showed strong fit [χ^2 (208)=993.129, $p<.001$, CFI=.84, TLI=.82, RMSEA=.03, SRMR_{within}=.04, SRMR_{between}=.13]. To evaluate discriminant validity, we compared our model with two alternative models using maximum likelihood restricted scaled correction factors. We used the Deviance Information Criterion (DIC) to compare model fit from a Bayesian perspective (McNeish & Hamaker, 2020). DIC takes into account both model complexity (number of parameters) and fit (deviance). Our proposed five-factor model provided a good fit for the data (DIC=47,344), performing better than the two 2-factor models in which we combined all between-level (DIC=57,673) and all within-level variables (DIC=60,653), respectively.

We used 10,000 iterations and two parallel chains and the first half of each chain was discarded as burn-in, following standard Mplus practice, yielding 5000 post-burn-in iterations per chain (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2010). Convergence was assessed using the potential scale reduction factor (PSR). Convergence was supported by a PSR of 1.045 in the final iteration, below both the conventional threshold of 1.10 and the default threshold of 1.05 used in Mplus (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2010). No convergence problems were observed. The PSR trajectories across iterations are provided in the Supplementary Materials (Table S6.1).

We conducted a Monte Carlo power analysis (500 replications) using Mplus. With our current design, simulation-based power estimates indicated high power (>80%) for detecting cross-level moderation by narcissistic admiration (82%) and narcissistic rivalry (96%) and moderate power (>70%) for indirect effects. These results suggest that our design generally provides sufficient power to test the key hypotheses, although caution is warranted when interpreting smaller indirect effects.

The bivariate correlations, means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1. Below, the hypothesized effects' findings are presented, including leader age, gender and marital status as controls. The Supplementary Materials contain the results of the same analysis without control variables (see

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations.

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Between-level variables									
1. Leader age (b)	2.78	.67							
2. Leader gender (b)	.40	.50	-.21**						
3. Leader marital status (b)	.92	.27	.15	.10					
4. Leader narcissistic admiration (b)	4.20	.96	-.21**	.20**	.10				
5. Leader narcissistic rivalry (b)	2.58	.95	-.10**	-.11	-.17	.04			
Within-level variables									
6. Leader daily work-induced ego depletion (t)	2.24	.78	.02	-.02	.02	-.08*	.08*		
7. Leader after-work unhealthy eating (t)	1.78	.75	-.03	.03	.04	.01	-.01	.45**	
8. Follower-rated next-day abusive supervision (t+1)	1.84	.64	.06	.01	-.07*	.00	.01	.01	.04

Note: Leader age was coded as 1=21–30, 2=31–40, 3=41–50, 4=51–60, 5>60. Leader gender was coded as 0=Male and 1=Female. Marital status was coded as 0=Not married and 1=Married/cohabiting. b=baseline survey; t=focal day; t+1=following day.

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table S5.1), indicating a similar pattern of results, just with different significance levels linked to the cross-level moderation of leader narcissistic admiration (H4a).

Hypothesis testing

H1 predicted that leaders' daily work-induced ego depletion would be positively related to after-work unhealthy eating, which our analysis supported (estimate = .40; 90% CrI [.34, .47]). H2 predicted that leaders' after-work unhealthy eating would positively relate to followers' perceptions of their leaders' next-day abusive supervision. However, our results did not support this proposition (estimate = .09; 90% CrI [−.06, .25]). H3 proposed an indirect relationship between leaders' daily work-induced ego depletion and follower-reported next-day abusive supervision through unhealthy eating. This was not supported; the 90% CrI for the indirect effect included zero (indirect effect = .01, 90% CrI [−.05, .07]).

H4a and H4b proposed that leader narcissism (admiration and rivalry) would moderate the second path of the indirect effect of daily work-induced ego depletion on next-day abusive supervision through after-work unhealthy eating. Our analyses showed that admiration acted as a cross-level moderator of the effect of after-work unhealthy eating on next-day abusive supervision, with the 90% CrI excluding zero (estimate = −.13, 90% CrI [−.23, −.02]). The direction of this effect was negative, contrary to H4a. Rather than weakening the effect of after-work unhealthy eating on next-day abusive supervision, narcissistic admiration reverses it, from positive to negative. That is, after-work unhealthy eating is linked to lower abusive supervision for leaders high on narcissistic admiration. Leaders' narcissistic rivalry positively moderated the slope of interest (estimate = .15; 90% CrI [.03, .26]), thus supporting H4b. The results of all hypotheses tests are presented in Table 2. Figures 3 and 4 show the Johnson–Neyman plots used to investigate cross-level moderations. At low levels of leader admiration (light grey region), the 90% CrI for the conditional moderation effect includes zero and is therefore not supported. Conversely, for leaders with high levels of narcissistic admiration or both high and low levels of rivalry, the 90% CrI excludes zero, indicating moderated effects (dark grey region).

Figure 3 shows that the higher a leader's narcissistic admiration, the stronger the *negative* effect of after-work unhealthy eating on next-day abusive supervision; this is only at high levels of leader narcissistic admiration. Figure 4 shows the opposite for leaders high on narcissistic rivalry: a higher narcissistic rivalry score is associated with a stronger *positive* effect of after-work unhealthy eating on next-day abusive supervision. To further illustrate these effects and aid interpretation, we present plots in Figures S1 and S2, which show the within-person effect (projected slope) for leaders high and low in narcissistic admiration and rivalry, respectively.

We further assessed the conditional indirect effects at high (+1 *SD*) and low (−1 *SD*) levels of the cross-level moderators. We found that the conditional indirect effect of work-related ego depletion on next-day abusive supervision, through after-work unhealthy eating, is supported only when leaders' narcissistic admiration is high (estimate = −.22; 90% CrI [−.46, −.01]), but not at low levels (estimate = −.13; 90% CrI [−.28, .01]). In contrast, the conditional indirect effect was supported at both low (estimate = .14; 90% CrI [.04, .24]) and high (estimate = .26; 90% CrI [.06, .43]) levels of leader narcissistic rivalry.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we explore the daily work and nonwork antecedents of abusive supervision, as well as their interaction with leader narcissism, given the negative implications of abusive supervisors for organizations and their members (Fischer et al., 2021). To achieve this, we drew on the W-HR model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012) to develop hypotheses on the effect of work-induced ego depletion on after-work unhealthy eating and next-day abusive supervision, moderated by leader narcissistic admiration and rivalry. We used daily diary data from 112 Chinese leaders and 225 followers over 10 consecutive working days to test our model. Our results support the prediction that leaders are more

TABLE 2 Dynamic structural equation model results with credibility intervals.

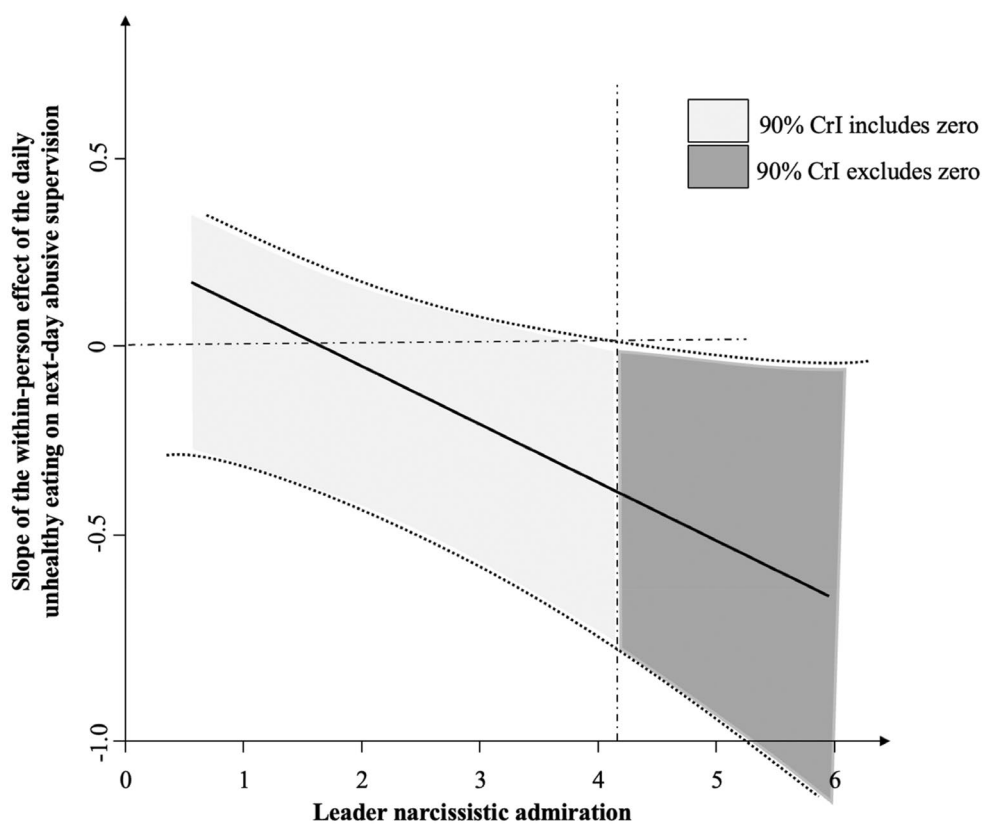
	Null model			Leader after-work unhealthy eating (t)			Follower-rated next-day abusive supervision (t + 1)		
	Estimate	SD	90% CrI	Estimate	SD	90% CrI	Estimate	SD	90% CrI
Level 1: Within-person (daily) variables									
Leader daily work-induced ego depletion (t)				.40*	.04	[.34, .47]	.01	.04	[−.05, .08]
Leader after-work unhealthy eating (t)							.09	.08	[−.06, .25]
Latent lagged variables									
Leader daily work-induced ego depletion (t-1)				−.07	.05	[−.16, .02]			
Leader after-work unhealthy eating (t-1)							−.03	.04	[−.10, .04]
Autoregressive regression coefficients	.24*	.06	[.13, .35]	.28*	.05	[.19, .37]	−.03	.05	[−.11, .06]
Residual variances	.52*	.03	[.47, .57]	.41*	.03	[.36, .45]	.31*	.02	[.27, .34]
Level 1: Indirect effect of leader work-induced ego depletion (t) on follower-rated next-day abusive supervision (t + 1), via leader after-work unhealthy eating (t)									
							.01	.04	[−.05, .07]
Level 2: Between-person variables									
Leader daily work-induced ego depletion (t)				.71*	.24	[.41, 1.10]	−.20	1.52	[−1.67, 2.30]
Leader after-work unhealthy eating (t)							.16	2.35	[−3.43, 2.17]
Control variables									
Leader age							.08*	.04	[.01, .15]
Leader gender							.01	.05	[−.07, .09]
Leader marital status							−.21*	.09	[−.35, −.07]
Residual variances				.01*	.01	[.00, .01]	.00*	.00	[.00, .01]
Slope	.17*	.05	[.09, .25]						
Intercept	.10	.08	[−.04, .24]	.20	.55	[−.71, .83]	1.98*	1.11	[.95, 3.53]

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Null model			Leader after-work unhealthy eating (t)			Follower-rated next-day abusive supervision (t + 1)		
	Estimate	SD	90% CrI	Estimate	SD	90% CrI	Estimate	SD	90% CrI
Level 2: Moderation									
Cross-level moderation effect of leader narcissistic admiration on the within-person effect of the mediator on the outcome (slope)							-.13*	.06	[-.23, -.02]
Moderated effect at <i>low</i> leader narcissistic admiration ($-1SD$)							-.32	.22	[-.68, .03]
Moderated effect at <i>high</i> leader narcissistic admiration ($+1SD$)							-.56*	.34	[-1.13, -.02]
Cross-level moderation effect of leader narcissistic rivalry on the within-person effect of the mediator on the outcome (slope)							.15*	.07	[.03, .26]
Moderated effect at <i>low</i> leader narcissistic rivalry ($-1SD$)							.35*	.15	[.11, .59]
Moderated effect at <i>high</i> leader narcissistic rivalry ($+1SD$)							.64*	.27	[.19, 1.07]
Level 2: Moderated mediation									
Moderated mediation effect at low leader narcissistic admiration ($-1SD$)							-.13	.09	[-.28, .01]
Moderated mediation effect at high leader narcissistic admiration ($+1SD$)							-.22*	.14	[-.46, -.01]
Moderated mediation effect at low leader narcissistic rivalry ($-1SD$)							.14*	.06	[.04, .24]
Moderated mediation effect at high leader narcissistic rivalry ($+1SD$)							.26*	.11	[.06, .43]

Note: The 90% CrI provided correspond to Bayesian credibility intervals. Results of leader after-work unhealthy eating (t) on follower-rated next-day abusive supervision (t + 1) are obtained from within-level standardized estimates averaged over clusters in Mplus. The within-person slope of leader after-work unhealthy eating (t) on follower-rated next-day abusive supervision (t + 1) is allowed to vary. Leader gender was coded as 0 = Male and 1 = Female. Leader marital status was coded as 0 = Not married and 1 = Married/cohabiting.

*90% CrIs excludes zero.



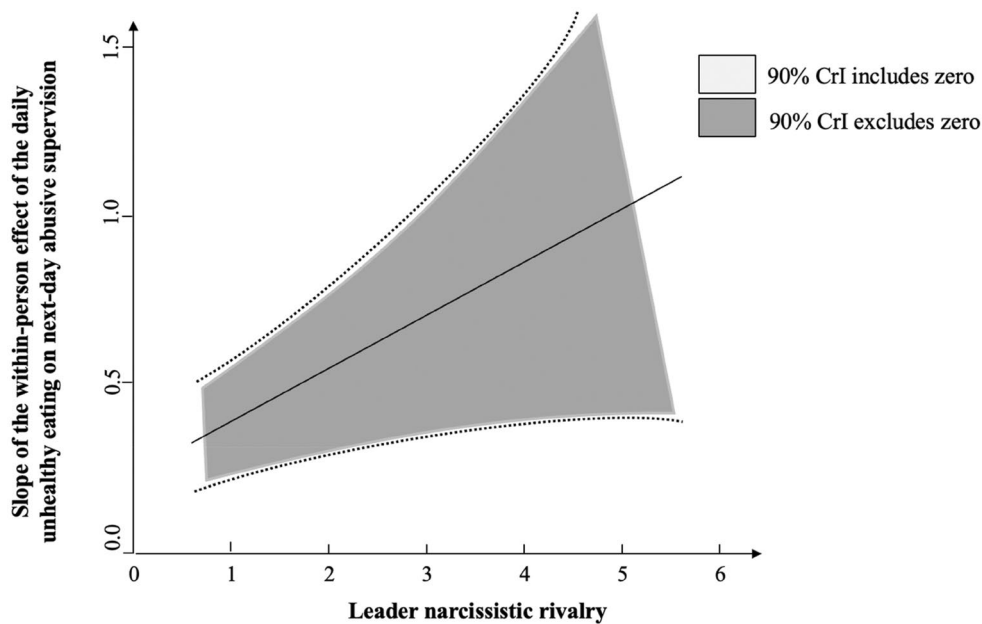
Note. The reported intervals are Bayesian credible intervals (CrI).

FIGURE 3 Cross-level moderation effect of leader narcissistic admiration on within-person slope.

likely to engage in unhealthy eating when they experience daily work-induced ego depletion. Contrary to expectations, after-work unhealthy eating did not lead to next-day abusive supervision. However, this effect was contingent on leaders' narcissistic traits. Surprisingly, more after-work unhealthy eating was associated with lower next-day abusive supervision for leaders high in narcissistic admiration, while there was no association between the two for leaders low on narcissistic admiration. As hypothesized, leaders' narcissistic rivalry strengthened the positive effect of after-work unhealthy eating on next-day abusive behaviour.

Theoretical implications

This study advances our knowledge of the dynamic and nuanced drivers of negative leader behaviours by identifying daily work and nonwork factors that contribute to fluctuations in abusive supervision and combining cross-domain and leader-centric approaches to studying abusive supervision. Several studies have shown that daily work- (e.g., Foulk et al., 2018) and nonwork-related triggers (e.g., Barnes et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2024) can explain why leaders engage in abusive behaviours on some days but not on others. These studies typically focus on either work or nonwork triggers of supervisory abuse or spillover effects from one domain to the other (e.g., Courtright et al., 2016; Dionisi & Barling, 2019). However, the W-HR model proposes that resource loss/gain spirals between domains are not limited to one domain affecting the other (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Our study demonstrates that work strains trigger a work–nonwork–work chain reaction with compounding adverse



Note. The reported intervals are Bayesian credible intervals (CrI).

FIGURE 4 Cross-level moderation effect of leader narcissistic rivalry on within-person slope.

consequences that unfold over time. As such, it contributes to the limited pool of evidence that resource loss/gain spirals may occur across several work–nonwork–domain transitions; and endorses past studies that demonstrate the effects of full cycle nonwork–work–nonwork processes. For example, Liu et al. (2017) demonstrated that the previous night's sleep decreased the effect of work-related stressors on after-work unhealthy eating (i.e., nonwork–work–nonwork spiral).

Eating behaviour is a relatively understudied nonwork behaviour, which is ubiquitous, and our findings demonstrate that it plays a complex role as a resource-depleting mechanism for organizational leaders. Previous studies report mixed results regarding the relationship between depletion and unhealthy eating (Liu et al., 2017; Sonnentag et al., 2017; Vasiljeva et al., 2023). Our study adds some clarity to this relationship by using time-separated measures and a rigorous data analytic technique that isolates within-person effects to show that ego depletion does indeed result in people eating more unhealthily. This could be attributed to the depletion of self-regulatory resources, which are necessary for resisting temptation and making choices and decisions. While we focused only on organizational leaders, it is reasonable to expect that work-induced ego depletion may affect eating behaviours irrespective of profession or managerial status. This is in line with the basic principles of the W-HR model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012) and should be considered when theorizing and studying the spillover effects of work experiences on broader health and wellbeing behaviours.

The downstream effects of after-work unhealthy eating on next-day work behaviours are less clear in our data. Cho and Kim (2022) demonstrated that prior-day unhealthy eating leads to lower resource-intensive work behaviours, such as helping, and more withdrawal behaviours, mediated by emotional and physical strain. While we expected a similar process to unfold for leaders, leading to next-day abusive supervision due to personal resource depletion, we did not find a main effect between unhealthy eating and abusive supervisory behaviours. Our findings also contrast with other day-level studies of abusive supervision that observed direct effects of daily nonwork triggers such as sleep quality and air pollution (Barnes et al., 2015; Khan et al., 2024). A potential explanation could be that different processes underlie unhealthy eating compared to factors such as sleep quality and environmental conditions that are largely outside one's control, and thus not

subject to self-regulatory capacity. Furthermore, unhealthy eating might generally lead to the *omission* of positive behaviours, such as reduced helping behaviours or increased withdrawal behaviours (Cho & Kim, 2022), due to depleted self-regulatory resources, rather than *active engagement* in overtly negative behaviours, which themselves require interpersonal interaction and may expend personal resources, such as energy and cognition. In addition, it is plausible that the extent to which nonwork factors affect abusive supervision behaviours depends on the timeframe (i.e., same-day versus next-day effects; Khan et al., 2024), with more proximal experiences such as sleep (Barnes et al., 2015) and commuting (Chen et al., 2023) being more likely to have an effect than prior-day behaviours. Cho and Kim (2022) show that personal resources (e.g., emotional stability) play a moderating role on the effect of unhealthy eating on next-day responses, which may explain why the effect of unhealthy eating on abusive supervision was not supported. Indeed, this personal resource explanation is demonstrated by our findings on the moderating role of leader narcissism.

Evidence on the association between narcissism and abusive supervision is mixed (e.g., Nevicka et al., 2018). To shed light on this issue, we drew on the dual model of narcissism (Back et al., 2013), which distinguishes admiration from rivalry based on individuals' reactions along different self-regulatory strategies. Past research points to leader narcissistic admiration being less important for predicting abusive supervision, with evidence indicating that those high in narcissistic admiration have higher abusive intentions (Gauglitz & Schyns, 2024); however, there is a non-significant effect on actual abusive behaviours reported by followers (Gauglitz et al., 2023). Our findings indicate that leaders high on narcissistic admiration are less likely to exhibit abusive supervision behaviours when they engage in unhealthy eating behaviours the previous evening. One possible interpretation of this finding is that since unhealthy eating behaviours are associated with feelings of guilt and shame (Cho & Kim, 2022), leaders high on narcissistic admiration experience this as a threat to their ego; in response, they seek to restore their grandiose self-image through positive behaviours towards their followers that would elicit admiration. This results in behaviours that combine a greater focus on themselves with a lesser focus on others. This is consistent with the self-promotion responses of individuals high on narcissistic admiration (Back et al., 2013). What is more concerning about our findings is that leaders high on narcissistic admiration are more likely to exhibit abusive supervision behaviours when they have *not* engaged in unhealthy eating behaviours the previous evening. Returning to our theorizing based on self-regulatory resource use and depletion, Baumeister and Vohs (2003) explain that resisting temptation is a situation in which self-regulatory resources are used and temporarily depleted. Extrapolating this to the example of unhealthy eating, we infer that resisting unhealthy food may reduce leaders' self-regulatory resources, resulting in misregulation in the form of abusive behaviour. For leaders high on narcissistic admiration, such an exacerbated state of depletion, combined with a positive self-image from resisting unhealthy and socially undesirable food choices, may eliminate the motive for self-promotion through positive behaviours and restrict their ability to resist abusive impulses. This is supported by previous research that shows self-regulatory impairment leads to abusive supervisory behaviour (Fan et al., 2020; Mawritz et al., 2017).

Leaders' narcissistic rivalry had an augmenting effect in our data, with the positive effect of unhealthy eating on abusive supervision being stronger for leaders high on narcissistic rivalry. Past research has demonstrated that experiences that may be interpreted as a threat to one's grandiose self-image would lead to abusive supervisor behaviours among leaders high on narcissistic rivalry (Gauglitz et al., 2023; Gauglitz & Schyns, 2024). Following an ego depleting day at work, unhealthy eating is likely to trigger feelings of guilt and self-loathing (Cho & Kim, 2022) that could be considered a threat to one's ego; in leaders high on narcissistic rivalry, this would prompt antagonistic self-defence attempts at self-regulation, associated to hostile and aggressive behaviours towards others (Back et al., 2013). Thus, our study reinforces the dual nature of narcissism with regard to leadership outcomes (Fehn & Schütz, 2021; Gauglitz et al., 2023), driven by its divergent self-regulatory strategies; it contributes to explaining why research that focuses on a single dimension of grandiose narcissism shows inconsistent relationships with abusive supervision (e.g., Nevicka et al., 2018) while

also highlighting the need to explore both situational, and variable and stable individual factors for comprehensive behavioural explanations.

Practical implications

Our findings offer important practical insights into managing abusive supervision through interventions that mitigate self-regulatory resource depletion. First, our findings suggest that organizations can reduce leaders' after-work unhealthy eating by tackling work-induced ego depletion, and prevent the initiation of the resource loss spiral. Drawing on the job demands and resources model (Bakker et al., 2004) organizations can derive a range of job design best-practices to limit ego depletion by matching the level of workplace demands (e.g., delegating work) on an employee with an appropriate mix and level of resources (e.g., feedback). Organizations can encourage leaders to set clear daily goals and establish switch-off times, in line with evidence that a clear separation between work and nonwork time reduces ego depletion (Germeys & De Gieter, 2018). Such practices will help reduce leaders' work-related ego depletion and thus reduce after-work unhealthy eating.

Second, based on our findings, organizations interested in reducing supervisory abuse may benefit from supporting leaders in avoiding after-work unhealthy eating habits by reducing the required self-regulatory resource expenditure for making food choices. This can be achieved, for instance, through the provision of on-site facilities such as free fresh fruit and nuts, vending machines with nutritious snack options, or discounted healthy meal kit subscriptions.

Finally, our findings suggest that organizations should adopt a nuanced and individualized approach to supporting leaders and averting abusive supervision, given the reverse effects of unhealthy eating on abusive supervision between leaders high on narcissistic admiration versus rivalry. Supporting leaders to become self-aware and develop mindfulness skills and practices (Vasiljeva et al., 2023) is an evidence-based method for circumventing the ego-depletion-driven effects of leader narcissism on abusive supervision.

Limitations and future research directions

Despite its strengths (e.g., multisource and cross-lagged data), this study is not without limitations. First, we did not observe the hypothesized positive association between leaders' after-work unhealthy eating and next-day abusive supervision. Apart from our findings on the role of leader narcissism in shaping this relationship, other personality traits that are relevant to self-regulation (McCrae & Löckenhoff, 2010), such as emotional stability and conscientiousness can be investigated. These may better explain the effect in question: lower scores on both may augment the effect of unhealthy eating on abusive behaviours. In addition, since the mediating effect of affect on the relationship between unhealthy evening eating and next-day workplace behaviours is well established (see Cho & Kim, 2022), future research should explicitly consider affect as a key mechanism that carries the effect of prior-day eating behaviour on abusive supervision, alongside other proximal mediators, such as sleep quality and duration and morning routines (e.g., commuting, Chen et al., 2023).

An alternative explanation may be offered by the cultural characteristics of our Chinese sample. For instance, although unhealthy eating items are fairly well-known, definitions of what constitutes unhealthy eating vary across cultural contexts and can be influenced by national (e.g., food prices) and cultural (e.g., eating norms) factors (Chen & Antonelli, 2020). Additionally, perceptions of abusive supervision can differ across cultures and are shaped by countries' distinct societal norms and expectations (Vogel et al., 2015). By extension, the link between after-work unhealthy eating and next-day abusive supervision may depend on cultural norms and future research should test this relationship across cultures and explore potential culture-variant moderators. Power distance, an important cultural indicator in the Chinese context, has been found to have a positive effect on

abusive supervision across several studies (e.g., Vogel et al., 2015); this may restrict the variation in daily abusive supervision in our sample, with the effect of unhealthy eating on abusive supervision potentially being contingent on low power distance. In low power distance cultures, where abusive supervisory behaviours may be more counter-normative than in our sample, there may be greater variation in within-person abusive behaviours, which may be determined by more proximal factors, such as unhealthy eating. Therefore, future research should explore the moderating effects of cultural norms, such as power distance.

Second, we theorized that after-work unhealthy eating triggers negative emotions (e.g., shame and guilt), exacerbates self-regulation depletion and disrupts the resource restoration process, resulting in next-day abusive supervision. However, we did not directly measure affect or self-regulatory resource processes. Regarding the temporal and causal order of after-work unhealthy eating and next-day abusive supervision, it is plausible that the negative emotions brought about by unhealthy eating lead to self-corrective behaviours, resulting in healthier eating on subsequent days. Therefore, future studies should measure emotions and self-regulatory processes while adopting sequential measurement approaches to clarify this relationship.

Additionally, although self-reports are often necessary to capture personality, studies have shown that others' personality ratings, especially of narcissism, can be more predictive and accurate than self-ratings (Fehn & Schütz, 2021). Objective indicators, such as the size of leaders' signatures or their frequency of using first-person pronouns (Mailhos et al., 2016), may provide less biased measures of narcissistic traits. Further approaches to triangulating the findings of our research could involve multisource ratings of leader narcissism, with raters drawn from both the work and nonwork domains, as well as from different hierarchical levels in the organization. Similarly, self-report eating behaviour measures may be biased in the direction of more positive and socially acceptable eating choices. This could be a limitation in daily diary studies, as people may find that reporting their eating one day may influence their eating behaviour thereafter, especially if they anticipate reporting again the following day (Mann & Ward, 2025). Future research should validate our findings using more observational and quantified measures of eating behaviours; these should replace participants' reflections and reporting on food choices with measured food quantities or equipment for accurate food intake recording.

Finally, although our study spanned two consecutive weeks, which is an appropriate duration for capturing meaningful daily fluctuations in leader behaviours (e.g., Gerpott et al., 2022), we acknowledge that leader behaviours may also vary over longer periods. Future research should test longer-term effects of work–nonwork resource loss and gain spirals, as well as the duration and fluctuation in resource depletion and replenishment, in order to explore how persistent and consistent these effects are.

CONCLUSION

This daily diary study highlights that on days when leaders feel more depleted after work, they are more likely to eat unhealthily. However, we found that after-work unhealthy eating did not increase next-day abusive supervision. Instead, this relationship was contingent on leaders' narcissistic admiration and rivalry. High narcissistic rivalry amplified these effects, resulting in leaders acting more abusively towards their followers the next day. High narcissistic admiration was a mitigating factor and decreased the likelihood of abusive supervision for leaders who engaged in unhealthy eating the prior evening.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Xiaoyu Gan: Conceptualization; methodology; software; data curation; formal analysis; visualization; investigation; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing; resources; project administration; validation. **Anna Topakas:** Conceptualization; methodology; software; formal analysis; data curation; visualization; validation; resources; writing – review and editing; project administration. **Kristin**

Hildenbrand: Conceptualization; methodology; data curation; visualization; investigation; validation; writing – review and editing; supervision; project administration; writing – original draft. **Kara Ng:** Writing – review and editing; supervision; project administration. **Malcolm Patterson:** Writing – review and editing; supervision; project administration.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in OSF at https://osf.io/j6f3a/overview?view_only=ce5b37eb47c54453986dca262cce29c4.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

Figure S1.

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