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The Moderating Effects of Personal Reputation on Accountability–Strain Relationships

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Although felt accountability has predicted positive outcomes in some studies, it has demonstrated anxiety-provoking properties in others. This inconsistency has led researchers to search for moderating variables that explain why felt accountability promotes or impedes favorable outcomes. Building on these studies, the authors examine the moderating effects of personal reputation on the felt accountability–strain relationship. As hypothesized, the results indicate that a positive personal reputation ameliorated the strain reactions caused by felt accountability. In particular, as felt accountability increased, individuals with strong personal reputations experienced less job tension and depressed mood at work, as well as more job satisfaction, but individuals with weak personal reputations experienced the opposite outcomes.

Keywords: accountability, personal reputation, stress

Because of the recent misconduct of industry executives and political figures, there has been a call for accountability in the popular press, and academic studies conducted in organizational contexts have followed (Hochwarter et al., 2007a). This research has suggested that chaos would ensue without accountability mechanisms in place (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999), thus implying the regulatory role of accountability. However, felt accountability has the potential to predict unfavorable outcomes as well. Whether accountability serves functional or dysfunctional purposes has been the focus of scholarly attention for some time (Frink & Klimoski, 2004; Hall et al., 2003).

As is often the case, the inclusion of individual and contextual moderating factors has been helpful in discerning the conditions that promote accountability outcomes (Hall et al., 2006; Hochwarter, Perrewé, Hall, & Ferris, 2005). Building on these studies, we examine personal reputation as a factor capable of influencing the often-circuitous relationship between felt accountability and work outcomes (Hall et al., 2003). On the one hand, personal reputation, which reflects others' competency judgments of an agent (Bromley, 1993), may act as a resource that assists an individual's coping process when confronted with heightened expectations (Hall et al., 2006). On the other hand, we expect that increases in felt accountability will be associated with unfavorable strain outcomes (Doby & Caplan, 1995) when personal reputation is low because of the difficulty of accumulating, and subsequently using, stress-reducing resources.

Definition and Conceptualization of Accountability in Organizations

Definition of Felt Accountability

The content domain of felt accountability has been delineated in management, social psychology, and philosophy literatures (e.g., Frink & Klimoski, 1998; Lerner & Tetlock, 1999), with considerable overlap across definitions. In this research, we adopt Hall et al.'s (2003, p. 33) operationalization of felt accountability as "... an implicit or explicit expectation that one's decisions or actions will be subject to evaluation by some salient audience(s) with the belief that there exists the

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potential for one to receive either rewards or sanctions based on this expected evaluation."

Inherent in this definition are two important assumptions outlined by Tetlock (1991). The first, that answerability of conduct is a far-reaching component of all decision contexts, links the individual and the social system one occupies. The second, that individuals inherently seek approval and status from external sources, indicates that protecting one's identity/self-image and acquiring power/wealth are focal objectives of those who are held accountable (Tetlock, 1983). In this regard, personal reputation is an important consideration when investigating accountability dynamics in organizations.

The Nature of Felt Accountability in Organizations

A common belief in both academic and applied research is that the implementation of formal mechanisms (e.g., laws, regulations, and performance evaluation systems) ensures accountability. However, studies show that individuals who inhabit similar work environments, and have comparable demands and expectations, often report inconsistent or contradictory accountability perceptions (Frink & Klimoski, 1998; Hochwarter et al., 2007a). As a consequence, researchers (e.g., Tetlock, 1985; Hall et al., 2006) have adopted the *phenomenological view*, which conceptualizes accountability as a subjective state rather than an objective reality. Although this perspective recognizes that assessments of accountability are based in part on perceptions of objective external conditions, it emphasizes the subjective nature of the construct.

The phenomenological view of accountability is important to the current research because it promotes the consideration of contextual and individual difference factors as predictors as well as moderators of attitudes and behavior. Specifically, accountability does not exist in a vacuum; instead, perceptions regarding appropriate behavior, including performance demands and expectations, are established from contextual cues (De Cremer, Snyder, & DeWitte, 2001). Furthermore, the phenomenological view, by definition, relies heavily on individual difference factors as perceptual lenses through which reality is construed (Pervin & John, 2001). Because internal discernments of contextual cues predict both accountability and personal reputation perceptions, phenomenological considerations are warranted throughout this research.

Outcomes of Felt Accountability

Research has associated felt accountability with a number of work attitudes and behaviors, some of which are coveted by decision-makers. For example, research has found accountability to share a positive relationship with attentiveness (Mero, Guidice, & Anna, 2006), job involvement, job competency, citizenship behavior (Hall et al., 2003), and extrarole performance (Riketta & Landerer, 2002). More important to this study, heightened levels of accountability also have been linked with job satisfaction (Hochwarter, Ferris, Zinko, et al., 2007; Thoms, Dose, & Scott, 2002).

However, the potential for a "dark side" of accountability exists in virtually all organizations (Frink & Klimoski, 1998). For example, it has been argued that accountability for outcomes increases escalation of commitment to a chosen course of action, even when faulty logic has been acknowledged as a source of predecision information (Simonson & Staw, 1992). Furthermore, individuals who are held accountable are less flexible, helpful, cooperative, and accurate with information (Adelberg & Batson, 1978). In terms of negotiation behavior, research indicates that those who are held to heightened accountability standards are more likely to use contentious tactics, such as threats and attempts to dominate exchange partners (Carnevale, Pruitt, & Seilheimer, 1981). Finally, accountability has been associated with politically motivated behavior, which may divert employees from work tasks (Fandt & Ferris, 1990).

Accountability as a Stressor

In addition to these negative outcomes, it has been argued that accountability has the potential to act as a workplace stressor that causes strain reactions (Hall et al., 2003). Virtually all employees exist in a "web of accountabilities" (Frink & Klimoski, 1998) in which they experience demands from multiple sources. For example, Page (2006) reported that public managers receive demands from legal, hierarchical, professional, political, and market sources. If these accountabilities clash, individuals must prioritize their work tasks, which taps finite cognitive resources and promotes strain (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). In support, Schlenker and Weigold (1989) reported that ambiguities, demands, and strains, provoked by heightened expectations, caused individuals to "choke under pressure" (Baumeister, 1984), thus mitigating the potentially positive link between accountability and performance.

More accountability also implies increased levels of scrutiny (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999), which promotes anxiety for those prone to evaluation apprehension (White, Mitchell, & Bell, 1977). As an example, research has found that accountability for outcomes raises decision stress (Siegel-Jacobs & Yates, 1996). De Cremer (2003) suggested that accountability is stressful because as expectations increase, individuals grow increasingly concerned about the views of external evaluators. As such, strain increases when one feels overly controlled and continuously required to validate both behaviors and decisions (Green, Visser, & Tetlock, 2002).

Although scholars only have begun to position felt accountability as a stressor (Siegel-Jacobs & Yates, 1996), recent research has demonstrated a positive association between felt accountability and a variety of strain reactions (Hall et al., 2003). Hepburn and Brown's (2001) qualitative study of secondary school teachers corroborated an accountability-strain link. In particular, teachers reported feeling "tensed up" (p. 706) because of increased scrutiny and accountability from government authorities. Hochwarter et al. (2005) found that accountability predicted job tension for those who were high on negative affectivity (NA). Although the relationship between these constructs was nonlinear (i.e., represented by a U-shaped form) for those who were low on NA, these results demonstrate that high levels of accountability promote heightened job tension, regardless of one's disposition. Finally, Cooper, Clarke, and Rowbottom (1999) found that accountability was one of four themes that contributed to increased levels of stress (e.g., mental and physical health indicators) in a sample of anesthetists.

Discussion of Dependent Variables

In this research, we examined the interactive effects of felt accountability and personal reputation on job tension, job satisfaction, work effort, and depressed mood at work. These outcomes were chosen because of their academic and practical acceptance as important consequences of heightened workplace demands (e.g., Barsky, Thoresen, Warren, & Kaplan, 2004). Job tension can be viewed as individuals' subjective feelings in response to environmental demands. These heightened expectations promote anxiety and conflict, which affect an individual's attitudes and well-being (Van Dyne, Jehn, & Cummings, 2002). Job tension has been suggested to have consequences that are both psychological and physiological in nature, ranging from burnout, reduced productivity, and absenteeism to increases in serum cholesterol, heart rate, blood pressures, and skin temperature (Fox, Dwyer, & Ganster, 1993). Such effects are detrimental not only to the individual, but also to the organizations from financial and social responsibility standpoints.

Job satisfaction represents the level of pleasurable engagement at work, or simply an employee's like or dislike of the job (Locke, 1969). Individuals' satisfaction at work can be viewed as both intrinsically (e.g., striving to do better personally) and extrinsically motivated (e.g., recognition and awards). Regardless of the origin of motivation, job satisfaction often is viewed as a key factor in long-term stability, and a driving force behind positive work affect.

Work effort is defined as "the amount of resources that are expended" (Yeo & Neal, 2004, p. 232) on job-related tasks and activities. There is often a positive association between effort expended and performance. However, environmental variables, such as those that cause stress, may influence individuals' expectations of themselves, their perceived control, and the amount of effort they are willing to exert on the job (Brown & Leigh, 1996).

Lastly, depressed mood at work refers to specific, negative feelings that are relatively temporary in nature and are manifest only while on the job (Stoner & Perrewé, 2006). Aside from irritability and a lack of energy and interest, individuals also are likely to feel a sense of uselessness and a general unimportance while at work (Quinn & Shepard, 1974). Research corroborates a positive relationship between organizational stressors and depressed mood at work (Heinish & Jex, 1997).

Nature of Personal Reputation

Reputation has been studied in a variety of disciplines, including public administration (Ferris & Stallings, 1988), social psychology (Emler, 1990), communications (Dortok, 2006), and management (Zinko, Ferris, Blass, & Laird, 2007). In the sociological realm, Bromley (1993) asserted that reputation represents the sum of opinions about an entity (e.g., person, group, organization), while Emler and Hopkins (1990) described reputation as a community's collective judgments of an individual's personal qualities or character.

Taking into consideration discussions of the construct in both organizational science and sociology literatures, Ferris, Blass, Douglas, Kolodinsky, and Treadway (2003, p. 215) defined personal reputation as

a "perceptual identity formed from the collective perceptions of others, which is reflective of the complex combination of personal characteristics and accomplishments, demonstrated behavior, and intended images presented over some period of time as observed directly or reported from secondary sources, which reduces ambiguity and unexpected future behavior." This definition has led researchers to take a phenomenological approach to the study of personal reputation (e.g., Hochwarter et al., 2007b; Liu et al., 2007; Zinko, 2007). Based on this reasoning, individuals' perceptions of their own and others' personal reputations may be determined by objective conditions, but it is these individuals' subjective perceptions that are vital to the assessment of this construct.

Research has found personal reputation to be associated with a myriad of positive outcomes. For example, individuals with favorable personal reputations were viewed as more legitimate, competent, and trustworthy, and often enjoy the benefits of possessing higher status (e.g., Bromley, 1993). Furthermore, individuals with a higher level of perceived personal reputation were more likely to receive benefits often associated with favorable social exchange relationships than those with lower perceived standing (Emler, 1990). These favorable social relations allow for the accumulation of decision latitude, autonomy (Ferris et al., 2003), influence, and power (Pfeffer, 1992). Finally, Hochwarter et al. (2007b) found that personal reputation affected uncertainty, exhaustion, and performance.

Personal Reputation's Moderating Role on the Felt Accountability–Strain Relationship

To explain the moderating potential of personal reputation on felt accountability–strain relationships, we draw on conservation-of-resources (COR, Hobfoll, 1989) and signaling (Hochwarter et al., 2007b) theories. According to Hobfoll (1989), stress occurs when a situation is subjectively interpreted to exceed an individual's self-regulatory resources (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1998). Therefore, psychological stress is a reaction to an environment where there is the threat of a net loss of resources, there is an actual loss of resources, or there is a loss of resources following the investment of resources (Hobfoll, 2001). Because individuals are expected to compete for scarce assets (Mannix, 1993), resource theory is particularly important in this discussion.

Resource theory asserts that the ability to manage personal assets is the key to understanding stress (Hobfoll, 2001). Resources are objects, energies, personal characteristics, and conditions, which are either valued in their own right or because they assist individuals in acquiring other desirable assets (Hobfoll, 1989). Hobfoll (2002) suggested that during stressful situations, individuals must offset the loss of resources in one area by acquiring resources in another area. Therefore, when dealing with persistent demands, an individual's pool of resources will be depleted, thus leading to fatigue, a lack of resilience, and an increased vulnerability to other stressors (Monnier, Cameron, Hobfoll, & Gribble, 2002). As such, the ability to maintain an adequate resources reserve will, by definition, promote the accumulation of desirable outcomes (Hall et al., 2006).

We contend that personal reputation, which would be classified as a "condition resource" (Hobfoll, 1989), represents an asset that is particularly helpful in minimizing the anxiety that may be heightened as accountability expectations increase. Like other condition resources, personal reputation is valued because it helps individuals secure other resources that are needed to either survive or thrive when faced with heightened expectations (Freund & Riediger, 2001). For example, individuals with a positive personal reputation are likely to obtain more decision autonomy and less monitoring than those who are held in lower regard (Hall, Blass, Ferris, & Massengale, 2004). Reputable employees also are more likely to receive cooperation (Milinski, Semmann, & Krambeck, 2002) and have their requests viewed as more legitimate and other-serving (Hochwarter et al., 2007b) than those who are held in lower status. Finally, research has found a positive relationship between source credibility and target acceptance of agent suggestions (Bannister, 1986), thus suggesting that a positive personal reputation should afford individuals some degree of power within their organizations.

Although previous research clearly supports personal reputation as a condition resource, one must question *why* a positive personal reputation might help an individual acquire additional resources. We draw on signaling theory (Ferris & Judge, 1991) to answer this question. According to Spence (1974), signaling represents behaviors that convey information regarding an individual's abilities and intentions to external constituents (e.g., individuals, marketplace). Other discussions of signaling maintain that ". . . reputational information about the abilities and work habits of people filters into the organization and generates reputations for competence" (Hinds, Carley, Krackhardt, & Wholey, 2000, p. 229).

Because personal reputation largely represents external perceptions of an agent's expected contribution, it serves an important signaling function in virtually all contexts (Hochwarter et al., 2007b). However, research indicates that signaling is particularly important in uncertain environments (Posner, 1997). In this regard, one's perceived abilities serve as a predictive tool for those who are unable to possess "complete information" (Thompson, 1967), by promoting the target's attentional focus (Taylor & Fiske, 1978) on the agent's desirable behaviors.

By definition, increased uncertainty is a consequence of heightened accountability expectations (Orpen, 2000). As accountability requirements increase, however, cues from external sources can minimize much of its ambiguity-generated tension. For example, those who are held in high status typically are more successful in managing others' perceptions (Crant, 1996), often leading the target to develop a self-fulfilling prophesy for the agent (Bromley, 1993). Because personal reputation is considered as much a sociopolitical reality as a rational, objective one, reputable individuals are presumably more likely to be granted the "benefit of the doubt" (Ferris, Fedor, & King, 1994) when questions regarding actions and decision surface.

Research detailing the accumulation of "idiosyncracy credits" supports this perspective (Hollander & Julian, 1969). This reasoning suggests that those who are perceived to have a favorable personal reputation are granted more latitude and discretion to deviate from expectations without incurring penalties, including behavior that is perceived to be uncharacteristic of others or inconsistent with the objectives of the larger entity (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). Therefore, based on these theoretical arguments, we suggest that:

> *Hypothesis.* Personal reputation moderates the relationship between felt accountability and the outcomes of job satisfaction, work effort, job tension, and depressed mood at work. Specifically, increases in felt accountability are associated with decreases in job satisfaction and increases in work effort, job tension, and depressed mood at work for individuals with lower personal reputation levels. Alternatively, higher personal reputation levels neutralize the adverse effects of increased accountability on these outcomes.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Consistent with previous research (Hochwarter, Perrewé, Meurs, & Kacmar, 2007; Hochwarter et al., 2005), undergraduate students were each given three surveys to have full-time employees complete at two distinct times (roughly one and a half months apart during the semester). Independent variables (i.e., negative and positive affectivity, felt accountability, and personal reputation) were collected at Time 1, whereas the dependent variables (i.e., job tension, depressed mood at work, work effort, and job satisfaction) and selected demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, organization tenure, position tenure, and self-report position) were gathered at Time 2. Respondents provided their birth date on the last page of each survey for matching purposes. Class credit was given for student participation.

A total of 530 surveys were distributed at each time and 470 respondents completed both surveys (response rate of 88%). Occupations included, but were not limited to, business owner, bricklayer, plumber, marketing associate, and car salesperson. The average age of respondents was 40 years (SD = 12.28; range = 24–79), while the sample consisted of 291 women (e.g., 62%). Organization tenure and position tenure were approximately 9 (SD = 9.96; range = <1 to 45) and 7 (SD = 7.31; range = <1 to 32) years, respectively. The largest occupational classification was professional (39%, n = 183), followed by nonmanagement (23%; n = 108), middle management (19%, n = 89), self-managed (14%, n = 66), and upper management (5%, n = 23).

Measures

Affective disposition. We used Watson, Clark, and Tellegen's scale (PANAS, 1988) to measure negative (NA, α = .85) and positive affect (PA, α = .86). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they experienced, "*in general, that is, on the average,*" 10 positive (e.g., interested and determined) and 10 negative (e.g., distressed and hostile) emotions. Responses ranged from 1 (*very little or not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*).

Felt accountability. We measured felt accountability (α = .83) using an eight-item scale developed by Hochwarter (Hochwarter et al., 2007a; Hochwarter et al., 2005). "I often have to explain why I do certain things at work" represents scale

items. Responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Personal reputation. We measured personal reputation ($\alpha = .94$) using a 12-item scale (Hochwarter et al., 2007b). "I am regarded highly by others" and "If people want things done right, they ask me to do it" represent scale items. Responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Job tension. We measured job tension ($\alpha = .80$) with House and Rizzo's (1972) six-item measure. Representative items include "My job tends to directly affect my health," and "I work under a great deal of tension." Responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Job satisfaction. We measured job satisfaction ($\alpha = .76$) using a five-item subscale of Brayfield and Rothe's (1951) index. "Each day of work seems like it will never end" (reverse coded) and "Most days I am enthusiastic about my work" are representative items. Responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Work effort. We measured work effort using a five-item work intensity scale developed by Brown and Leigh (1996). "When there's a job to be done, I devote all of my energy to getting it done", and "When I work, I really exert myself to the fullest" represent two sample items ($\alpha = .89$). Responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Depressed mood at work. We measured depressed mood at work ($\alpha = .87$) using Quinn and Shepard's (1974) 10-item scale. "I feel downhearted and blue at work" and "I find it easy to do the things I used to do at work" (reverse scored) represent scale items. Responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Demographic variables. Respondents indicated their age, gender, organization and position tenure, and position within the organization.

Results

We conducted hierarchical moderated multiple regression analyses to test the hypothesized interactions (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). After all predictors were standardized and centered, age, gender, organization tenure, position tenure, and position were entered in the first step. The affective disposition terms (NA and PA) also were entered to account for their potentially biasing effects (Perrewé & Spector, 2002; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). In the second and third steps, the linear and nonlinear main effect terms were entered. Cortina (1993) noted that bivariate interactions in hierarchical multiple regression may be significant due to their overlap with unmeasured nonlinear main effect terms. Furthermore, recent discussions have advocated testing for, or at least considering the influence of, nonlinear stressors in job stress models (see Ferris et al., 2006 for a discussion) to rule out more complex relational forms. The final step contained the felt accountability and personal reputation cross-product term. A significant change in R^2 in the third step offers evidence of an interaction effect (Cohen et al., 2003).

We also provide collinearity diagnostics. Specifically, we calculated variance inflation factor (VIF) scores, which measure the extent to which collinearity among the predictors affects the precision of a regression model in each step. In general, variation inflation is the consequence of multicollinearity. VIF scores of less than 10 typically are deemed acceptable (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1, and regression results are provided in Table 2. Correlations between felt accountability, personal reputation, and study outcomes are consistent with previous research (Hall et al., 2003; Hochwarter et al., 2007b). Regression results indicate the importance of including demographic and dispositional variables as control variables (e.g., 20 out of 27 were significant predictors). In terms of main effect relationships, felt accountability predicted work effort ($\beta = .14$, $p < .01$), suggesting that those with heightened levels of perceived answerability were more apt to exert work effort. Accountability had nonlinear effects on both job tension ($\beta = .08$, $p < .05$) and satisfaction ($\beta = .10$, $p < .05$). The positive beta in these steps suggests a U-shaped form between accountability and each dependent variable. Specifically, job satisfaction and tension were highest when accountability was both moderately low and moderately high.

With respect to job tension, the felt accountability x personal reputation interaction term explained significant incremental criterion variance ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .01$, $\Delta AdjR^2 = .02$, $p < .01$). Furthermore , VIF scores for all predictors were less than 3.0. Significant felt accountability $\times$ personal reputation interaction terms also surfaced for job satisfaction ($\beta = .12$, $p < .01$, $\Delta AdjR^2 = .02$, $p < .01$; VIF scores range from 1.11 to 2.87), work effort ($\beta = .10$, $p < .05$, $\Delta AdjR^2 = .01$, $p < .05$; VIF scores range from 1.05 to 2.79), and depressed mood at work ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .01$, $\Delta AdjR^2 = .02$, $p < .01$; VIF scores range from 1.17 to 2.67).

We plotted the prediction of felt accountability on each outcome at the mean, as well as at high and low

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	40.24	12.28												
2. Gender	—	—	.12*											
3. Organization tenure	9.45	9.96	.52*	.10*										
4. Position tenure	6.93	7.31	.55*	.04	.68*									
5. Position	3.13	1.07	−.04	−.07	−.01	−.09*								
6. Negative affect	1.86	.63	−.23*	−.15*	−.04	−.05	.12*							
7. Positive affect	3.60	.68	.14*	.05	.12*	.13*	.08	−.07						
8. Felt accountability	3.62	.58	.21*	−.01	.15*	.13*	.14*	.02	.53*					
9. Perceived reputation	5.70	.79	.28*	.13*	.07	.13*	.04	−.28*	.54*	.47*				
10. Job tension	3.31	1.26	.19*	.09	.27*	.27*	.11*	.29*	−.17*	.20*	.08			
11. Job satisfaction	4.24	.65	.20*	−.13*	.11*	.05	.18*	−.24*	.44*	.25*	.32*	−.13*		
12. Work effort	5.65	1.07	.23*	.10*	.20*	.14*	.12*	−.05	.51*	.47*	.39*	.29*	.40*	
13. Depressed mood	1.80	.81	−.17*	−.08	−.09*	−.02	−.07	.40*	−.43*	−.28*	−.36*	.14*	−.53*	−.42*

Note. Gender was coded "0" for men and "1" for women.
* $p < .05$.

levels of personal reputation (Stone & Hollenbeck, 1989). For job tension, the simple slopes for high, $t = -2.10$, $p < .01$ and low levels, $t = 1.99$, $p < .05$ of personal reputation were significantly different from zero. The effects of felt accountability on job satisfaction (simple slopes for high, $t = 2.55$, $p < .01$, and low levels, $t = -.2.28$, $p < .05$, of personal reputation), work effort (simple slopes for high, $t = 2.27$, $p < .05$, and low levels, $t = -.25$, *ns,* of personal reputation, and depressed mood at work (simple slopes for high, $t = -2.19$, $p < .05$, and low levels, $t = 1.87$, $p < .10$, of personal reputation) are shown.

Discussion

Building on previous research (Hochwarter et al., 2007a; Hochwarter et al., 2007b) that has investigated the role of felt accountability and personal reputation in organizational settings, we examined the multiplicative effect of these constructs on a number of important work outcomes. Data collected from employees working in an array of settings supported our contention that personal reputation can untangle the ambiguous relationship between felt accountability and employee attitudes and behaviors. More specifically, individuals who were held in low regard experienced more job tension and depressed mood at work and less job satisfaction as felt accountability intensified. Conversely, job tension and depressed mood at work decreased, but job satisfaction and work effort increased, for those who were perceived to be reputable.

The reactions of individuals with positive personal reputations appear to be counterintuitive at first glance. However, previous research has found that individuals experience anxiety when their personal reputation is threatened (Doby & Caplan, 1993). With low levels of felt accountability, these individuals may fear that their performance will go unnoticed, thus making it difficult for them to maintain their positive personal reputation. In effect, low levels of felt accountability may be just as threatening to individuals with positive personal reputations as high levels of accountability are to individuals with negative personal reputations.

Results from this research suggest that accountability can have both beneficial and detrimental outcomes. Moreover, although accountability can fluctuate in its role as a potential stressor, it is necessary for organizational survival. Thus, one challenge for both individuals and organizations is to find the correct balance of accountability demands. In turn, our findings suggest that developing a positive personal reputation is one way to achieve this balance.

Thus, in regard to scholarship, this study contributes to contemporary research by identifying a factor that differentiates accountability opportunities from accountability threats (Hall et al., 2006; Hochwarter et al., 2007a). Personal reputation, which has been operationalized as a *competence* in previous research

Table 2
Regression Results

Step/variable	β			
	Job tension	Job satisfaction	Work effort	Depressed mood
Step 1				
Age	.10*	.16**	.16**	−.09
Gender	.10*	−.19**	.04	−.01
Organizational tenure	.05	.09	.16**	−.12*
Position tenure	.18**	−.14*	−.14**	.18**
Position (hierarchy)	.10*	.17**	.08**	−.08
Negative affect	.35**	−.23**	−.01	.39**
Positive affect	−.13*	.37**	.57**	−.35**
$\Delta AdjR^2$	.21	.29	.41	.34
F	19.61**	28.99**	48.75**	35.87**
Step 2				
Felt accountability (A)	.03	−.05	.14**	−.06
Perceived reputation (R)	.04	.09	.04	−.04
$\Delta AdjR^2$	.00	.01	.02**	.00
F	15.37**	22.90**	40.33**	28.32**
Step 3				
A × A	.08*	.10*	.01	−.02
R × R	.04	.01	.03	−.04
$\Delta AdjR^2$	−.02*	.02*	.00	.00
F	15.31**	21.77**	38.02	26.01
Step 3				
A × R	−.11**	.12*	.10*	−.12**
$\Delta AdjR^2$	.02**	.02*	.01*	.02**
F	15.64**	21.78**	37.73**	26.62**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

(Gladstone, 1963), is one individual factor that appears to maximize the desirable consequences of accountability. In particular, research suggests that individuals gravitate toward those that appear capable (Hinds et al., 2000), and provide them with resources and rewards that are not available to those who are held in lesser standing. Because competence is a multifaceted representation of ability, encompassing intellectual, attitudinal, interpersonal, and task dimensions (Shapiro & Azuma, 2004), future research will need to unravel the theoretical properties of the construct to determine its interaction with felt accountability as well as other external cues.

Practical implications warrant brief mention. First, organizations may find it fruitful to seek out opportunities to develop positive social networks for employees. However, increasing participation in the social milieu at work does not guarantee that the actor will benefit from its membership. Marchand, Demers, and Durand (2006, p. 878) noted that "The way people relate to aspects of the social environment can be sources of pleasure and well being, but also sources of frustration, strain, stress, exclusion, inequality, and suffering that can affect mental health." Organizations will profit from networking opportunities only if resources are made available. Because resources are unevenly distributed in most collective social settings (MacDonald, Karasek, Punnett, & Scharf, 2001), monitoring their availability and use will be critical.

Finally, organizations will benefit by reducing the level of accountability-generated ambiguity that employees experience. Because of structural modifications and widened reporting channels, many employees simply *don't know what to do*, *how to do it*, and *how it will be evaluated*. As expected, communication ineffectiveness consistently has predicted both ambiguity and conflict (Tubre & Collins, 2001). In this regard, we share the view of Jackson (1989, p. 31) who suggested that adequate communication may lead to ". . . additional and/or more acute knowledge about the formal and informal expectations held by others for the worker, the formal and informal policies and procedures of the organization, and discrepancies among these."

Strengths and Limitations of the Research

The current study has a number of strengths. First, this study found a significant interaction between felt accountability and personal reputation across several related strain measures. By corroborating effects across all outcomes, we have confidence in the theoretical underpinnings guiding this research. Second, we controlled for affective disposition when conducting substantive hypothesis tests. Positive and negative affect can influence the way that potentially stressful stimuli are perceived and evaluated (Perrewé & Spector, 2002). Thus, controlling for their effects allows for a conservative test of the hypotheses.

Third, we took into consideration nonlinear main effect relationships before evaluating the efficacy of the accountability-personal reputation interaction term. Cortina (1993) noted that significant interactive relationships in moderated hierarchical multiple regression may be significant because of its overlap with unmeasured nonlinear main effects. He further advocated using nonlinear terms as covariates prior to predicting cross-product effects. Finally, our sample consisted of individuals occupying a variety of positions across multiple organizational settings. Although this approach does not allow for an examination of industry effects, it does suggest a level of external generalizability that is not available when conducting single organization research.

This study has limitations that must be mentioned as well. The exclusive use of surveys as means of collecting data represents one possible limitation by introducing the potential for same source bias. According to James, Gent, Hater, and Corey (1979), spuriously high relationships ($r > .70$) between independent and dependent variables are a sign of common method variance. An examination of Table 1 indicates interrelationships considered moderate by psychometric standards. Another possible limitation is the use of self-report data to assess personal reputation. Because personal reputation is based on the collective perceptions of others, it has been suggested that this construct should be evaluated by individuals in the target's work group. However, previous research has found self- and others' reports of personal reputation to be largely consistent (e.g., Hochwarter et al., 2007b; Liu et al., 2007; Zinko, 2007), thus suggesting that individuals can assess their own personal reputation accurately.

Because of the cross-sectional nature of the study, we also were not able to draw conclusions about whether felt accountability causes strain reactions or strain reactions cause felt accountability. Finally, we were unable to determine how accountability-reputation relationships evolved longitudinally. We contend that this relationship is dynamic, with the potential for modification after each social exchange. Not only will future longitudinal research determine the cause and effect relationship between felt accountability and strain reactions, but it will also help to access the interplay between felt accountability and personal reputation over time. Please see Figures 1–4.

Directions for Future Research

The findings reported in this research provide a foundation for subsequent studies. First, although incorporating personal reputation as an intervening factor shed light on the accountability-work outcome relationship, it is likely that more complex associations exist. In this regard, we advocate research adopting multilevel theories and methodologies to further explain the dynamics of this relationship (Frink et al., in press). For example, it is clear that accountability demands may come from sources at multiple levels, including subordinates, peers, supervisors, executives, clients, one's profession, and society. Does personal reputation have comparable stress-neutralizing effects when accountability demands originate from peers as when they come from adherence to professional standards? If not, which of the myriad of individual difference or contextual factors serves as a viable substitute?

Moreover, a richer understanding of personal reputation is warranted. Although we viewed felt accountability and personal reputation as two distinct constructs, it is possible that they may be more strongly linked to each other than we anticipated. For example, individuals who perceive themselves to be highly reputable probably believe that others already have evaluated them positively. In effect, they believe that they have passed the "accountability test." If this is true, an additional explanation for our results might be that highly reputable employees do not experience strain reactions as felt accountability increases because they believe they have already satisfied similar demands, thus giving them confidence in their ability to satisfy future demands.

Relatedly, is an individual's personal reputation consistent across organizational levels and social networks, and if so, which aspects of one's status (i.e., task, social, interpersonal) are the most dominant in influencing strain reactions? Furthermore, are there any disadvantages of being perceived as reputable? Portes (1998, p. 15) described four neg-

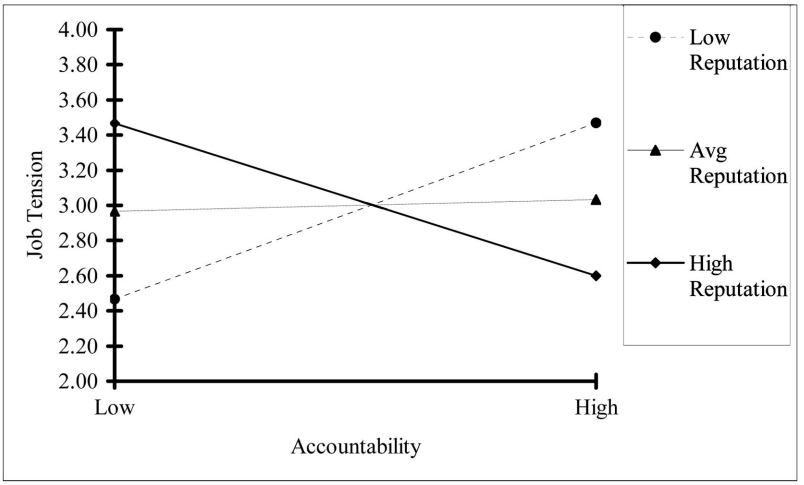

Figure 1. The interactive effects of felt accountability and perceived reputation on job tension. Avg = average.

ative consequences of social capital (i.e., of which reputation is a dimension): the exclusion of outsiders, excessive claims on group members, limitations on individual's independence, and downward norm leveling. If organizations rely exclusively on reputable individuals to chart the course of action, do the ideas of those held in lower status go unheard?

Finally, is it possible that one's personal reputation can be too high? Specifically, trust is a documented consequence of a favorable personal reputation (Hochwarter et al., 2007b), and this heightened con-

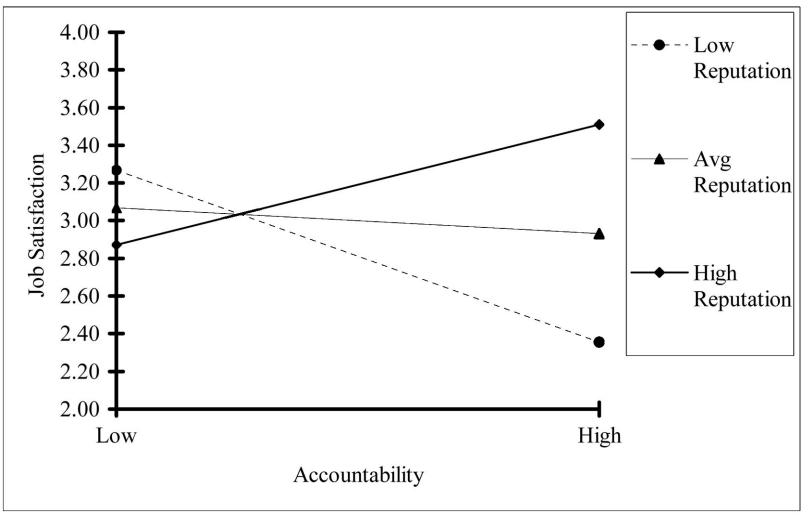

Figure 2. The interactive effects of felt accountability and perceived reputation on job satisfaction. Avg = average.

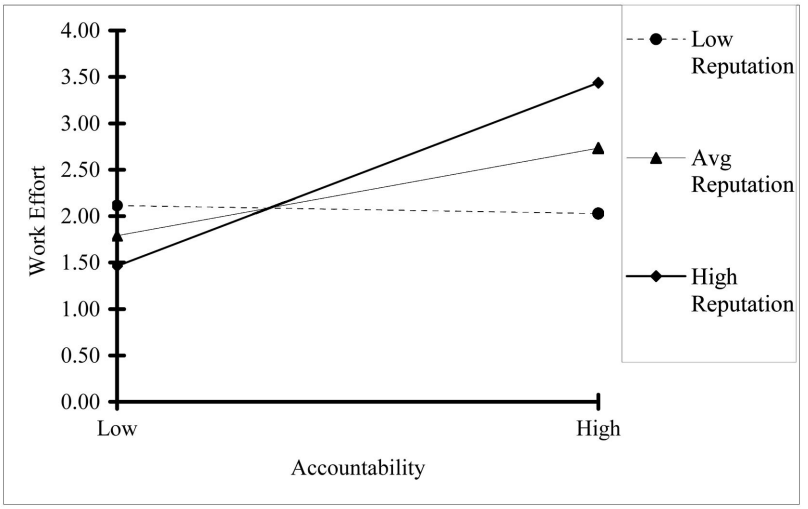

Figure 3. The interactive effects of felt accountability and perceived reputation on work effort. Avg = average.

fidence increases expectations for future behavior (Bohnet, 2006). Research indicates that physical and mental well-being suffers when expectations become unrealistically high (Browning, Ryan, Greenberg, & Rolniak, 2006). As an example, Dewe (1992) found that heightened expectations represented a significant source of anxiety. Taken together, these findings suggest that reputation-strain relations may be nonlinear in form, with moderately high levels representing the point on the continuum associated with the most favorable outcomes. More specifically, lowest levels of reputation are associated with limited social inclu-

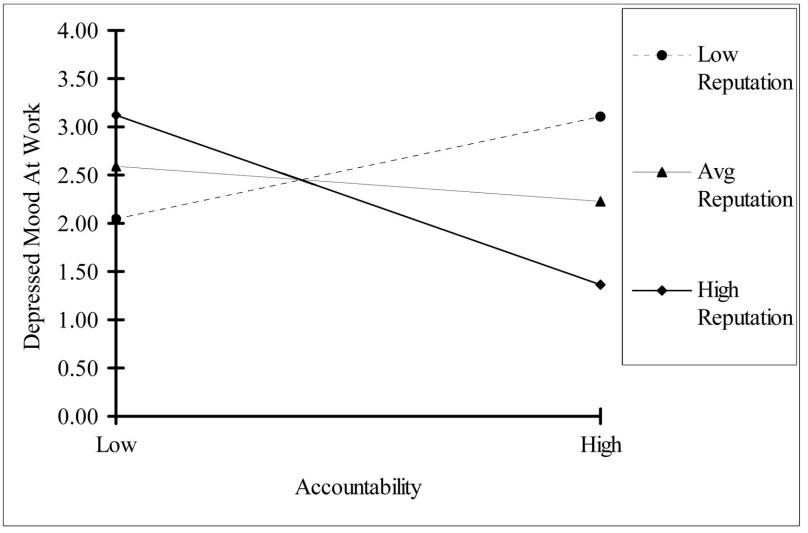

Figure 4. The interactive effects of felt accountability and perceived reputation on depressed mood at work. Avg = average.

sion (Lin, 2001), whereas extreme levels lead to disproportionately excessive expectations (Portes, 1998). Whether personal reputation-work outcome relationships are linear or nonlinear represents a research question in need of investigation.

Conclusion

Personal reputation and accountability are constructs of critical importance in the organizational sciences. As such, exploring their unique and multiplicative relationship on key outcomes was warranted for both scholarly and practical purposes. The results reported in this research further support their significance by demonstrating personal reputation's role as a meaningful moderator of accountability-work consequence relationships. These results not only add to burgeoning bodies of research in each of these domains, but also should stimulate additional studies.

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