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**RELEVANCE OF PERSONALITY IN PERCEPTIONS OF ABUSIVE SUPERVISION: A  
MULTILEVEL ANALYSIS**

**A dissertation  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy  
in the Department of Management  
The University of Mississippi**

**by**

**JAIME L. WILLIAMS**

**May 2021**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this dissertation is to determine the relevance of personality of both the supervisor and subordinate in the perception of abusive supervision. A report published in 2014 found that 27% of U.S. workers – comprising over 65 million people – have claimed to suffer from some form of abusive behavior perpetrated by their leaders, such as repeated intimidation, humiliation, and verbal abuse (Workplace Bullying Institute; Zieby International, 2014). However, researchers have not determined whether the differences in the perceptions of abusive supervision is driven by the cognitive biases of the individual subordinates or the trait driven behaviors of the supervisors. A supervisor with an aggressive personality should enact aggressive behaviors that would be perceived as abusive by their individual subordinates as well as at the team-level. Subordinates with an aggressive personality are more likely to possess a hostile attribution bias whereby they perceive the actions of others to aggressive and hostile more often than prosocial individuals. Therefore, subordinates with an aggressive personality should more frequently perceive the actions of their supervisor to be abusive that would also increase the variation of abusive supervision perceptions among team members. It is important to pinpoint the antecedents of abusive supervision as it is a serious issue for organizations. Consequently, through a multi-level analysis of research conducted in four organizations, this research aims to determine if an analysis of subordinate personality, supervisor personality and group abusive supervision will help organizations better understand abusive supervision in the workplace.

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my parents (Don and Leigh Williams) and grandparents (Bill and Shirley Massey) who have offered me their unfailing support for my entire life. I would also like to dedicate this work to my advisor, Dr. Jeremy Schoen, without whom this project would not have been possible.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

The negative effects of abusive supervision on organizations, employees, and the families of employees are well documented (c.f. Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017). Far less is known about individual differences that act as antecedents to the employee perceptions of abuse (Waldman, Wang, Hannah, Owens, & Balthazard, 2018). Previous theoretical explanations for abusive supervision have failed to fully capture the unique aggressive or hostile behavior that defines abusive supervision (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007).

In preparing for this dissertation, a search was conducted for all research papers in high-impact journals that investigated the antecedents of abusive supervision. The concept of aggression was discussed in 24 of the 30 identified articles. However, my review of the literature (Chapter 2) demonstrates that few studies included aggressive personality as an antecedent of abusive supervision. Researchers state that certain displays of abusive supervision might not meet the definition of “aggression” as traditionally defined (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Bushman & Anderson, 2001). Yet, the idea that so many researchers consider aggression as a key theoretical linking concept but do not attempt to assess aggression or aggressive personality is remarkable. Thus, the disconnect in previous studies regarding the theories employed in the study of abusive supervision resulted in two overarching objectives for this dissertation.

The first objective of this project was to understand the extent to which the aggressive personality of the supervisor is a factor in the subordinate perception of abusive supervision. If a supervisor has an aggressive personality, they should enact aggressive behaviors that would be perceived as abusive by their subordinates more often than prosocial supervisors. The second

aim was to investigate the extent to which the aggressive personality of the subordinate leads to the perception of abusive supervision through the attributions they make regarding the behavior of others. Subordinates with an aggressive personality are more likely to possess a hostile attribution bias whereby they perceive the actions of other to aggressive and hostile more often than prosocial individuals. Therefore, subordinates with an aggressive personality should more frequently perceive the actions of their supervisor to be abusive.

In the few studies focusing on the antecedents of abusive supervision, justice is frequently proposed as an antecedent for many behaviors in response to abusive supervision. Research also demonstrates that personality is important for predicting responses to unfairness (Eissa & Lester, 2017; Mawritz, Folger, & Latham, 2014). The response individuals make to perceived unfairness is the main outcome justice researchers study. Hence, as justice is a critical component in understanding abusive supervision, personality is a critical component in understanding justice.

In light of these relationships, research on the effect of personality on the perceptions of abusive supervision is needed. Tepper's (2007) critical appraisal of the abusive supervision literature urges researchers to consider the characteristics of supervisors, because the attitudes and behaviors of leaders are profoundly influenced by their personalities and prior experiences (House, Shane, & Herold, 1996). Empirical evidence suggests that individual differences directly influence the occurrence of workplace aggression in general (Aquino & Bradfield, 2000; Douglas & Martinko, 2001; Garcia, Restubog, & Denson, 2010; Inness, Barling, & Turner, 2005) and abusive supervision in particular (Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, & Tang, 2010). The research noted above and the call to perform that research, however, has potentially led to a failure in understanding how abusive supervision is perceived. As discussed in Chapter 2, most studies on abusive supervision tend to focus either on the supervisor or on the subordinate rather than their interaction. As noted by several researchers, destructive workplace behaviors – such as abusive supervision – can best be realized by regarding them as a function of

a relationship rather than the contributions of a single party (Hershcovis & Barling, 2007; Hershcovis & Rafferty, 2012).

To address the issues just identified, investigating the aggressive personality of both the supervisor and the employee may further aid in understanding how and when abusive supervision is enacted and perceived. This requires understanding employee biases that influence how the employees can make skewed judgements of the supervisor's behavior based on their own thoughts, beliefs, values, norms, and perceptions. Personality plays an important role in determining how individuals perceive and interpret social information as well as how their own biases effect the attributions they make of the behavior of others (Schoen, DeSimone, Meyer, Schnure, & LeBreton, 2021).

This research is important because it should increase the ability of organizations to use abusive supervision as an effective measure of a situation. Abusive supervision in current research is determined through the perception of subordinates. Current research typically relies on the assessment of a single employee. Organizations should be reluctant to use reports of single individuals as a tool for the detection of leadership issues. While a single report can be useful for starting an investigation of potentially egregious behaviors, reports by single individuals lack veracity. An understanding of specific factors that enable abusive supervision is crucial for developing targeted policies and interventions to reduce its occurrence. Therefore, for practical application, the proposed measurement triangulation of personality of both the supervisor and the subordinate as well as the perception of multiple subordinates under the same supervisor should give organizations a more accurate picture of whether abuse is more likely to be occurring or is simply the perception of one individual.

Based on my review of the literature (chapter 2), I propose studying implicit aspects of aggressive personality to better understand the role of personality as a predictor of perceptions of abusive supervision. Subordinates with a motive to aggress are likely to perceive the behavior of their supervisor as abusive because of their tendency to attribute hostile intention to others' actions (see James et al., 2005). Building on the theory of implicit personality that states individuals with a motive to aggress are more likely to engage in a range of aggressive behaviors (Bing et al., 2007, Frost et al., 2007; James et al., 2005), this project extends this theory to include engaging in abuse of subordinates.

The concepts outlined above indicate the difference in personality alone (i.e., aggressive personality) indicates that not all employees are affected by or react to various supervisor behaviors, including abusive supervision, in the same way (Tepper et al., 2001). Previous research indicates that supervisors who experience injustice in the workplace are more likely to engage in behaviors that are perceived as abusive by their subordinates (Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Tepper, Duffy, Henle, and Lambert, 2006; Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007; Hoobler and Hu, 2013); however, not all supervisors who feel they have been a victim of injustice will abuse their subordinates. That is to say, while aggressive personality is expected to predict both employee perceptions of abusive supervision and supervisor enactment of abuse, the aggregation and dispersion of the perceptions of multiple employees, will provide a better understanding of the consensus of the group. Thus, I will examine whether aggressive personality is key in understanding whether 1) supervisors' motive to aggress covaries with employee perceptions of abusive supervision; 2) employees' motive to aggress covaries with their own perceptions of abusive supervision; and 3) how the perceptions of multiple employees with the same supervisor vary based on their individual differences.

To explore these questions, Chapter 2 provides a review of the theories and antecedents found in the literature on abusive supervision and provides an analysis on the current state of the literature. This review additionally highlights the major issues that can be addressed by future research. Chapter 3 establishes a theoretical understanding of how aspects of aggressive personality translate into perception and behavior. This is followed by a theoretical integration of aggressive personality and abusive supervision based on attribution theory and trait activation theory. Chapter 4 outlines the proposed constructs, scales, methods, and sample to test the hypotheses presented in Chapter 3. Finally, chapter 5 provides the results, discussion, and conclusion.

## **CHAPTER 2: QUALITATIVE REVIEW OF THE THEORY AND ANTECEDENTS OF ABUSIVE SUPERVISION**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature on the antecedents of abusive supervision and theories used to explain or predict this phenomenon. The chapter starts with a review of what exactly constitutes “abusive supervision,” to fully identify the focal construct. Then, I detail the identification process I used to select studies for the systematic review. Next, the results of the review are provided; these results lay out the theoretical background regarding abusive supervision, including antecedents of the behavior in question. The final discussion section presents the findings of the review and links this information to the current research questions.

The past 20 years of research on abusive supervision shows a growth in popularity of the topic. In my initial review of the literature, I found 17 articles exploring abusive supervision in the top five management journals between 2000 to 2010. By contrast, 79 articles appeared between 2011 and 2018. Among the 95 articles I reviewed, 71 focused on consequences and outcomes associated with the effects of the perception of abusive supervision while 30 focused (at least partially) on the antecedents.

Examples of the outcomes associated with abusive supervision include dissatisfaction with one’s job and life (Ashforth, 1997), intentions to quit (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 1998), role conflict (Keashly, Trott, & MacLean, 1994), low self-efficacy (Baron, 1988), organizational conflict (Baron, 1990; Thomas & Schmidt, 1976), and unfavorable attitudes (Ashforth, 1997; Keashly, Trott, & MacLean, 1994). However, my review does not focus on the outcomes of

abusive supervision, which have been studied extensively (see Mackey, Frieder, Brees, & Martinko, 2015 for a recent meta-analysis; see Martinko, Harvey, Brees, & Mackey, 2013 for a recent narrative review). I am more interested in the antecedents, which have not been fully explored (Eissa and Lester, 2017; Courtright et al., 2016; Waldman et al., 2018).

The purpose of this review is threefold: 1) review and organize the theories in literature to establish a theoretical basis for the integration presented in Chapter 3; 2) systematically review the research to build a complete picture of what is known about the antecedents of abusive supervision; and 3) identify the gaps in research to highlight what remains poorly understood about the antecedents of abusive supervision.

### **Definition of Abusive Supervision**

As defined by Tepper (2000, p. 178), “abusive supervision refers to subordinates’ perceptions of [the] extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact.” This succinct definition provides several important boundary conditions of abusive supervision. First, physical contact is excluded from the behaviors of an abusive supervisor (and is outside the scope of this research). Second, the supervisor must engage in “sustained displays” of the behavior that the subordinate perceives as abusive. This definition – and my study – excludes “daily abusive supervision,” which means a subordinate ranks their supervisor as abusive although this behavior is not sustained or continual (Barnes, Lucianetti, Bhave, & Christian, 2015; Qin, Huang, Johnson, Hu, & Ju, 2018; Liao, Yam, Johnson, Liu, & Song, 2018). The requirement that papers should focus on “sustained displays of abusive supervision” helps to eliminate the “noise” of brief actions that could be displayed by anyone. The focus is rather on continuous actions that have severe consequences for subordinates and the whole organization.

Third, abusive supervision is a subjective assessment that subordinates construct based on their perceptions of their supervisors' behaviors. This appraisal may be affected by the characteristics of the observer such as personality or demographic profile as well as the context in which the assessment is made such as the workplace or coworker perceptions. Finally, Tepper (2000) stated that abusive supervision falls within the realm of purposeful behavior, signifying that supervisors intentionally commit behaviors perceived as abusive by their subordinates.

### **Previous Reviews and Meta-analysis**

Two narrative reviews (Tepper, 2007; Martinko, Harvey, Brees, & Mackey, 2013) and a meta-analysis (Zhang & Bednall, 2016) both recently summarized the antecedents of abusive supervision. At the time of Tepper's (2007) review, only two papers had investigated the antecedents of abusive supervision. One of the future research directions provided by Tepper advised researchers to focus more on the causes rather than the outcomes of abusive supervision. The second review was on abusive supervision in general. Martinko and colleagues (2013) note that researchers focused on perceptions of injustice as an antecedent of abusive supervision (e.g. Burton, Hoobler, & Scheuer, 2012; Harris, Harvey, and Kacmar, 2011; Tepper, Moss, & Duffy, 2011). Additional research tested the trickle-down model whereby supervisors who perceived their managers as abusive were more likely to be perceived as abusive by their subordinates (Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012; Mawritz et al., 2012; Harris, Harvey, Harris, & Cast, 2013). Finally, additional work found that characteristics of the subordinate shaped their perceptions of abuse including low core self-evaluation (Wu and Hu, 2009), organization-based self-esteem (Kiazad, et al., 2010), and hostile attribution style (Martinko, Harvey, Sikora, & Douglas, 2011).

The meta-analysis by Zhang and Bednall (2016) provided a more detailed analysis on the antecedents of abusive supervision. This work found that the antecedents of abusive supervision



fell into four categories; supervisor characteristics, organizational characteristics, subordinate characteristics, and demographic characteristics (Zhang & Bednall, 2016). Antecedents examining the effect of supervisor characteristics exhibited the strongest relationship with the subordinate perceptions of abusive supervision while supervisor and subordinate characteristics, such as age, had little to no effect (Zhang & Bednall, 2016).

One analysis that is notably missing from these reviews is an assessment of the theoretical explanation of the subordinate perceptions of abusive supervision. As noted by Zhang and Bednall (2016), abusive supervision research is in urgent need of a theoretical framework. Yet, before a theoretical framework can be built, an analysis of the extant theoretical work must be conducted. The first part of this review explores the theoretical explanations used by researchers in an effort to explain either why abusive supervision occurs or why subordinates are more likely to perceive their supervisor as abusive. The second part of this review gives a more detailed narrative review of the antecedents of abusive supervision, which expands the work of Martinko and colleagues (2013) to include the many additional studies conducted after their publication. I also use and expand upon the categorization established by Zhang and Bednall (2016) to provide an up-to-date narrative review of the antecedents of abusive supervision.

## **Methodology**

I limited my review to articles in Scopus, the largest database of peer-reviewed articles available. My searches included all variants of the words “abuse” (abus\*) and “supervision” or “supervisor” (supervis\*) in the title, abstract or keywords for papers published in journals with an impact factor over 3. I chose to limit the journals from which I pulled articles on the antecedents in order to provide a ‘best-evidence synthesis’ (Slavin, 1986). The restricted impact-factor level allowed me to limit my search to articles published in journals with substantial

influence in current research (Zickar & Melick, In Press). This approach also limited the number of articles analyzed for this project which has been recommended by previous research (Slavin, 1986). Using the ‘best-evidence synthesis’, this review only considers the studies with high internal and external validity as well as use well-specified and defended a priori inclusion criteria. Journals with articles that met these criteria included the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Leadership Quarterly*, and *Personnel Psychology*.

All identified articles were reviewed to ensure that abusive supervision was a main topic and that supervision was defined in a way that fit Tepper’s (2000) definition – as the seminal article on abusive supervision – as well as the main measurement of this construct. Application of these criteria resulted in the elimination of three works that researched “daily” abusive supervision, with supervisors rating themselves (Barnes et al., 2015; Qin et al., 2018; Liao et al., 2018). These works were problematic based on two parts of the definition of abusive supervision provided earlier as, according to this definition abusive supervision: 1) is measured by the employee’s perception; and 2) the behaviors exhibited are sustained and reoccur.

All articles were coded. Because this review focused on the antecedents of abusive supervision, articles that did not contain antecedents were then excluded. Of the 95 articles identified, 30 met the exclusion criteria with all but the three listed in the previous paragraph being excluded for the lack of antecedents. The authors of these papers evaluated 14 theories and 28 antecedents to explain why some individuals abused their subordinates, or why some subordinates were more likely than others to perceive their supervisor as abusive.

**Table 1: Count of relevant articles by journal and year**

**All Abusive Supervision Articles**

Journal	Year	Count
<b>Academy of Management Journal (15 Total)</b>	2000	1
	2007	1
	2011	1
	2012	1
	2014	3
	2015	1
	2016	3
	2017	2
<b>Academy of Management Review (2 Total)</b>	2014	1
	2017	1
<b>Journal of Applied Psychology (30 Total)</b>	2001	1
	2002	1
	2004	1
	2006	1
	2007	3
	2008	2
	2010	1
	2011	1
	2012	2
	2013	2
	2014	5
	2015	4
	2016	4
2018	1	
<b>Journal of Management (5 Total)</b>	2007	1
	2012	1
	2017	2
	2018	1
<b>Personnel Psychology (4 Total)</b>	2006	1
	2011	1
	2012	1
	2018	1
<b>Journal of Organizational Behavior (16 Total)</b>	2011	1
	2012	1
	2013	3
	2014	3
	2015	1
	2017	2
<b>Leadership Quarterly (24 Total)</b>	2007	3
	2011	2
	2012	2
	2013	6
	2014	2
	2015	3
	2017	2
	2018	4

**Antecedents only**

Journal	Year	Count
<b>Academy of Management Journal (5 Total)</b>	2011	1
	2016	2
	2017	1
	2018	1
<b>Journal of Applied Psychology (9 Total)</b>	2006	1
	2007	1
	2011	1
	2014	3
	2015	1
	2016	1
<b>Journal of Management</b>	2018	1
	<b>Personnel Psychology (2 Total)</b>	2006
2012		1
<b>Journal of Organizational Behavior (3 Total)</b>	2014	1
	2017	2
	<b>Leadership Quarterly (10 Total)</b>	2011
2012		1
2013		1
2014		2
2015		1
2017		1
2018	2	

## **Review of theories of abusive supervision**

The proliferation of theories used in the abusive supervision literature provides a challenge for developing a unified understanding of the domain. Four articles out of the 30 that met all inclusion criteria did not include any specific theory explaining why the relationship being studied occurred to aid the understanding of that paper's research questions. Among the works with theoretical basis, 14 theories were invoked to support the hypothesized contexts, individual characteristics, relationships, and emotions proposed to lead to abusive supervision. To understand what types of theories were used, I listed keywords from each article and grouped them according to similar themes, which led to the creation of five broad categories. These theoretical categories included individual resources, individual cognition, affect, social exchange, and organizational justice. For example, the 'individual resources' category includes the studies using depletion of an individual's cognitive resources as an explanation of why abusive supervision occurs. Similarly, the organizational justice category subsumed all of the theories explaining that abusive supervision occurred when an individual felt slighted or perceived 'unfairness' by the organization, another individual, or a difference between the perception of 'what ought to be' and reality. Table 2 lists the theories and the categories. The next section describes each of the theoretical perspectives used, and how that perspective was employed to draw the linkage between the antecedents studied and abusive supervision.

**Table 2: Theories to Explain the Antecedents of Abusive Supervision**

**Individual Resources (5)**

Conservation of Resource Theory (2)  
Ego Depletion Theory (2)  
Self-Regulation Theory

**Social Exchange (12)**

Interpersonal Interaction Theory  
LMX Theory (2)  
Social Dominance Theory (2)  
Social Exchange Theory (2)  
Social Learning Theory (6)

**Individual Cognition (4)**

Cognitive Theory of Stress  
Attribution Theory  
Victim Precipitation Theory  
Moral Exclusion Theory (2)

**Affect (1)**

Affective Events Theory

**Org. Justice (4)**

Justice Theory

*Theories of Organizational Justice*

Organizational justice has been investigated in several abusive supervision research projects including studies that explore interactional justice, interpersonal justice, procedural justice, distributive justice and psychological contract breaches. These different facets of organizational justice and psychological contract breach all center around the main theme of the perception of fairness. These perceptions of fairness represent aspects of the work environment or behaviors by supervision. Organizational justice theories generally describe the individual or group's perceptions of the fairness of treatment by an organization (or other individual) and the behavioral reaction to such perceptions (James, 1993). Researchers use theories of and concepts related to organizational justice to explain why supervisors engage in behaviors perceived as abusive by their subordinates. They also use justice theories as situational explanations for why subordinates react to abusive supervision.

Organizational justice theories are prominently used as the linking processes described in trickle-down models of abusive supervision. The trickle-down model posits that when supervisors are mistreated by the organization or by their supervisors as agents of the

organization, co-workers or powerful others, instead of retaliating directly against the source of the perceived “harm,” they express their frustration or anger towards people with less power – that is, their subordinates (Mawritz et al., 2012). Although organizational justice and the trickle-down model are widely used in investigations of the outcomes of abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007), only four papers used theories related to justice perception in their explanations of the antecedents of abusive supervision as described below.

Research demonstrates that when a supervisor perceives a lack of procedural justice, this can translate into depression that subsequently results in incidences of abuse as reported by subordinates (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006). Tepper and colleagues (2006) based their reasoning on studies suggesting that a lack of procedural justice can produce generalized negative emotional states, which may be vented against convenient targets (Weiss, Suckow, & Cropanzano, 1999). Procedural justice judgements are shaped by relational concerns and tend to be a crucial factor in evaluating group or organizational authorities. Hence, procedural issues feature prominently in the assessment of authorities (Tyler, 1994). This research further contributes to the trickle-down model, where negative contexts or relations between a supervisor and their supervisor led to undesirable behaviors (Tyler, 1994) that are subsequently perceived by subordinates as abusive (Tepper et al., 2006). The trickle-down model leads subordinates to experience abusive supervision ultimately caused by the behavior from higher up in the organizational hierarchy.

The interaction of interactional justice and supervisor leadership style have been shown to be significant antecedents of abusive supervision (Aryee, Sun, Chen, and Debrah, 2007). Interactional justice highlights the concern an individual has about the fairness of interpersonal treatment received from decision makers when enacting decision procedures (Folger & Bies,

1989). When confronted with interpersonal injustice, people tend to respond with negative emotions such as anger or hostility (Folger, 1993). Thus, supervisors who experience interactional injustice at the hands of their immediate supervisors may experience the emotional states of anger, outrage, and frustration. These emotions subsequently lead to instances of behavior perceived by subordinates as abusive (Aryee et al., 2007). Furthermore, the results of meta-analyses exploring abusive supervision indicate that the supervisor's perceived interactional justice was negatively related to abusive supervision ( $\bar{r} = -0.43$ ) (Zhang & Bednall, 2016). However, abusive supervision is thought to be influenced by the supervisor's perceptions of interactional justice in conjunction with individual differences regarding authoritarian leadership style. This finding suggests that the perception of interactional justice held by the supervisor constitutes an act of provocation; yet, it mainly engenders abusive supervision only among supervisors who rate highly in authoritarian leadership style (Aryee et al., 2007).

The violation of a supervisor's psychological contract with the organization is shown to lead to behavior perceived by subordinates as abusive (Hoobler and Brass, 2006). Psychological contract breach is grouped under the header of organizational justice theory because of the central tenet of "fairness," which is the main link between other organizational justice theories and the abusive supervision literature. When supervisors felt their employer had not fulfilled their expectations, their subordinates reported a higher incidence of abusive supervision (Hoobler and Brass, 2006). Such research added further support to the trickle-down model. That is, when supervisors felt they were treated unfairly, they vented their frustration against less powerful individuals.

In a further test of the trickle-down model of abusive supervision, Hoobler and Hu (2013) hypothesized interactional justice perceptions as an antecedent to abusive supervision, mediated

by the supervisor's negative affect. Consistent with their predictions, the perception of interactional justice held by a supervisor was negatively associated with ratings of subordinate negative affect. In turn, negative affect was positively related to supervisors engaging in behaviors perceived as abusive by the subordinate.

The review of articles using these theories as grouped under the organizational justice umbrella as a basis for explaining abusive supervision provides interesting information. First, a situational or contextual variable is critical to include in the examination of abusive supervision as the actions of the supervisor or the perception of subordinates are strongly influenced by context (Hershcovis & Reich, 2013). Second, one of the main models of abusive supervision, the trickle-down model (also referred to as the "displaced aggression model"), received support from multiple sources. Supervisors perceive unfair treatment from one source yet vent their frustration onto another less powerful person. This helps us to understand that the factors leading to a subordinate perception of abusive supervision may be distal rather than proximal.

#### *Theories of Individual Resources*

Five papers, citing three theories, investigated how a drain on an individual's cognitive resources weakened their ability to maintain social normative behavior under difficult circumstances. These findings suggest that resource depletion can impair the ability of supervisors to engage in appropriate social interactions (Von Hippel & Gonsalkorale, 2005). Furthermore, lack of sleep (Kahn-Greene, Lipizzi, Conrad, Kamimori, & Killgore, 2006) and executive functioning resources (DeWall, Baumeister, Stillman, & Gailliot, 2007) predicted aggressive behavior. Aggressive behavior then was a statistically significant predictor of a subordinate's perception of abusive supervision. A leader with depressive symptoms – such as anxiety or alcohol consumption in the workplace – may be experiencing resource depletion



(Byrne et al., 2014) or emotional exhaustion (Lam, Walter and Huang, 2017). These issues were all independently and positively related to employee perceptions of abusive supervision.

The theory of conservation of resources (COR) (Hobfoll, 2001) is used as the theoretical basis for research investigating the relationship between an individual's resources and abusive supervision (Stucke & Baumeister, 2006). The COR theory elucidates how individuals who lack personal resources and then experience stress can be prone to further loss of resources. This leads individuals who have experienced a drain on their resources to react defensively to conserve their remaining resources. This conservation effort may mean using counterproductive or loss-control strategies (Hobfoll, 2001). For example, exhausted supervisors could be poorly motivated or unable to use valuable resources to maintain normative conduct, and may thus be unwilling to invest effort to restrain their aggressive impulses (Stucke & Baumeister, 2006). COR differs from other theories as it discusses the outcomes of the loss of individual resources by integrating environmental processes with the individual's internal processes (Hobfoll, 2001). Hence COR focuses not just on the context or the individual's cognitions but also on the interaction between the person and the environment. Protecting oneself from further resource drain is an internal coping mechanism. The individual, in an effort to conserve their resources, may act without conscious thought regarding how or why they are reacting.

Similar to COR, the theory of resource/ego depletion used by Courtright and colleagues (2016) to explain self-regulatory resource whereby depletion arises from stressful situations such as family-work conflict (FWC). This provides an additional theoretical viewpoint about why supervisors behave in a manner perceived as abusive by their subordinates. Ego depletion theory emphasizes the theoretical relevance of negative family-work dynamics as a key driver of self-regulatory resource depletion. Meeting competing demands of the family and the workplace

causes individuals to expend energy in dealing with this constant stress, leaving fewer resources to deal appropriately with other situations as they arise (Inzlicht and Schmeichel, 2012).

Courtright and colleagues found support for their process model, which demonstrated that abusive supervision can result through a process of self-regulatory resource depletion. Similarly, Yam and colleagues (2016) based their research on ego-depletion theory and the emotional labor literature (Grandey, 2000) to understand when and why abusive supervision occurs. They found that supervisors are more likely to become depleted when taxing customer interactions necessitate them to engage in surface acting – whereby an individual fakes an emotion (e.g. smiling and using an upbeat tone of voice even with a difficult customer).

A third theory, self-regulation theory, is somewhat similar to concepts developed from COR and ego-depletion. According to self-regulation theory, individual resources are limited. Accordingly, when resources are depleted, individuals are likely to engage in behavior without thinking, giving thoughtless responses (Inzlicht & Schmeichel, 2012). Mawritz, Greenbaum, Butts, and Graham (2017) found that self-regulation is a mediator of the relationship between subordinate deviance and abusive supervision. If an individual's self-regulatory resources were depleted, this led to the impairment of their ability to control inappropriate responses to negative stimuli, such as subordinate deviance.

The studies outlined above all have a common theme: individuals have limited resources and abilities to regulate their behavior. If self-regulation is a finite resource, an individual who is prone to aggressive behavior must self-regulate to keep their aggressive impulses in check; such a person may thus have lower resource capacity than non-aggressive individuals. Stucke and Baumeister (2006) determined that the capacity to inhibit aggressive behavior should be relatively low among people who have already exercised self-regulation. An interesting question

is what happens when individuals who are already exercising self-regulation are further tested by exhaustion, depression, alcohol consumption, anxiety or subordinate deviance. Therefore, certain traits or individual characteristics would engage self-regulation resources, rendering those individuals prone to aggressive behaviors when additional cognitive drain occurs in the workplace.

### Individual Cognition

The individual cognition category contains a variety of theories that predict how individual cognitions explain when abusive supervision is more likely to occur or be perceived. These theories include moral exclusion theory, attribution theory, and the cognitive theory of stress. Both moral exclusion theory and the cognitive theory of stress focus on the cognitions of the supervisor while attribution theory focuses on the cognitive processes of the subordinate.

The basis of moral exclusion theory is social identity theory. Social identity theory posits that individuals continually categorize others in an effort to differentiate similar and dissimilar characteristics when comparing others to oneself. The individual then demonstrates favoritism toward similar others and treatment toward those who are dissimilar ranging from discrimination to derogation (Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979). Moral exclusion theory goes one step further than social identity theory by relegating those individuals deemed as either ‘out-group’ or ‘other’ as less deserving of moral considerations and “expendable, undeserving, exploitable, and irrelevant” (Opatow & Weiss, 2000, p. 478).

Walter and colleagues (2015) used the same theoretical arguments from moral exclusion theory when they tested the relationship between subordinate performance and abusive supervision, moderated by how much the supervisor likes the subordinate as well as how dependent the supervisor is on the subordinate for outcomes of which the supervisor is

responsible. Supervisor interdependency with a subordinate as well as whether the supervisor liked the subordinate both decreased the likelihood the subordinate would perceive the supervisor as abusive (Walter et al., 2015).

Hostile and aggressive acts are suggested to be directed mainly towards dissimilar others, either consciously or unconsciously, because dissimilar others are excluded from one's scope of justice (Tajfel, et al., 1979). Moral exclusion theory (Opatow, 1990) was used in the studies mentioned above to explain how abusive supervision is related to perceived deep-level dissimilarity and negatively related to supervisor evaluations of subordinate performance. When people are excluded from the focal individual's scope of justice, they are more likely to be mistreated or excluded and ignored (Opatow, 1990). These behaviors, enacted frequently, fall under the definition of abusive supervision.

The abusive supervision literature using moral exclusion theory has focused on differences in the perceptions of abusive supervision among employees under the same supervisor. All such studies indicated that attributions play a role in the perception of the quality of the subordinate-supervisor relationship (Martinko et al., 2011). Attributions and attribution theory describe the different ways in which people explain the behavior or actions of others (Weiner, 1980). Attribution styles describe how people are biased in their causal explanations of the behaviors of others (Weiner, 1980). That is, one cannot know the motives for another person's behavior, yet one may infer a casual explanation based on a combination of one's own past experiences and behavioral inclinations. Martinko and colleagues (2011) reported that the hostile attribution styles of subordinates were positively related to the perception of abuse, and were negatively related to leader member exchange (LMX) perceptions.

An additional contextual variable, the cognitive theory of stress, was used to investigate what role this type of environment played in the perception of abusive supervision (Mawritz, Folger, and Latham, 2014). Stress is defined as “an individual’s psychological response to a situation in which there is something at stake and where the situation taxes or exceeds the individual’s capacity or resources” (LePine, LePine, & Jackson, 2004, p. 883). The original cognitive theory of stress describes a stressor–appraisal–emotion–outcome process (Folkman, 1984). Based on this model, stress is thought to drain an individual’s resources. Researchers found that Supervisors who experience stress are more likely to enact behaviors perceived as abusive by their subordinates.

Stress theory suggests that there is a sequence in which a stressor is first appraised as either a challenge or a threat; the appraisal is followed by either positive or negative emotions (LePine, et al., 2004). In the final step of the sequence, the stressor–appraisal–emotion process influences whether the behavioral outcome is positive or negative. Positive behaviors are associated with positive outcomes and negative behaviors are associated with negative outcomes (Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007). Mawritz and colleagues (2014) did not suggest a direct link between exceedingly difficult goals (as perceived) and abusive supervision, but they drew on stress research to explain the mechanisms in the relationship between goals and abuse. Job goals that are appraised by supervisors as exceedingly difficult to attain increase the stress and pressure felt by the supervisor, which increases their negative emotions – particularly anger and anxiety. Research on deviant behavior and coping strategies indicates that feelings of anger and anxiety can motivate abusive behavior. Hence, when supervisors experience anger and anxiety associated with stress, they are motivated to engage in aggressive acts, which are perceived as abuse by their subordinates (Mawritz et al., 2014).

This review then found three major theories used to link antecedents to abusive supervision via individual cognition. Moral exclusion theory explained that poor performers were more likely to be abused as they were more likely to cause relationship conflict (Tepper et al., 2011). Going one step further, the relationship between poor performance and abusive supervision was moderated by how much the supervisor likes the subordinate as well as how important the work of the subordinate was to the supervisor's outcomes (Walter et al., 2015). Attribution theory and a hostile attribution bias, whereby the subordinate possesses a skewed perception of a supervisor's actions had a positive relationship with the employee perception of abusive supervision (Martinko et al., 2011). Finally, the cognitive theory of stress found that a stressful environment (as perceived by the supervisor) led to a significant increase in the subordinate perception of the behavior of the supervisor as abusive.

### *Social Exchange*

The theories categorized under the umbrella of social exchange include leader-member exchange (LMX), social learning theory, social exchange theory, social dominance theory, and interpersonal interaction theory. The commonality of these theories resides in the interaction of the focal individual and another person, group, or environment. The type of relationship (low- or high-quality) that is created by this interaction or exchange leads to a higher likelihood of the occurrence or perception of abusive supervision. Social exchange theory states that individuals develop common compulsory exchange relationships with one another, which are maintained by observing the norms of reciprocity. These norms mean that positive or negative behaviors create an obligation to respond in kind (Blau, 1968; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Research in this vein tested the hypothesis that an employee who engaged in deviance could instigate supervisor

behaviors that were perceived as abusive (Lian, Ferris, Morrison, & Brown, 2014; Mawritz et al., 2014).

LMX theory proposes that the quality of leader–member relationships varies from high to low (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Subordinates in high-quality exchanges are seen more favorably and receive advantages from their supervisors, unlike their low-quality LMX counterparts (Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). It follows logically that when abuse occurs due to the presence of conflict between the supervisor and subordinate, members in low-quality exchanges may perceive the actions of their supervisor as a form of abuse more strongly and frequently than do members in high-quality exchanges (Liden, et al., 1997). Following this logic, Martinko and colleagues (2011) linked LMX and abusive supervision by explaining that perceptions of abusive supervision might constitute a subset of LMX quality perceptions: “It appears logical to infer that whenever subordinates perceive that their supervisors abuse them, they also perceive that the LMX relationship is poor.” (p. 754). While this point is almost certainly true, they did not claim that all perceptions of poor LMX quality would result in perceiving the supervisor as abusive.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1973) highlights the important role of socio-contextual factors for learning the types of behaviors that are appropriate in specific situations or relationships. The focus of social learning theory is to better understand how behavior is acquired and regulated (Bandura, 1977) and suggests that individuals learn normative behavior not only through their own experiences but, also through the observation of the experiences of others (Bandura, 1977). For example, social learning theory suggests that frequent exposure to, and subsequent modeling of, the seemingly acceptable aggressive behaviors of others increases the likelihood that an individual will learn to aggress. These same individuals also learn to

perceive aggression as an appropriate response in situations where it may not be warranted (Bandura, 1973; Berkowitz, 1993). Accordingly, leaders will most likely imitate the behaviors of a reliable role model to guarantee their success as a leader (Bandura, 1977). Abusive supervision research using social learning theory is grouped under ‘social exchange’ rather than ‘cognitive’ header. Though cognitive processes play a prominent role in social learning theory, the focus by researchers of abusive supervision on how behavior is learned because of a specific relationship, such as that between the supervisor and subordinate or between a parent and child.

Researchers use social learning theory to explain how supervisors who perceive aggressive organizational norms as occurring in their organization and being accepted by those in the organization (e.g., leaders, followers) learn – and eventually adopt – hostile patterns of behavior (Restubog, Scott, and Zagenczyk, 2011; Mawritz, Dust, and Resick, 2014). These patterns are likely to translate into a perception of abuse by their subordinates. An argument was also made that when aggressive norms are displayed from the top of the organization and modelled down through the ranks, aggressive behaviors also flow downward (Restubog, et al., 2011). A direct and positive relationship was found between aggressive norms and perceptions of abusive supervision (Restubog et al., 2011).

The work into social learning theory as a tool for understanding abusive supervision lends further support to its use as a tool for understanding the antecedents of abusive supervision. Specifically, it is hypothesized that a hostile organizational climate plays an important role in shaping leader behaviors and perceptions of abusive supervision (Mawritz et al., 2014). This work did not focus on the norms of the organization but tested the hypothesis that abusive supervision occurs because supervisors emulate the behavior of their own past or current supervisor. This argument suggests that subordinates look to their immediate supervisors for



information on behavioral norms and many times go so far as to mimic their behavior (Mawritz et al., 2012).

The link between norms and perceptions of abusive supervision was subsequently confirmed by Tu, Bono, Shum and LaMontagne (2018). However, these researchers found this relationship was significant if the past or current supervisor who was perceived as abusive was also perceived to be successful; the relationship was not significant when the supervisor was viewed as unsuccessful. Because success is equated with credibility, abusive behavior by the successful supervisor is viewed by their employees as effective. The same behaviors are emulated after promotion to a supervisory position, in a cycle that further supports abuse.

Two additional studies investigated a similar phenomenon of emulation but looked beyond the organization for the source of the behaviors adopted by a supervisor who was perceived as abusive. These works test the relationship between family undermining (Kiewitz, et al., 2012) and history of family aggression (Garcia, Restubog, Kiewitz, Scott, & Tang, 2014) experienced by supervisors while growing up. A history of family aggression increased the likelihood of subordinates perceiving abusive behavior by the supervisor, beyond the influence of organizational mistreatment or other individual variables – such as demographic characteristics and subordinate neuroticism (Garcia et al., 2014). Kiewitz and colleagues (2012) found that growing up in a family environment where parents undermined their children through verbal abuse increased the likelihood that the children would experience relationship problems as adults. These problems may resurface, particularly in the workplace, due to the psychological parallels between parent–child and supervisor–subordinate relationships (Game, 2008).

Under this umbrella of social exchange, some researchers investigated organizational / workplace deviance as both an outcome and an antecedent of abusive supervision using social

exchange theory. It was found that deviance against the organization that the supervisor represents can disrupt the normal social exchange between supervisor and subordinate thereby increasing the likelihood of inciting supervisor behavior perceived as abusive, as a means of retaliation against the subordinate (Lian et al., 2014; Mawritz et al., 2014).

Social dominance theory is also categorized in the social exchange category because of the dyadic relationship between the dominator and the dominated inherent in this theory. Social dominance theory (SDT) is used by two sets of researchers in two studies to develop new theoretical models that consider the interaction of characteristics of the subordinate and the supervisor in the perception of abusive supervision. SDT postulates that the combined effect of, first, a desire for status, and second, power differences, creates a hierarchical structure that promotes the superiority of dominant groups over subordinate groups (Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006). Individuals in the dominant group perceive a threat to an existing hierarchy when the activities, values, traditions, or actions of the subordinate group create the perception of impending change or threat to the status quo (Esses, Jackson, & Armstrong, 1998). SDT also suggests that when high-dominance individuals interact with others who are proactive, conflict ensues, and this increases the likelihood of mistreatment, hostility, and abuse (Sidanius and Pratto, 2001).

In the first study, subordinate performance is shown to have a positive indirect effect on perceptions of abusive supervision through perceived threat to hierarchy (Khan, Moss, Quratulain, & Hameed, 2016). This effect was amplified when the supervisor's social dominance orientation was higher than average. A supervisor's level of social dominance orientation was found to determine whether that supervisor would feel threatened by a high-performing subordinate (Khan et al., 2018). When the supervisor had a high social dominance orientation,

higher-performing subordinates were more likely to perceive abusive supervision (Khan et al., 2018).

The second study focuses on identifying leader and follower characteristics that explain the role of similarity or dissimilarity in inciting relationship conflict and subsequent abuse (Graham et al., 2018). SDT was used to help explain how and why certain characteristics of leaders and followers lead to abusive supervision while interpersonal interaction theory (IIT) provided further insight on the specific types of dyadic dominance combinations that drive relationship conflict and subsequent abuse. The combination of these two theories worked to provide logical reasons for the ways in which the interplay of traits may lead to abusive supervision through relationship conflict. The basis of IIT resides in the compatibility of individuals that is created by interpersonal reciprocity when people behave in ways that elicit desired behavioral responses from each other (Grant, Gino, & Hofmann, 2011). Hence, IIT broadly suggests that interpersonal conflict resulting from incompatibility leads to mistreatment. By contrast, SDT describes how individuals in a hierarchically superior position (i.e. leaders) engage in abusive actions because of relationship conflict triggered by incompatibility (Graham et al., 2018). Therefore, high-dominance supervisors were more likely to be perceived as abusive regardless of the orientation of the subordinate while low-dominance supervisors were more likely to be perceived as abusive by high-dominance subordinates (Graham et al., 2018).

The important message from these works is that the abusive supervision, while a perception of subordinates, is informed by the actions and characteristics of the supervisor, the subordinate, and a wider network of actors (e.g., higher levels of supervision with the organization, previous relationships experienced by the subordinate). Studies that investigate the characteristics of either the supervisor or the subordinate alone potentially exclude important

information that could be explained by the interaction between these two people. Abusive supervision cannot exist solely on one side of a dyadic relationship.

### Affect

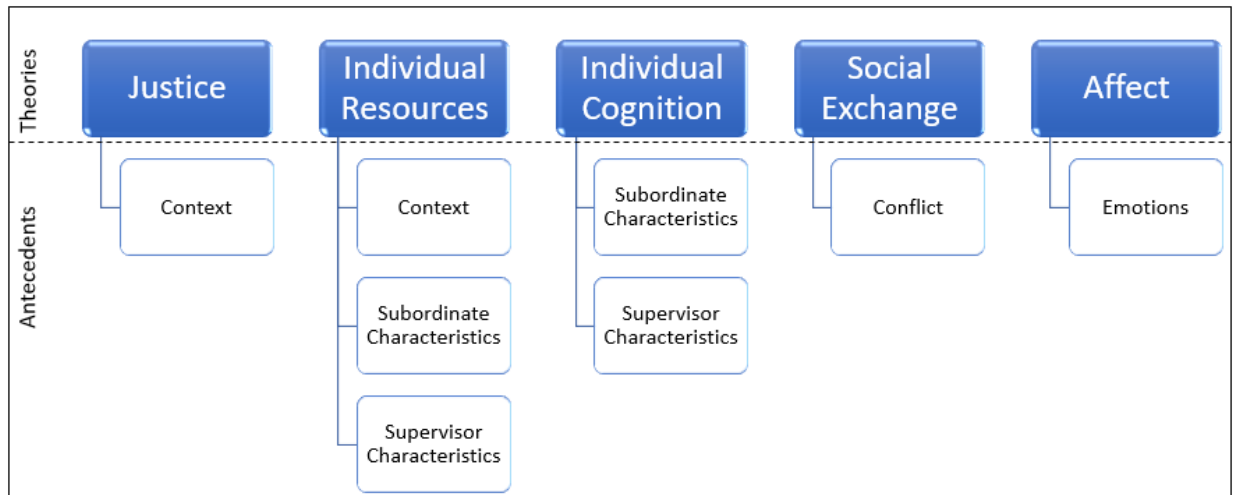
According to affect events theory (AET), emotions are central to predicting employee behaviors in the workplace (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Specifically, AET proposes employee behaviors hinge on exposure to specific work events or experiences and the emotional responses these events generate (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Eissa and Lester (2017) demonstrated that abusive behavior by a supervisor is a link in the event–emotion–behavior process experienced by subordinates who perceive abuse. Specifically, supervisor role overload (an event) led to induced supervisor frustration (an emotional reaction), which then provoked abusive behavior by the supervisor (a behavioral reaction). The magnitude of these relationships depended on facets of a supervisor’s personality (Eissa & Lester, 2017). To date, this is the only study to use AET to highlight the role of emotions in the abusive supervision process both proximally (frustration) and distally (role overload). However, other works have examined different emotions as antecedents of abusive supervision.

### **Antecedents of Abusive Supervision**

This next section analyzes in further detail the exact constructs tested as antecedents of abusive supervision. In some cases, the information detailing the actual antecedent and the theory are similar and may seem redundant as is the case when discussing resource depletion as an antecedent and resource depletion theory. As discussed in detail in the previous section, supervisors with depleted resources are more likely to engage in abusive supervision (Von Hippel & Gonsalkorale, 2005; Kahn-Greene et al., 2006; DeWall et al., 2007; Byrne et al., 2014; Lam et al., 2017). However, there are other theories that use constructs as antecedents to explain

the occurrence of abusive supervision that are not definitionally similar to the theory. One such example is ‘surface acting’ as the operationalization of how resources are depleted. All of the constructs below were directly demonstrated to act as an antecedent of abusive supervision. The antecedents have received less attention from researchers than have the outcomes of abusive supervision. Nonetheless, this research explores an interesting mix of the causes of abusive supervision. The original 30 articles coded by theory were also coded by antecedent whereby five distinct categories emerged. These were context, conflict, subordinate characteristics, supervisor characteristics and emotion. These categories largely match the categorical groupings from previous literature reviews and meta-analyses (Tepper, 2007; Martinko et al., 2013; Zhang & Bednall, 2016). The main changes were to include categories for conflict and emotion which I found to be important distinctions from the other three categories. Additionally, demographic characteristics of both the supervisors and subordinates were subsumed by the subordinate or supervisor characteristic categories. Figure 1 illustrates the antecedent to category linkage; the categories are discussed in detail below. Figure 1 visually depicts how the antecedents acted through the different theoretical lenses already discussed in an effort to further elucidate the causes of abusive supervision. Justice theories have only examined context while theories of individual resources have looked at antecedents classified as context, subordinate characteristics, and supervisor characteristics. Subordinate and supervisor characteristics have both also been examined through the lens of individual cognition theories while social exchange theories have only used antecedents that fall into the conflict classification. Similarly, affective theories have only investigated emotions as antecedents of abusive supervision.

**Figure 1: Conceptual links between antecedents and theories in the literature**



Context

Situational context, as an antecedent of abusive supervision, is explored in three ways in the current literature. The main contexts are resource drain and its associated operationalizations (Tepper et al., 2006; Courtright et al., 2016; Byrne et al., 2014; Mawritz et al., 2014; Yam et al., 2016; Lam et al., 2017), organizational justice (Ayree et al., 2007; Hoobler & Hu, 2006; Hoobler & Brass, 2006), and organizational norms or climate (Restubog et al., 2011; Mawritz et al., 2014). The consensus of this research on contextual antecedents is that situational context matters in the study of abusive supervision; abusive supervision is not a phenomenon that occurs in a vacuum. Through various theoretical explanations, context is shown to be a catalyst for behavior by the supervisor, which is then perceived by the subordinate as abusive.

The antecedents that lead to resource depletion or indicators of resource depletion are some of the most frequently analyzed contexts in the abusive supervision literature. According to Von Hippel and Gonsalkorale (2005), when leaders' resources are drained, their ability to regulate their affective reactions and behaviors is compromised. Depleted self-control also impairs the ability to engage in normative social interactions (Von Hippel & Gonsalkorale,

2005). Depletion of executive functioning resources was shown to predict aggressive behavior that was subsequently perceived as abusive by subordinates (DeWall et al., 2007).

The causes of resource depletion vary. Research on the antecedents of abusive supervision analyzed how emotional exhaustion (Lam et al., 2017), low state self-control (Yam et al., 2016), high stress (Mawritz et al., 2014), and family–work conflict (Courtright et al., 2016) can deplete a supervisor’s resources to the point where regulation of their behavior within the bounds of social norms becomes difficult. Each of these factors was found to have a positive relationship with abusive supervision.

Consistent with the stressor–appraisal–emotion–outcome sequence (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Mawritz and colleagues (2014) reported that goals appraised as exceedingly high were appraised as hindrance stressors. This heightened feelings of anger and anxiety held by the supervisor and these emotional responses, in turn, predicted subordinate perceptions of abusive supervision. Byrne and colleagues (2014) confirmed the link between anxiety and abusive supervision, along with additional indicators of resource depletion – including depression and alcohol consumption in the workplace. Other abusive supervision studies reported further signs that emotional exhaustion caused by resource depletion led supervisors to adopt a defensive posture to conserve their remaining resources (Lam et al., 2017). This defensive posture is likely to take the form of behaviors viewed as aggressive and hostile by subordinates (Lam et al., 2017).

“Surface acting” with customers includes suppressing, altering, or overruling one’s emotions after they are experienced (Grandey, 2000). This behavior also eroded state self-control and thus led to resource depletion (Yam et al., 2016). Work–family conflict was an additional stressor found to lead to resource depletion. This framework where work-family conflict led to

abusive supervision through resource depletion, similar to that of Mawritz and colleagues (2014), illustrated that stressors outside the direct work domain could impact experiences and behaviors inside the work domain (Courtright et al., 2016).

The second contextual factor examined here as an antecedent of abusive supervision is the supervisor's perception of just treatment by the organization or their own supervisor. The perception of just treatment was operationalized as a breach of psychological contract (Hoobler and Brass, 2006), procedural justice (Tepper et al., 2006), or interactional justice (Aryee et al., 2007; Hoobler and Hu, 2013). In this literature, abusive supervision is viewed as a response to organizational events or norms. In a "kick the dog" (Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Restubog et al., 2011) or trickle-down fashion, supervisors express their aggression against those over whom they have power in the organization, their subordinates. Aryee and colleagues (2007) found that when supervisors reported unfair treatment from others in the organization, their subordinates were more likely to report their supervisor as abusive. Similarly, when supervisors felt their employer had not lived up to promises made – that is, supervisors felt their psychological contracts had been violated, their subordinates judged them as relatively abusive (Hoobler & Brass, 2016).

The third and final contextual factor explored here that was considered by researchers in relation to abusive supervision was organizational climate. Researchers have speculated that work environments that support a degree of hostility may result in aggressive or violent behavior in the workplace, because such environments legitimize aggressive or abusive treatment (Hoobler & Brass, 2006) or teach employees to behave in this manner through processes described in social learning theory (O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Grew, 1996). Organizational



climate – representing shared perceptions of organizational policies, practices, and procedures – is an empirically important indicator of workplace behavior (Reichers & Schneider, 1990).

Some studies have shown that aggressive organizational norms influence abusive supervision by signaling that aggressive behavior is acceptable through allowing this behavior rather than punishing it (Restubog et al., 2011). Mawritz and colleagues (2014) reported similar findings, although they focused on hostile organizational climates rather than aggressive organizational norms. This study bolstered previous research that found that hostile climates are an affective climate that emerges when employees feel envious, untrusting, and aggressive toward other organizational members (Mawritz et al., 2012). These researchers hypothesized that the organizational members most likely to be the targets of envious, untrusting and aggressive behaviors are those who hold relatively low positions in the organization (since these feelings and behaviors are not necessarily tied to the type of position held by either the supervisor or subordinate). This translated into perceived abuse over the long term (Mawritz et al., 2012; Restubog et al., 2011).

Context, though wide ranging, is a significant antecedent in the analysis of the subordinate perception of abusive supervision. The situational factors that cause resource depletion, perceptions of organizational or interpersonal justice from coworkers or supervisors, and organizational climate have all been found to attribute to the subordinate perception of a supervisor as abusive. Most of these contexts are studied in how they directly affect the supervisor and indirectly affect the subordinate though future research could determine if these contexts were 1) perceived as the same by the supervisor and subordinate and 2) if the context had the same types of effects on both the supervisor and the subordinate.

### Conflict

The next group of antecedents falls under the umbrella of conflict. This group is characterized by a contentious relationship between two people as an antecedent of abusive supervision. This grouping refers in broad terms to a general relationship conflict between a supervisor and their subordinate (Mawritz et al., 2012); conflict between supervisors at the same level (Harris et al., 2011); or conflict between a supervisor and a subordinate, caused by personality differences (Graham et al., 2018) or deep-level dissimilarity (Tepper et al., 2011). These latter two works used conflict to operationalize certain characteristics related to the supervisor or the subordinate. Hence, these works are discussed in the sections on supervisor and subordinate characteristics.

As noted earlier in this review various authors used the trickle-down model to explain how conflict with same-level coworkers (Harris et al., 2011) or an upper-level manager (Mawritz et al., 2012) could lead a supervisor to vent their frustrations against people who have little recourse to retaliate – that is, their subordinates. Researchers have demonstrated that the relative power of the parties in a conflict influenced the manner in which the parties responded (Thomas & Schmidt, 1976). When legitimate power levels are equal, as in the case of coworkers, hostile responses are likely to be met with retaliation. In this situation, the target of retaliation could respond with further hostility, creating an escalating cycle of conflict (Harris et al., 2011). Subordinates, by contrast, are often reluctant to respond in kind to hostile supervisor behavior for fear of losing their jobs or facing other punitive action available to the supervisor. If the behaviors of the supervisor are motivated by emotion rather than logic, the fact that subordinates are not the cause of the supervisor's frustration may have little impact on their behavioral response. The desire to vent one's anger over a coworker relationship conflict, but using a safe target, may override the concern that subordinates are not the logical target for retaliation, as

they are not the cause of the conflict (Mawritz et al., 2012). Research has shown that frustration caused by supervisors' conflict with their coworkers (Harris et al., 2011) or the conflict stemming from the supervisors' supervisor (Mawritz et al., 2012) is often taken out on a subordinate. This research found that when supervisors reported conflicts with co-workers or supervisors, their subordinates were more likely to perceive the actions of their supervisor as abusive.

### Supervisor Characteristics

The largest category of antecedents is supervisor characteristics and researchers exploring these characteristics represented almost half of the papers in this review. These studies investigated one or more supervisor characteristics to explain why abusive supervision occurs. Supervisor characteristics include personality (Mawritz et al., 2014; Eissa & Lester, 2017; Breevaart & de Vries, 2017; Graham et al., 2018; Yu, Duffy, & Tepper, 2018), leadership style or beliefs (Aryee et al., 2007; Tu et al., 2018; Watkins, Fehr, & He, 2018), hostile attribution bias or cognitions (Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Garcia et al., 2014), personal history (Garcia et al., 2014; Kiewitz et al., 2012), and impaired self-regulation (Collins & Jackson, 2015; Lam et al., 2017). Personal history included family undermining or being exposed to an abusive supervisor. Personal history and poor self-regulation represent the operationalization of theories already discussed in chapter 2 and that material is not repeated here.

In the past five years, abusive supervision researchers investigated how the personality traits of a supervisor might relate to subordinate perceptions of abusive supervision. Supervisor conscientiousness moderated the early stage of the indirect relationship between perceived hostile climate and abusive supervision (Mawritz et al., 2014). Highly conscientious individuals tend to think before acting and abide by ethical principles, whereas less conscientious individuals

tend to be less disciplined in their actions and less focused on moral obligations (Colquitt, Scott, Judge, & Shaw, 2006; Costa & McCrae, 1992). The findings aligned with the expectation that highly conscientious supervisors would be relatively unlikely to react to perceived hostility by engaging in abusive supervision. In contrast, less conscientious supervisors modeled hostile climate norms and engaged in abusive acts that constituted environmental stressors for employees (Mawritz et al., 2014).

Eissa and Lester (2017) examined the “big five” personality traits in relation to abusive supervision. They explored moderated relationships in the hopes of better understanding the specific traits that exacerbated the relationship between role overload and abusive supervision. These authors concluded that neuroticism strengthened the relationship between role overload and frustration while agreeableness weakened the relationship between frustration and abusive supervision (Eissa and Lester, 2017). The findings also demonstrated supervisor personality traits provisionally moderated the indirect effect of supervisor role overload on abusive supervision. Hence, this research found that different levels of supervisor personality traits could encapsulate the differences in the emotional and behavioral reactions of supervisors to varying work events and emotions.

In addition to the big five, the HEXACO personality inventory was also used to better understand how supervisor personality is related to abusive supervision (Breevaart & de Vries, 2017). The HEXACO model of personality distinguishes six personality domains: honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Only agreeableness and honesty-humility were hypothesized to predict abusive supervision while the other traits were not thought to have a significant effect which matched their actual findings. Prior research established that individuals with high levels of honesty-

humility are genuine in their relationships with others, are unwilling to manipulate others, tend to avoid fraud and corruption, and do not take advantage of others (Ashton, Lee & Goldberg, 2007). By contrast, individuals with low honesty-humility use others for personal gain, are willing to cheat and steal, and see themselves as superior to others (Ashton et al., 2007). Low honesty-humility is also associated with general counter-normative behaviors (Ashton et al., 2007). Agreeable people are thought to provide mild judgments of others and are willing to compromise and cooperate, do not express their anger easily, and tend to be forgiving (Ashton et al., 2007). Individuals who score low on agreeableness are critical and stubborn, lose their tempers quickly, tend to hold grudges toward those who treated them badly, and judge others harshly (Ashton et al., 2007). The expected relationships between perceptions of abusive supervision and the two personality variables of honesty-humility and agreeableness were found. Individuals who scored low on agreeableness and honesty-humility were relatively likely to be perceived as abusive supervisors.

Graham and colleagues (2018) proposed that individuals vary in their propensity for dominance, and that dominance influences how they interact with others (Sidanius & Pratto, 2000). This research was based on SDT. The theory suggests that individuals whose dominance scores are high enjoy unequal social roles and tend to believe they are superior to others. Highly dominant individuals enjoy having status (Pratto, Stallworth, Sidanius, & Siers, 1997) and feel that using force towards others, especially people in subordinate groups, is justified (Sidanius & Pratto, 2000). In contrast, low-dominance individuals feel that no-one should be dominant over others. Rather than being submissive and passive, they prefer equality and hold egalitarian worldviews (Sidanius & Pratto, 2000). As stated in the theory section, supervisors with a high dominance orientation were more likely to be perceived as abusive by their subordinates while

low-dominance supervisors were only likely to be perceived as abusive by high-dominance subordinates (Graham et al., 2018).

In addition to personality, three leadership-related constructs are linked to abusive supervision. Authoritarian leadership style (Aryee et al., 2007), ideal leadership self-concept (Tu et al., 2018), and a supervisor's instrumental beliefs of abusive supervision (Watkins et al., 2018) are all significant predictors of abusive supervision. Aryee and colleagues (2007) reported that authoritarian leadership style was a significant predictor of abusive supervision. The underlying need for control by individuals high in authoritarian leadership style, and their inability to manage their emotions, predispose them to engage in abusive supervision (Ashforth, 1997). Research also explored the association between those who are exposed to abuse and whether or not they are perceived as abusive when they become a leader (Tu et al., 2018). This relationship is found to be strongest when the role model of a new leader is perceived as a high performer and the new leader's self-perception either endorsed tyranny or is low on sensitivity (Tu et al., 2018). The leadership self-concept acts as an instrument by which individuals recognize, understand, and respond to the behaviors of a role model (Gibson, 2003). These behaviors are influential determinants of an individual's behaviors and reactions to the context because they stimulate the person to define who they do or do not want to be. This knowledge leads new leaders to try, approach, reject, or modify the behaviors they observed in others (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). Therefore, new leaders who perceived their past supervisors as abusive but, successful, were more likely to be perceived by their subordinates as abusive (Tu et al., 2018).

Leaders who are perceived as abusive may abuse their employees for ostensibly legitimate purposes (Watkins et al., 2018). This is an interesting finding on abusive supervision, since previous studies suggest that performance levels generate abuse from leaders due to moral

exclusion (Walter et al., 2015) or perceived threat (Khan et al., 2016). Though Watkins and colleagues (2018) found that supervisors perceived as abusive may not be acting maliciously but in the interest of others, it remains agnostic about whether leaders consider abuse to be a means to an end or believe it will boost their performance.

Lastly, Hoobler and Brass (2006) examined hostile attribution bias of the subordinate as the main driver of subordinates rating their supervisor as abusive. Hostile attribution bias is an extra-punitive mentality in which individuals have a tendency to cast responsibility onto others (Adams & John, 1997). According to Thomas and Pondy (1977), hostile attributions strongly affect the perceptions of and reactions to frustrating situations, such as psychological contract violations. Therefore, those individuals experiencing psychological contract violations were theorized to be more likely to possess a hostile attribution bias with the interaction of these two constructs significantly relating to abusive supervision. When a supervisor interpreted a psychological contract violation as a personal affront, abuse was more likely to result than if the supervisor did not make a hostile attribution.

It is not surprising that the individual characteristics of the supervisor would be the most frequently studied antecedent in abusive supervision research since the supervisor is the main focus of abusive supervision as a construct. A supervisor with a conscientious (Mawritz et al., 2014) or agreeable personality was found to be less likely to be perceived as abusive while a supervisor with a neurotic personality (Eissa and Lester, 2017) or one who tested low on agreeableness or honesty-humility (Breevaart and DeVries, 2017) was more likely to be perceived as abusive. Supervisors who were found to possess a dominance-oriented (Graham et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2018) or an authoritarian (Aryee et al., 2017) leadership style were also found to be more likely to be perceived as abusive by subordinates. If a supervisor believed that

the behaviors deemed ‘abusive’ were likely to lead to positive performance outcomes (Watkins et al., 2018) or if a supervisor was abused by a previous supervisor and that supervisor’s supervisor was perceived as successful (Tu et al., 2018), then subordinates were more likely to perceive their behavior as abusive. Finally, if the supervisor possessed a hostile attribution bias, subordinates were more likely to perceive their behavior as abusive (Hoobler & Brass, 2006).

### Subordinate Characteristics

Nine of the reviewed papers examined a characteristic of the subordinate as an antecedent of abusive supervision. Five of these works presented a hypothesis that variations in subordinate performance were likely to lead to abusive supervision (Tepper et al., 2011; Mawritz et al., 2017; Lam et al., 2015; Liang et al., 2018; Lian et al., 2014); two examined subordinate deviance (Lian et al., 2014; Harvey et al., 2017); one examined subordinate attribution style (Walter et al., 2011); one examined psychological entitlement of the employee (Harvey et al., 2014); and one examined dominant personality among subordinates (Graham et al., 2018).

Subordinate poor performance was linked as a predictor in abusive supervision in several works, based mainly on literature about the derogation of targets. Previous research suggested that apprehensions about justice and morality are not applied to targets perceived as disadvantageous for the focal actor (Opatow, 1990). Hence, harmful and hostile behavior transpires more often toward individuals who exhibit relatively low utility (Opatow, 1990). Based on this reasoning, it was theorized that subordinates perceived as low performers would exhibit less utility for their supervisors, and findings confirmed a negative association between perceived subordinate performance and supervisor abuse (Tepper et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2015).



Similarly, antecedents such as deep-level dissimilarity and relationship conflict were only significant predictors of subordinate evaluations of abusive supervision when the subordinate was a low performer as rated by the supervisor (Tepper et al., 2011). Building on this work, two studies by Walter and colleagues (2015) showed that the perception of supervisor performance was negatively related to subordinate perceptions of their abusive behavior if a supervisor's outcomes largely depended on a subordinate. With lower outcome dependence, in contrast, even high-performing subordinates perceived abuse more often than their high-dependence colleagues (Walter et al., 2015).

Poorly performing subordinates were found to provoke hostility (when framed as subordinate perceptions of abusive supervision) from a supervisor because supervisors viewed them as individuals who threatened authority and impeded goal attainment (Liang et al., 2016). The more often a subordinate exhibits poor performance or the more severe the issues that result, the more often these individuals evoke supervisor hostility and abusive behavior. Liang and colleagues (2016) suggested that the more powerful a supervisor's experienced hostility toward a subordinate, the stronger the desire to relieve this unpleasant feeling by inflicting pain on the subordinate who provoked it. Hence, supervisor's hostility toward a subordinate, fuels their abusive behavior toward that subordinate.

Low performers were found to drain the resources of their supervisor more than high performers, thereby causing the supervisor to be less capable of controlling their actions in difficult situations (Lam et al., 2017; Harvey et al., 2011; Lian et al., 2014). Other researchers similarly argued that dealing with deviant subordinates drained the self-regulatory resources of a supervisor when the supervisor is trying to process and understand the deviant behaviors of their subordinates (Mawritz et al., 2017; Harvey et al., 2011; Lian et al., 2014). When employees

engaged in deviance aimed at supervisors, such as acting rudely toward them or gossiping about them (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007), supervisors were found to engage in behavior perceived to be abusive by the same employees, such as reminding them of their past mistakes and making negative comments about them to others (Mawritz et al., 2017).

Graham and colleagues (2018) used a dominance perspective to demonstrate how conflict was generated between a supervisor and subordinate in the case of high-dominance subordinate–supervisor dyads. When a high-dominance leader interacted with a high-dominance follower, relationship conflict was relatively likely. High-dominance followers possess attitudes and engage in behaviors that contradict what high-dominance leaders deem desirable or normative behavior. Therefore, leaders with high dominance ratings tend to experience negative interpersonal reciprocity with high-dominance followers (Graham et al., 2018). This negative reciprocity was statistically evident in the form of supervisory behaviors that were perceived as abusive by high-dominance subordinates (Graham et al., 2018).

Another study found that several characteristics of psychological entitlement primed employees to interpret innocuous behaviors, such as providing objectively critical feedback, as abusive (Harvey et al., 2014). Entitlement was expected to promote a perception of abusive supervision, because psychologically entitled individuals tend to feel mistreated in general (Harvey et al., 2014). The inflated self-image of people with a strong sense of entitlement often caused them to develop unbalanced notions of reciprocity, in which high expectations for outcomes are associated with relatively poor performance (Naumann et al., 2002). Supervisors can be natural targets for blame by subordinates when the expected rewards and praise do not materialize. Hence, unmet expectations can lower the perceived quality of exchange relationships with supervisors (Harvey et al., 2014).

The final subordinate characteristic that fosters perceptions of abusive supervision is the attribution style of the subordinate (Martinko, Harvey, Sikora, & Douglas, 2011). Attribution theory appears well suited to describing how individuals may develop perceptions of abuse for three reasons. First, a long history of research on the relationship between attributions and leader–member relations has validated the importance of attributions (see Martinko, Harvey, & Douglas, 2007 for a review). Second, attributional factors play a significant role in determining individual perceptions. Finally, attribution theory focuses on the process by which people form causal explanations for significant life outcomes (Weiner, 2008). A test of this general thesis indicated that a significant proportion of the variability in subordinate perceptions of abusive supervision were accounted for by attribution style (Walter et al., 2011).

Since abusive supervision is measured from the perspective of the subordinate, it makes sense for researchers to focus on subordinate characteristics that may lead to these individuals to perceive abusive supervision more frequently. Two of these works provided an interesting take on the abusive supervision/workplace deviance relationship by suggesting that subordinate deviance could lead to supervisor behaviors perceived as abuse rather than the perception of abuse leading to deviance. Subordinate entitlement (Harvey et al., 2014) and hostile attribution style (Walter et al., 2011) were both found to lead to greater perceptions of abuse that may not actually have anything to do with the actions or behaviors of the supervisor. Research in the previous section on supervisor characteristics reported that high-performing subordinates were a threat to supervisors with a high social dominance orientation (Khan et al., 2018). However, several papers in this section reported that poor performers were more likely to perceive their supervisors as abusive (Tepper et al., 2011; Mawritz et al., 2017; Lam et al., 2015; Liang et al., 2018; Lian et al., 2014). This discrepancy is something that requires further research. These

findings also support the view that subordinate and supervisor characteristics should both be investigated.

### Emotions

Seven articles investigated the effect of different emotions in relation to abusive supervision. Three articles focused on general negative affect (Tepper et al., 2006; Hoobler & Hu, 2013; Collins & Jackson, 2015); two focused on hostile affect (Liang et al., 2016; Garcia et al., 2014); one focused on anger (Mawritz et al., 2014); and one focused on envy (Yu et al., 2018). Emotions, whether positive or negative, serve a social function – such as keeping individuals mindful of conditions that are suboptimal, or preparing them to take remedial action when change is warranted (Hill & Buss, 2006). Evolutionarily, positive affect signals that people are satisfied whereas negative affect signals that something is wrong (Pirola-Merlo, Härtel, Mann, & Hirst, 2002).

Supervisors who reported low procedural justice tended to enact behaviors perceived as abusive by subordinates who were rated (by the supervisor) more highly in negative affect (Tepper et al., 2006). A direct relationship was also found between low procedural justice and abusive supervision for subordinates with both high and low negative affect. Hoobler and Hu (2013) found the same relationship between negative affect and abusive supervision through an interaction with interactional injustice.

Tasks of varying difficulty impacted a leader's attentional resource capacity and negative emotions. This led to differences in self-regulation and constructive or destructive forms of leader behavior (Collins & Jackson, 2015). In support of their hypotheses, negative emotions were found to mediate the relationship between task difficulty and abusive supervision. This finding demonstrated that as task difficulty increased, the more the attentional resource capacity

of the leader became depleted through the experience of negative emotions. The result was impaired self-regulation and subordinate perceptions of destructive leadership (Collins and Jackson, 2015).

Building on previous research demonstrating that abusive supervision is a response to the poor performance of subordinates, a self-control framework was used to explain why supervisors might abuse underperforming subordinates (Liang et al., 2016). It was found that poorly performing subordinates stimulate a sense of hostility in a supervisor that could lead to behaviors perceived as abuse. According to this framework, poor performance is likely to lead to abusive supervision when 1) the magnitude of the hostility experienced is high such as for people with a hostile attribution bias, or 2) translation of hostility into abusive supervision is unconstrained such as for people low in trait mindfulness (Liang et al., 2016).

The supervisor's history of observed hostile behavior in their family is found to increase long-term hostile cognitions, which in turn led to the supervisor being rated as abusive by their subordinates (Garcia et al., 2014). Given the psychological parallels that exist between parent-child and supervisor-subordinate relationships (Game, 2008), it is plausible that conditioned negative emotions learned in the family context could be triggered in the workplace. Further support for the relationship between history of family aggression and hostile affect was derived from ancillary research on emotional socialization, especially the influence of parental expression of emotion (Kim, Conger, Lorenz, & Elder, 2001).

Anger and anxiety that resulted from hindrance stress – due to the supervisor's perception of difficult goals – were investigated as antecedents of abusive supervision (Mawritz et al., 2014). Anger is an emotional state consisting of feelings of annoyance, irritation, fury, and rage (Van Der Ploeg, 1988), whereas anxiety is an emotional response that includes feelings of

tension and apprehension (Speilberger, 1972). Both of these negative emotions associated with hindrance stress result from perceived threats to a valued outcome (Lazarus, 1991). Furthermore, individuals may act aggressively when they experience these unpleasant feelings (Neuman & Baron, 1998), and this aggressive behavior is likely to be perceived as abuse by their subordinates. Research found that supervisors experiencing anger or anxiety associated with hindrance stress tended to engage in abusive behavior, as reported by subordinates, as a method of coping with their negative feelings (Mawritz et al., 2014).

Yu and colleagues (2018) cited prior works that demonstrated how envy plays a crucial social role. Individuals continually monitor their social environment for information that might suggest they are underperforming relative to other people in an important area of their lives. They engage in effortful regulation to counteract the threats to self-esteem that envy evokes (Hill & Buss, 2006). Individuals generally want to see themselves favorably and they perform acts that maintain and improve their self-worth (Crocker & Park, 2004). These positive self-views tend to come under attack when individuals experience envy.

There are two kinds of adaptive responses identified in the literature that individuals use to manage envy-induced threats to self-esteem. The first set of strategies is intended to deprive envied targets of their perceived advantages. The second set involves the “envier” working harder in order to experience successes that match those of the individuals they envy (Cohen-Charash, 2009). Yu and colleagues (2009) found that individuals who envied their subordinates and enacted the first set of strategies were relatively likely to be perceived by their subordinates as abusive.

Although emotions are studied as an antecedent of abusive supervision less frequently than the other categories, the research above demonstrates that emotions of the supervisor and/or

subordinate do have a significant impact on the subordinate perception of abusive supervision. Emotions should not be ignored when considering the cause of abusive supervision and, as can be seen above, can easily be studied in conjunction with several other constructs and theories. Abusive supervision, whether it is actually occurring, or just perceived to be occurring, is found to produce a strong situation which can invoke strong emotions and should be included more frequently in the investigation of abusive supervision.

## **Discussion**

The following discussion identifies issues and also provides important lessons learned from this review. This section also discusses the implications of these issues for this dissertation.

- 1) *Current research in abusive supervision confounds two constructs: a) the subordinate's perception of the supervisor's behavior as abusive, and b) the various behaviors of the supervisor when the intention of the supervisor is unknown.* The formal definition of abusive supervision rests on the “employees’ perception.” However, research on abusive supervision often assumes that this perception is accurate. In other words, a finding of abusive supervision based on the employee’s perception indicates that abuse is occurring. My review indicates that scholars often construe research findings about abusive supervision as factual confirmation that abuse is real even when employee-appraised abusive supervision is the sole measure used (Sutton, 2007; Tepper et al., 2012). The perception a subordinate has of their supervisor’s behavior as abuse is certainly one critical piece of information to inform researchers of the qualities of supervisory treatment. However, factors internal to employees – such as the extent to which they collect data about the behavior of another person or process such data, and their use of analytical frames based on a

history of previous experience and individual cognitions, also play an important role (Brees, 2012). Researchers acknowledge that abusive supervision is a subjective assessment of a supervisor's behavior from the perspective of the employee, and that two employees could differ in their assessment of the supervisor's behavior (e.g., Tepper, 2000). This is not to say that an individual's perception is not important as perception is reality to that individual. The outcome of abusive supervision does not change whether the supervisor is intentionally abusing the subordinate or the subordinate only perceives the supervisor's actions thusly. However, much is unknown regarding the between-person differences in ratings of abusive supervision. For example, certain characteristics of employees might increase the likelihood of an individual rating their supervisor as abusive. As it stands, with abusive supervision assessed via one employee's perception, it would be difficult for an organization to use it as a measure of a leadership from an employee's perspective. Having a better understanding of how certain characteristics could lead to particularly biased perceptions, along with a measure of group consensus, would increase the utility of this measure to organizations as it would increase the likelihood that misperception could be detected. This topic will be explored in more depth in chapter 3.

- 2) *Abusive supervision is a measure of subordinate perception. Yet few studies have examined the cognitive processes or other characteristics of the subordinate that could contribute to a perception of being abused.* Most of the research on abusive supervision uses Tepper's measure and describes the results as if the subordinate perception of abuse means that the supervisor is actually abusive. However, the very definition of abusive supervision indicates the subjective nature of this construct.



Perception is a cognitive process undertaken by – in this case – an employee, through which they extrapolate meaning behind another individual's actions – in this case, the supervisor as part of the sensemaking process (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

Therefore, individual differences among the raters of abusive supervision (the subordinates) may provide higher explanatory power than supervisor characteristics, contexts, or emotions, or the relationship conflict. In a study of abusive supervision, individual characteristics of the raters (subordinates) must be captured as they can represent a significant explanation of the likelihood that any given employee will report abusive supervision. If such individual differences affect the perception of abuse, a false positive result is possible, where abuse is perceived but might not actually exist.

- 3) *Aggression (behavior or personality) is mentioned in all but one of the articles included in this review and is a main topic in 22 of 30 research papers investigating the antecedents of abusive supervision; yet, aggressive personality is not directly tested as a possible explanatory variable.* There are several noteworthy studies on the antecedents of abusive supervision. These works have shown that abusive supervision is a consequence of displaced or provoked aggression resulting from experienced injustice, psychological contract breach, stress, or conflicts with colleagues (c.f., Martinko et al., 2013; Tepper, 2000; Zhang & Bednall, 2015). However, despite Tepper's (2007) proposition that supervisor personality traits are an important part of the nomological network surrounding abusive supervision, little is known about the individual differences in personality related to abusive supervision. For subordinates, only one personality trait, dominance, was tested as an antecedent. By contrast, the

dominance, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and honesty-humility personality traits of supervisors were examined. This leaves aggressive personality as an obvious yet missing piece of the puzzle.

- 4) *Many theories are presented in the literature, all attempting to explain the same phenomena but without consensus.* The fractured literature illustrates tests of various perspectives, without consensus regarding why the relationships exist. However, after reviewing the abusive supervision literature, the broad commonalities that presented themselves allow a model to be constructed that includes the main concepts in the literature. These main concepts include context, subordinate characteristics, supervisor characteristics, conflict, and emotions. Each of these parts is important but, studying them in conjunction may give researchers a better indication as to which of these issues provides a better explanatory mechanism for what leads to abusive supervision. A proposed model is detailed and explained in more details in chapter 3.

The issues listed above are the major drivers for the necessity of this dissertation. Chapter 3 will work to address each of these issues and pose theoretically grounded solutions. Chapter 4 will then outline the methodology and testing procedure while Chapter 5 will relay the results and discussion.

### **CHAPTER 3: THEORY AND HYPOTHESES**

This chapter describes the theoretical foundations for a perspective that addresses the issues noted in Chapter 2, while addressing the research questions posed in Chapter 1. Abusive supervision, as noted, is defined as the perceptions of abuse by subordinates (Tepper, 2000; Tepper, 2007; Mackey et al., 2015). Unfortunately, most abusive supervision research relies on the perception of just one subordinate when trying to test various hypotheses related to the causes and effects of abusive supervision. A conclusion I drew from my review of the existing abusive supervision research suggests that both employee and supervisor characteristics should be considered, as well, since they combine in influencing employee/subordinate ratings of abusive supervision (Mackey et al., 2015). A major set of the characteristics of supervisors and subordinates that affects behavior and perceptions of others is personality. However, as described in the previous chapter, few studies have examined various personality components as antecedents of abusive supervision and none of them have examined the personality characteristics of both the supervisor and subordinate in the same study.

The relationship between personality and abusive supervision is important to understand because certain personality characteristics can contribute to explaining why some supervisors abuse their subordinates while others do not, or why some employees perceive abuse where others do not. The specific focus of this chapter is aggressive personality. The connection between aggressive personality and abusive supervision not only has face validity but this linkage is also grounded in the abusive supervision literature. Specifically, many definitions of

abusive supervision include the words “aggressive” or “aggression.” For example, research determined that abusive leadership occurs when leaders “engage in *aggressive* or punitive behaviors toward their employees” (Kelloway, Sivanathan, Francis, & Barling, 2005, p. 91, emphasis added). When aggressive behaviors are discussed in the context of abusive supervision, the behaviors are discussed as repeated because the definition of abusive supervision calls for the study of “sustained displays” of behavior (Tepper, 2000). In the many definitions of personality traits, the consensus seems to be that personality is a pattern of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Therefore, the supposition that consistent aggressive behavior as described in the abusive supervision literature would lead one to determine that aggressive personality is a focal construct in the abusive supervision nomological network. However, research about how aggressive personality might play a role in multiple aspects of the perceptions of abusive supervision is notably absent from current research.

The rest of this chapter includes a review and analysis of the history of aggressive personality in the fields of management and psychology. Although I do not investigate the causes of aggressive personality, a brief review of the psychological antecedents of aggressive personality allows a linkage to the abusive supervision literature – which is partly built on the same foundation. Next, I explore how an individual’s latent (implicit, unconscious) motive to aggress would lead to increased perceptions of abuse. These elements are crucial in understanding why the supervisor may be abusive and why certain subordinates may be more likely to attribute certain motives (abuse) to the behaviors of their supervisors.

In the final sections of this chapter, I build the arguments that act as the basis for my theoretical model. The first part of the model uses research on attribution theory, the motive to aggress, and abusive supervision to explain the link between subordinate aggressive personality

and individual level abusive supervision. Attribution theory lends support for the belief that subordinates with an aggressive personality are more likely to misattribute the behaviors of their supervisors as hostile because of cognitive processes that lead them to view the world as ‘out to get them’ (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Hoobler & Brass, 2006; James et al., 2005).

For the second part of the model, the relationship between individual level abusive supervision and team level abusive supervision is considered. Traditional abusive supervision research relies on employee perceptions of abuse of one subordinate in regard to one supervisor (Tepper, 2000, 2007). This is potentially problematic, especially if employee personality affects how employees perceive leader behaviors. Reliance on a single source of information, when it may be biased, hinders the predictive capability of research. Therefore, rather than relying on one individual subordinate, team level abusive supervision is an aggregate of several employees under the same supervisor. To take the analysis of team abusive supervision one step further, I make the theoretical argument that subordinate aggressive personality could have a significant effect on the dispersion or variability of team level abusive supervision.

The third part of the model introduces how supervisor aggressive personality could have an effect on team level abusive supervision. Since individual level abusive supervision relies on the perception of one subordinate, the personality of the supervisor is likely to have less explanatory power than an individual subordinate’s personality. However, the aggressive personality of the supervisor is likely to have a significant effect on level of agreement for team level abusive supervision which uses the perceptions of several individuals. Though team level abusive supervision is still comprised of employee perceptions and these perceptions could be distorted, the perception of employees could also be driven by the actions of a leader whose aggressive personality allows them to justify abusing their subordinates. Therefore, it is

important to also theoretically build the case for why supervisor aggressive personality could have an impact on team abusive supervision.

The fourth and final part of the model theorizes about the interaction of both subordinate and supervisor aggressive personality with context in the perception of abusive supervision. Context is operationalized by organizational justice perceptions of both the supervisor and the subordinate, separately. Context has long been viewed as a catalyst for abusive supervision (Mackey et al., 2018). Even if a supervisor or subordinate has an aggressive personality, according to trait activation theory aggressive behaviors are more likely to be initiated under certain contexts. By exploring the interaction of personality and context together, the theoretical foundations allow for an explanation of what situations increase the likelihood that individuals in leadership positions will engage in abusive supervision.

### **General Theoretical Basis of Aggression**

Approximately 12% of the population is considered to be moderately to highly aggressive (James & McIntyre, 2000). Yet, individuals with an aggressive personality are not constantly or continually aggressive. Other factors play a role in predicting how and when an aggressive person will engage in aggressive behavior. The social interaction theory of aggression suggests that aggression is purposeful behavior. Individuals act aggressively to effect submission in others, create and preserve desired identities, and preserve belief in a just world (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994).

It is important to understand that aggression is a behavior and not an emotion. However, the term is often confounded with – or used interchangeably with – negative emotions, such as anger. Aggression has also been erroneously applied to negative attitudes such as racial or ethnic prejudice (Baron & Richardson, 1994). It is not essential for individuals to be angry with others

in order to attack them; aggression can occur in “cold blood” or in the heat of intense emotional arousal (Baron & Richardson, 1994). Similarly, hate is not required for aggressive behavior to occur. Of relevance to this theory is that people known to exhibit trait aggression tend to view the world with “blood-red tinted glasses” (Dill, Anderson, Anderson, & Deuser, 1997). The aggressive person both expects and perceives more hostility and aggression in the actions of others than do non-aggressive individuals and they respond accordingly with more frequent aggressive behavior (Dill et al., 1997).

Many individuals, aggressive or not, have the same reaction when truly hostile behaviors are directed toward them. By contrast, aggressive individuals may react defensively to situations and behaviors that most people would consider benign (Dodge & Coie, 1980). This constitutes the key difference between aggressive and prosocial individuals, namely the misinterpretation of neutral actions as hostile when there is no real hostile intent. Understanding this interpretation – or misinterpretation – of the actions of others is an important element in understanding the motives of aggressive individuals. For example, Dodge and Coie (1987) found that hostile, aggressive elementary school boys were likely to over interpret the behaviors of their peers as hostile, and tended to respond to the perceived hostility with aggression.

Research on the impact of personal characteristics of employees and supervisors who act aggressively indicates that some people have a propensity to act in aggressive ways, whereas others do not (Inness, Barling, & Turner, 2005). Individuals learn aggressive behaviors by direct experience (Bandura, 1973; Kiewitz et al., 2012) and vicariously by observing and modeling authority figures (e.g., parents or past supervisors). An individual’s history of exposure to vicarious and personal aggression in their developing years significantly predicted the likelihood

of them behaving aggressively in subsequent situations (Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Greenburg & Barling, 1999).

Exposure to aggression in the family environment is a particularly powerful component predicting individual learning of aggressive behavior (Cappell & Heiner, 1990; Chermack & Walton, 1999). Parents are highly influential agents in social learning processes because children regard them as authority figures and depend on them for care (Bandura, 1973). In a series of experiments, Bandura and colleagues (Bandura, 1965; Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963) found that exposing children to human and filmed aggressive models doubled the aggressive behavior of children, relative to children not exposed to aggressive models.

### **The Motive to Aggress**

The motive to aggress is the “Desire to inflict harm on another individual, group, or entity” (James et al., 2005, p. 71). A person with a motive to aggress might or might not be aware that their desire to inflict harm on others is stronger than that of the “average” – or prosocial – individual (James et al., 2005; Murray, 1938). This lack of awareness occurs despite individual differences in aggressive reactions appearing early in life and being stable across the lifespan (Dill et al., 1997). The main difference between the reactions of a person with a motive to aggress and a prosocial individual is how these individuals frame situations (James, 1998; James et al., 2005). Prosocial individuals have a proclivity to be civil, polite, friendly, congenial, cooperative, and peaceful; such people frame situations in a prosocial manner (James et al., 2005). Individuals with a motive to aggress frame situations in a much more negative light. They are more likely to interpret innocuous social interactions with others as intentionally hostile (Dill et al., 1997; James et al., 2005) and to behave in an aggressive manner accordingly. Because of



their tendency to see the world through an “aggressive lens,” an individual with a motive to aggress is likely to view their own aggressive actions as reasonable responses.

To maintain their illusion of rational behavior and prosocial self-belief, individuals with a motive to aggress develop specialized defense mechanisms, called justification mechanisms (JMs) that allow them to rationalize their behavior (James, 1998). Research on defense mechanisms, the unconscious mind, and implicit biases in social cognition have investigated what individuals believe to be rational analysis. JMs allow people to view – or defend – their behavioral tendencies as rational and logical, thereby solidifying those tendencies as the preferred way for interpreting and reacting to the world around them. This argument forms part of conditional reasoning theory (James, 1998).

Aggressive behaviors might be difficult to rationalize as appropriate in most situations. However, individuals with an implicit motive to aggress justify their aggressive behavior as being the most logical course of action (James, 1998). These rationalizations and justifications are viewed as logical by aggressive people but are typically seen as illogical or unconvincing to non-aggressive individuals. The JMs described by James (1998; James et al., 2005) provide insight into the cognitive processes of an individual with a motive to aggress. Examples of JMs for aggression include an increased likelihood of seeing malevolent intent in others’ actions, even kind or well-meaning actions; having unconscious desires to harm others; framing oneself as a victim; and framing others in terms of weakness and strength (James, 1998; James & LeBreton, 2010). More specifically, individuals who are innately hostile and aggressive are thought to use six JMs to justify their behavior: hostile attribution bias, potency bias, retribution bias, victimization bias, derogation bias, and social discounting bias. Each justification mechanism is detailed below.

*Hostile Attribution Bias* - Individuals with a hostile attribution bias project their own hostile intentions onto others. This means that aggressive individuals tend to assume that other people are motivated by the desire to act aggressively (James et al., 2005). This allows them to claim self-defense, ostensibly a socially acceptable action, as a reason for their own aggressive behavior. When aggressive individuals are placed in a situation where they believe someone is trying to harm them, they are likely to behave aggressively in response. But this also means that aggressive individuals are more likely to perceive hostility in the benign behaviors of others as well.

*Potency Bias* - Potency bias is grounded in the belief held by individuals with a motive to aggress that social interactions and exchanges are contests or competitions. Individuals with a motive to aggress want to establish their dominance in these social exchanges (James, 2005). The potency bias guides an individual's framing of situations whereby they are likely to believe that "...the use of aggression to dominate others demonstrates strength, bravery, control, and fearlessness. Not acting aggressively is associated with weakness, fear, cowardice, and impotence" (James et al., 2005, p.74). Therefore, aggressive individuals view their behavior as necessary and appropriate to maintain face while prosocial individuals view this behavior as inappropriate.

*Retribution Bias* - The retribution bias suggests that aggressive individuals believe that exacting retribution for a real or perceived slight is more important than preserving a relationship. Additionally, the consequences that may arise from enacting retribution are also overlooked (James et al., 2005). The perceived or real slights could range from wounded pride and challenged self-esteem to disrespect. Those individuals who possess a retribution bias believe that retaliation is the appropriate response to a perceived slight. Retaliation refers to

behavior that seeks to “make the wrongdoer pay” for a transgression or event that harms or jeopardizes the victim in some meaningful way (Skarlicki & Folger, 2004, p. 374). For example, when a person with a motive to aggress perceives a potential or actual threat to their self-esteem, then they will retaliate directly against the individual or group that initiated the threat.

*Victimization Bias* - The motive to aggress leads individuals to believe that powerful people inflict harm or take advantage of weaker individuals. The victimization bias allows them to rationalize their own aggressive behavior against powerful others (James et al., 2005). This underlying assumption indicates that aggressive individuals view themselves as the victim of injustice or oppression by those who hold more powerful positions than their own. Those with a motive to aggress then behave aggressively to correct these perceived injustices or to attack their assumed oppressors. This JM is evident when employees believe they are treated unjustly and therefore steal from their employers.

*Derogation of Target Bias* - Derogation-of-target bias refers to the act of characterizing an individual who is targeted by those with the motive to aggress as evil, immoral, or untrustworthy (James et al., 2005). With this JM, aggressive individuals rationalize that people against whom they aggress are at fault and deserve the aggressive behavior. As an example, an employee with a motive to aggress is likely to characterize their supervisor as “abusive” in order to justify their aggressive behavior toward that supervisor. The aggressive employee would rationalize that the alleged abusive supervisor deserves to be treated aggressively by their subordinates, because the supervisor is at fault.

*Social Discounting Bias* - Finally, the social discounting bias allows those with the motive to aggress to ignore traditional ideals, conventional beliefs, and rules and justify behaving in socially unacceptable ways (James et al., 2005). Socially deviant behavior in which harm is

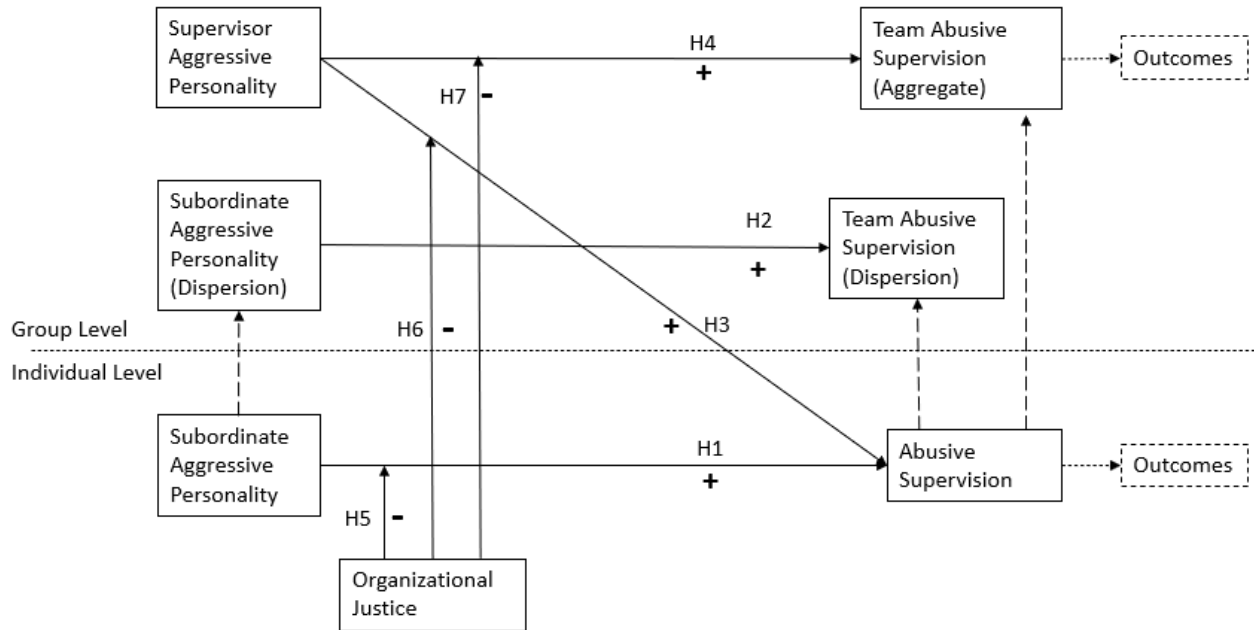
intended as an outcome can be rationalized by aggressive individuals as freedom of expression or liberation from constraining social customs by defying the norms (James et al., 2005). No research in the abusive supervision literature has explored what role social discounting bias could play in the perception of abusive supervision but it could be an interesting future avenue.

### **Theoretical Model**

As demonstrated by the theoretical model (see Figure 2), subordinate aggressive personality and supervisor aggressive personality are both likely to lead to a greater perception of abuse through two different mechanisms. Subordinates with an aggressive personality are more likely than prosocial individuals to make hostile attributions of the behavior of others and subsequently perceive acts of abusive supervision in the behaviors of their supervisors. Supervisors with an aggressive personality will be more likely to behave aggressively. Past research on abusive supervision has clearly demonstrated that aggressive behaviors are often perceived as abusive thereby leading the subordinates of aggressive supervisors to perceive them as abusive. At the team-level, the spread in the difference of the perception of abusive supervision (abusive supervision dispersion) should have a strong relationship with subordinate aggressive personality. In other words, there will be a difference in the perception of abusive supervision between several subordinates with the same supervisor based on whether they possess a more aggressive personality or a less aggressive personality. If the supervisor has an aggressive personality, there should be more agreement regarding whether the supervisor is abusive or not between the group members thereby reducing the likelihood of dispersion and increasing the likelihood of higher aggregate team abusive supervision. However, when the subordinates or supervisors perceive high overall organizational justice, the enactment or

perception of abuse should be reduced because the aggressive traits of these individuals will be less likely to be activated.

**Figure 2. Theoretical Model**



### Subordinate Aggressive Personality and Abusive Supervision

As just described, implicit aggression indicates that individuals with a motive to aggress use biases, JM, that negatively distort their perception of the behavior of others that allow them to then justify aggressive behaviors (James et al., 2005). There are two main arguments to be made that demonstrate theoretically why an individual with a motive to aggress would be more likely to perceive their supervisor as abusive. The first is attribution theory whereby an individual with a motive to aggress would also attribute the actions of others as aggressive because that is the lens through which they view the world. The other argument is based on victimization theory whereby a person believes that more powerful individuals (i.e. supervisors) seek to harm those who are less powerful (i.e. subordinates). Each of these theoretical arguments are outlined in more detail below.

Aggressive individuals are more likely than prosocial individuals to perceive hostility or threat in the actions of others due to their propensity to attribute hostile intentions to the actions of others. Attribution theory refers to “the perception or inference of cause” (Kelley & Michela, 1980, p.458). Research demonstrates that there are many types of attribution theories but they all try to determine the causal explanations individuals make for events or the actions of others (Kelley & Michela, 1980). In either case, it is important to understand attributions as they play a major role in human behavior as they determine a person’s understanding of “the causal structure of the world and, therefore, are important determinants of his interactions with that world” (Kelley & Michela, 1980, p. 460).

Abusive supervision is defined as and measured by the employee’s perception and an interpretation of the supervisor’s behavior is subsequently formed. It is this interpretation of the supervisor’s varied behaviors that are encoded as acts of abusive supervision (or not). Because those with a motive to aggress are thought to project their own hostile intentions onto others (as described by the hostile attribution bias, subordinates with a motive to aggress will be more likely to perceive the actions of others as aggressive and attribute them with hostile intentions. The increased sense of danger generated by hostile attribution bias provokes a sense of threat and feelings of fear. These feelings trigger a heightened sensitivity to the actions of others (e.g., supervisors) thereby distorting perceptions of the person’s actions (Frost et al., 2007). If the actions of others were actually hostile and threat of attack was factual and forthcoming, use of aggression for defensive purposes could potentially be appropriate and seen as rational by most observers. However, attributions of aggressive intent in the behavior of others by those with a motive to aggress reflects an implicit bias to see antagonism even in innocent situations (Frost et al., 2007). This proclivity to see hostility and antagonism is what leads the subordinates with a

motive to aggress to perceive their supervisor as abusive more frequently than a prosocial individual almost regardless of the behavior. As examples, a supervisor who corrects an employee could be framed by an aggressive individual as micro-managing or engaging in efforts to make the employee look bad to others. But similarly, a supervisor who largely leaves employees alone to work could be framed by an aggressive individual as engaging in shunning behaviors or as being intentionally unhelpful in a way that causes employees to fail.

Individuals with a motive to aggress also tend to perceive themselves as victims and possess a victimization bias (James et al., 2005). This means they are more likely to perceive victimization by powerful others whereby they believe powerful people deliberately harm and exploit less powerful people (Frost et al., 2007). Due to the automatic power differential between subordinate and supervisors, supervisors are likely to be deemed as one of these ‘powerful people’ by those with a motive to aggress based on their cognitive thought processes. Therefore, it would follow that subordinates with a motive to aggress would be more likely to perceive their supervisors as abusive because they are more likely to believe that anyone in a more powerful position than themselves is out to harm (or abuse) others of lower rank.

*H1: There will be a positive relationship between subordinate motive to aggress and perceptions of abusive supervision.*

### **Team-Level Perceptions of Abusive Supervision**

Scholars generally conceptualize abusive supervision as an individual-level construct, operationalizing it as a subordinate’s perception of their supervisor’s abusive behavior (c.f. Martinko et al., 2013). However, Priesmuth and colleagues (2014) theorized and found that abusive supervision also manifests at the team level, also known as Team Abusive Supervision (TAB). TAB is defined as “the collective perceptions employees hold regarding abusive

supervision in their work unit” (Priesemuth et al., 2014: 1513). As suggested by the seminal work on team abusive supervision (also called abusive supervision climate), theoretical and empirical evidence from the work climate and deviance literatures (Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, & Pagon, 2006; Roberson, 2006) suggest that the subordinate perception of abusive supervision can also occur at the group level. This construct has largely been conceptualized as consensus-based, with an assumption that team members all hold similar perceptions of the behavior of their supervisor as abusive (e.g., Farh & Chen, 2014; Hannah et al., 2013). In this approach, scholars concluded that team members perceived the same amount of abusive supervision and therefore operationalized TAB as the mean of the group members’ ratings of abusive supervision.

Studying TAB is important because TAB has been found to negatively affect group identification and collective efficacy, which in turn harmed group cooperation, organizational citizenship, and performance (Priesmuth et al., 2014). Similarly, Farh and Chen (2014) reported that TAB damaged individual employees’ voice behaviors, performance, and turnover intentions through increasing relationship conflict. However, the conceptualization of team abusive supervision as a simple aggregate of several subordinates reporting to the same supervisor disregards potentially meaningful differences in members’ perceptions of abuse. Dispersion is used in a wide variety of research into teams to more closely examine the factors that may cause differences in the opinions, beliefs, and perceptions between individual team members that may be disguised by an aggregate (such as a mean). According to Chan (1998), dispersion is a group-level property consisting of variability originating at the individual level that may include mutable underlying attributes (e.g., satisfaction levels).



The variability of abusive supervision perceptions within teams could be explained by the differences in aggressive personality of the individual team members. Based on the theoretical arguments provided earlier, individuals with an aggressive personality are more likely to perceive their supervisors as abusive more than prosocial individuals. As groups are made up of several individuals, each individual will come to a particular conclusion about the supervisor's behavior based on a combination of each individual's characteristics and past experiences. Therefore, the differentiation in the perception of abusive supervision should be examined to determine if the variability in aggressive personality has a direct link to team abusive supervision.

Group differentiation is accounted for with a dispersion measure (abusive supervision dispersion) that allows a better understanding of how the behavior of one individual (the supervisor) can be perceived differently by several subordinates. Dispersion accounts for the variation or spread of scores for the same construct by a group of people. In the case of this research, dispersion represents the variation in perceptions of one supervisor held by several subordinates. The differences in perception of abusive supervision held by each subordinate should mirror the differences in aggressive personality. The greater the variability in the motive to aggress of the individual subordinates, the greater the likelihood that the perceptions of a supervisor as abusive will have a greater range of variability leading to greater dispersion of team abusive supervision.

*H2: There will be a positive relationship between the dispersion of team abusive supervision and dispersion of subordinates' motive to aggress.*

## **Supervisor Aggressive Personality and Abusive Supervision**

As noted in the earlier review, research examining the relationship between supervisor characteristics and subordinate perception of abusive supervision, though not directly focusing on aggressive personality, center on constructs or descriptions with theoretical links to aggression. According to research on displaced aggression, supervisors who experience a contract violation or perceive injustice are likely to abuse their subordinates, because they feel this action is justified and elevates their status to “one who cannot be taken advantage of” (Tedeschi & Norman, 1985, p. 42). Displaced aggression is also partially instigated by injustice (Hoobler & Brass, 2006). One study found that the ability to control oneself was negatively related to counterproductive behaviors (Marcus & Schuler, 2004). There is also evidence that experimentally induced impairment of self-regulation promotes aggression (e.g., Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). Authoritarianism was also found to be positively related to abusive supervision as it stresses personal authority over subordinates, consolidates authority on oneself, and promotes autonomous decisions (Tsui et al., 2004). Aggressive personality significantly affects how individuals process information from the world around them leading them to be more likely to enact certain behaviors intended to inflict harm. These behaviors share many similarities to the behaviors that fall under the umbrella of abusive supervision. Supervisors with a motive to aggressive are more likely to enact behaviors deemed abusive their subordinates.

*H3: There will be a positive relationship between supervisor aggressive personality and individual-level perceptions of abusive supervision.*

Additionally, when the supervisor possesses a motive to aggress, it is more likely that they will behave aggressively and this aggressive behavior will be interpreted by the subordinates as abuse. Therefore, when the supervisor has an aggressive personality, there will

more likely be a group consensus where many, if not all, group members perceive the supervisor as abusive. When the supervisor does not have an aggressive personality and does not behave aggressively toward their subordinates, the individual perceptions of the group members regarding the behavior of the supervisor will be more varied and largely dependent upon each individual's own cognitive processes.

As work-unit members share information and stories regarding their individual abusive supervision experiences, the team abusive supervision (aka, TAB) emerges through the process of sensemaking and social information processing (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; Priesemuth et al., 2014). Theory and research likely understate the full impact of abusive supervision because abusive supervision not only affects targeted individuals, but can also become embedded in the climate of workgroups, thereby affecting the group at large. Therefore, even when a supervisor with an aggressive personality chooses to target some subordinates over others, the group as a whole is still more likely to perceive the supervisor as abusive. The greater the number of members in the group that individual perceive the supervisor's behavior as abusive, the more likely this perception will be to spread group consensus regarding abusive supervision.

*H4: There will be a positive relationship between supervisor aggressive personality and team abusive supervision.*

While it is possible that an aggressive individual could direct their aggressive behaviors toward specific individuals in a group rather than the group as a whole, theories of group processes and effectiveness indicate that the frequent interactions of team members builds social bound, greater cohesion, and mutual support (Cropanzano, Li, & Benson, 2011; Gladstein, 1984). However, to be sure that I am capturing the shared team-level perception of abusive supervision, I will be controlling for the differences in the individual treatment of team-members

by taking into supervisor affect toward subordinates. Even if the supervisor possesses an aggressive personality, they will be less likely to aggress against individuals they like versus individuals they do not like. Therefore, by controlling for affect, personal liking will be accounted for to allow for a more accurate examination of the team abusive supervision.

### **Context as an Initiator of Behavior**

Although there are different theoretical explanations between why a subordinate with an aggressive personality is more likely to perceive abusive supervision and why a supervisor with an aggressive personality would be perceived by multiple employees as abusive, the theoretical explanation for why the context changes these relationships is similar. The situation induces behavior, as explained by trait activation theory. This theory states that “The behavioral expression of a trait requires arousal of that trait by trait-relevant situational cues” (Tett & Gutterman, 2000, p. 398). Aggressive behavior is generally expected as a response to aggression-inducing stimuli for all individuals. However, those with a motive to aggress show a heightened response or greater sensitivity to a broad range of contextual factors. This means those with a motive to aggress are likely to frame both negative and innocuous organizational events as just case for aggressive retaliation.

The seminal work on abusive supervision by Tepper (2000) predicted that employees who perceived their supervisors to be abusive would also perceive this behavior to be unjust. The employees would display a range of reactions, from withholding organizational citizenship behaviors to more damaging behavior such as revenge (Bies & Tripp, 1996) or retaliation (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Therefore, a possible explanatory mechanism for this wide range of outcomes could be the aggressive personality of the subordinate.

For example, displaced aggression is partially instigated by injustice (Hoobler & Brass, 2006). As mentioned in Chapter 2, researchers speculated that work environments that support a degree of hostility may result in more aggressive or violent behavior in the workplace. Such environments, at best, refrain from punishing aggressive behavior directed against others, and at worst legitimize and encourage aggressive or abusive treatment (Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Restubog et al., 2011). When aggressive norms are displayed from the top of the organization down through the ranks, aggressive behaviors also flow downward (Restubog et al., 2011). These situations are likely framed by those with a motive to aggress as breaking organizational justice norms and are likely to encourage individuals with an aggressive personality to respond with aggressive action. Prior research supports this idea as abusive supervision was more strongly associated with perceived supervisor-directed aggression when the subordinate had a history of being aggressive (Inness et al., 2005). Additionally, abusive supervision is positively related to the frustration level of the subordinate, which was in turn linked to their level of aggression (Schat et al., 2006). The relationship between a subordinate's aggressive personality and their perception of abusive supervision would be exacerbated by the subordinate's perception of injustice.

While there are many situations which could induce an individual with an aggressive personality to act aggressively when a prosocial individual would not, overall organizational justice is the environmental characteristic most frequently tied to the perception of abusive supervision as well as the instigation of aggressive behavior. When those with a motive to aggress perceive a disruption in the current context, such as an incident that causes frustration or perceived loss of control, the traits of individuals with a motive to aggress are activated and induce them perceive themselves as the victim of injustice. They might even feel oppressed by

those who hold more powerful positions. An employee might attribute their sense of “being wronged” to a specific person such as their supervisor who is likely to be perceived both as a direct cause and also as a proxy for the organization (Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2013).

*H5: When the subordinate perception of overall organizational justice is high, the relationship between subordinate aggressive personality and individual-level abusive supervision will be reduced.*

The trickle-down model of abusive supervision and trait activation theoretically explains why and when a supervisor who perceives a lack of organizational justice would take out their frustrations on their subordinates (Harris, Harvey, Harris, & Cast, 2013; Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012; Mawritz et al., 2012;). This concept and the cited works were discussed in detail in chapter 2. For supervisors with an aggressive personality, perceived injustice would lead them to react to aggressively to correct the injustice, restore self-respect and dignity after being disparaged or ridiculed, demonstrate strength and courage, and liberate oneself from a tyrannical relationship (James et al., 2005). Therefore, when an unjust situation occurs, the supervisor is likely to take out their frustrations regarding that situation on their subordinates who are easy targets.

*H6: When supervisor perceptions of organizational justice are high, the relationship between supervisor aggressive personality and individual-level abusive supervision will be lower.*

*H7: When supervisor perceptions of organizational justice are high, the relationship between supervisor aggressive personality and team abusive supervision will be lower.*

## **Conclusion**

Aggressive behavior and abusive supervision are two constructs that both have multiple causes. They are both determined by cognitive, contextual, and personality factors. In this work, I propose a model to address the research questions and to capture relevant characteristics at several levels. These include 1) individual (personality), 2) situation (justice perceptions) characteristics, and 3) the group (abusive supervision dispersion). The research will involve testing the proposed model, which is illustrated in Figure 2.

## **CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY**

For the research design, two surveys were conducted in four organizations across a variety of industries. This research design will allow me to test my full theoretical model to investigate three important questions. First, what is the degree of importance of personality characteristics of both the supervisor and the subordinate in predicting the perception of abuse? Second, through measuring organizational justice as a variable to represent the context, does the situation act as a moderator between implicit aggressive personality and the perceptions of abuse at the individual level? Third, taking the analysis a step further, do the influences of 1) the personality of the supervisor and 2) the perception of abusive supervision of several employees under the same supervisor lead to group perceptions of abuse? This will enable me to 1) calculate team abusive supervision, 2) determine the degree of dispersion between ratings of abusive supervision among employees with the same supervisor, and 3) determine whether implicit or explicit aggressive personality is a determinant of high levels of dispersion.

### **Sample and Procedure**

Based on the recommendations of Koslowski and Klein (2000) and Aguinis (2013), since the data are nested, the samples in the highest level need to be large enough in relation to the number of variables being tested to provide sufficient power. The first survey contained the Conditional Reasoning test of Aggression (CRT-A) as well as the demographic questions. This survey was administered to both subordinates and supervisors. As recommended, the CRT-A was time limited to 25 minutes. The second survey consisted of abusive supervision (Tepper,



2000), Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson & Clark, 1994), Overall Organizational Justice (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009), and the Angry Hostility Scale from the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The second survey took an average of 8 minutes to complete. The surveys without copyright protections are included in Appendix A.

Complete data were collected from 215 employees and 58 supervisors across four organizations in the United States. Participants were recruited and surveys distributed for this study through different methods depending on the organization and outlined in more detail below. All participants, regardless of recruitment method, were informed that the purpose of the study was to examine the relationships between supervisors and subordinates. Participants were also assured of confidentiality through our data collection procedures (see below). Informed consent and confirmation of participant's being older than 18 were gained prior to the start of the data collection. If the supervisors or subordinates did not answer both surveys, their responses were not included in the data analysis. If a supervisor did not have 3 or more subordinates answer both surveys, then the supervisor's responses and any subordinates who did complete the surveys was excluded from the final analysis. Similarly, any subordinates who did not have a supervisor participate fully in the data collection were also excluded.

The CRT-A uses the illogical answer choices as attention checks that individuals are responding to the questions faithfully and if more than 6 illogical answer choices are chosen, it is recommended that those individuals be excluded from the data analysis (James, 1998). For this project, twelve cases were excluded for choosing too many illogical CRT-A responses. To encourage participation, I included an incentive for participants who fully completed both surveys. Participants who completed both research surveys and passed the attention checks were entered into a drawing to win one of twenty \$50 Amazon gift cards.

The surveys included a consent form before each survey listing the key information the participants needed to know including the purpose, duration, procedures, risks, and benefits. Since the data collected were not anonymous, participants were informed that their information would be protected by the researchers and would not be released to their employer. Once all of the data were collected and the subordinate participants were linked to their supervisors, all identifying information was coded numerically and separated from the data itself.

*Organization 1:* Organization 1 was comprised of several franchise restaurants owned by the same franchisor in the Southeastern United States with a total of approximately 750 employees. The supervisors of the organization were recruited by the owner of the organization to participate in this project directly through the distribution of paper copies of each survey along with a sealable, pre-addressed and stamped envelopes. Each individual who filled out the survey mailed the completed surveys directly to the lead investigator to ensure confidentiality. Forty-four supervisors completely filled out and returned the first survey and 36 supervisors filled out and returned the second survey for a retention rate of 77%.

Because of the nature of the organization, subordinates were not given time during the work day to complete the surveys. Instead, participants were recruited by flyers posted to breakroom bulletin boards. Pre-shift announcements were made to recruit participants for a research project examining the relationship between supervisors and subordinates with the link to the first survey in Qualtrics. The flyers and announcements also included information regarding the potential to win a \$50 Amazon Gift Card in return for full participation. Survey 1 was filled out by a total of 118 participants and survey 2 was filled out completely by 92 participants three weeks later for a 78% retention rate. Responses from surveys one and two for all individuals were combined then the subordinates were matched to the supervisors. A total 22 complete

groups were included in ultimate data analysis. These groups comprised 22 supervisors who completed the surveys and had at least 3 or more employees also completed the surveys (77 Subordinates) for a total of 99 participants from organization one.

*Organization 2:* Organization 2 was comprised of a chain of mid-level hotels owned by the same franchisor in the Southeastern United States. General managers, assistant managers, desk clerks, and office staff were recruited by the owner of the organization through an email with a link to the survey 1 in Qualtrics. They were all given permission to fill out the surveys during work hours and two reminder emails were sent by the general managers encouraging participation. All twenty-one supervisors completed the first survey and, three weeks later, 20 completed the second survey for a retention rate of 95%. Seventy-four subordinates completed the first survey and, three weeks later, 68 completed the second survey for a retention rate of 92%. A total 19 complete groups were included in the final analysis. These groups comprised 19 supervisors who completed the surveys and had at least 3 or more employees also completed the surveys (61 subordinates) for a total of 80 participants from organization 2.

*Organization 3:* Organization 3 was a supplier of medical devices located in the Midwestern United States. Supervisors in this organization were recruited through the “snowball” method whereby managers were recruited to participate by an individual within the organization. These managers then recruited other managers and their employees to fill out the first survey through a link to Qualtrics provided in a recruitment email. It is unknown how many people may have been solicited to participate by this method and, therefore, the participation rate is unknown. The second survey was distributed directly to each participant after they provided their email addresses during the first survey. Through the snowball method, nine supervisors completed survey 1 while eight completed survey 2 for an 89% retention rate. Thirty-eight

subordinates completed survey 1 while, three weeks later, 31 completed survey 2 for an 82% retention rate. A total of 8 complete groups were included in ultimate data analysis. These groups comprised 8 supervisors who completed the surveys had at least 3 or more employees also complete the surveys (31 subordinates) for a total of 39 participants from organization 3.

*Organization 4:* Organization 4 was a small city-owned utility company in the Southeastern United States. Participants were sent a recruitment email by the head of the utility urging participation and paper copies were distributed at the beginning of the work day. The lead investigator collected all completed surveys at the end of the work day and sealable, pre-addressed and stamped envelopes were left for those absent that day to return the surveys by mail. Three weeks later, survey 2 was distributed in the same manner. Twelve supervisors completely filled out the first survey while 11 completely filled out the second survey for a retention rate of 92%. Sixty-two employees filled out survey 1 while 53 completed survey 2 for a retention rate of 85%. A total 9 complete groups were included in ultimate data analysis. These groups comprised 9 supervisors who completed the surveys had at least 3 or more employees also complete the surveys (46 subordinates) for a total of 55 participants from organization four.

The final sample consists of 58 groups for a total of 58 supervisors and 215 subordinates across 4 organizations. The average age of the sample is 35 years old with an average organizational tenure of 7 years while 47% of the sample is female. The participants self-identified their race as 82% White, 9% Black, 6% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 1% other.

## **Measurement**

Data for this project were collected between August and December 2020. All survey instruments were delivered in English. All of the questions were in the same order whether distributed as paper copies or digitally through Qualtrics. There was a three-week time gap

between the distribution of surveys one and two with up to an additional three weeks between launch and completion.

*Implicit Aggressive Personality/Motive to Aggress.* The motive to aggress was measured via the CRT-A for all participants ( $KR-20 = .71$ ). This measure has demonstrated construct and criterion-related validity and has a robust theoretical foundation. It has been found to be resistant to faking and is easily administered and scored. The items are presented in multiple-choice format (James, 1998; James et al., 2005; LeBreton, Barksdale, Robin, & James, 2007).

The CRT-A consists of 25 conditional reasoning problems with an additional three inductive reasoning problems to improve face validity. Participants score high on the CRT-A if they select many answers based on JMs laid out in Chapter 3. A high score indicates that the aggression JMs influences the reasoning of respondents and plays a role in allowing them to justify their enactment of aggressive behavior. A low CRT-A score indicates that JMs are not instrumental in shaping a respondent's reasoning. The lack of a defensive system to justify acting aggressively suggests that such a respondent is unlikely to engage in acts intended to harm others. Moderate scores indicate that implicit defenses to justify aggression are not strongly developed. A sample problem is:

By 1980, the Japanese built approximately 25% of the cars sold in America. American carmakers started to build better cars as they lost business to the Japanese. Many American buyers thought that foreign cars were better made.

Which of the following is the most logical conclusion based on the above?

- a. America was the world's largest producer of airplanes in 1980.
- b. Swedish carmakers lost business in America in 1980.
- c. The Japanese knew more than Americans about building good cars in 1980.
- d. American carmakers built cars to wear out prior to 1980 so they could make a lot of money selling cars.

Answer A and B are meant to be illogical and help to indicate which individuals are paying attention and which are not. Answers C and D are both inductively logical but are both

biased. Prosocial individuals are likely to see answer D as plausible but unlikely (they will see the logic as flawed and extreme). Thus, answer C is the answer most likely to be ultimately chosen as ‘correct’ by prosocial individuals. Aggressive individuals will be more likely to ultimately choose answer D because this reasoning aligns with the biased belief that people are ‘out to get them’ and the motives of the automakers are, in large part, self-serving. It is important to note that answer C is referred to as a “wounding response” and is also flawed. It does not discount the possibility that American manufacturers intended to profit from poorly made products and does not pit the motive to aggress directly against a more prosocial view. Instead, answer C indicates that the Japanese had learned how to produce superior cars. This logic can be questioned since Americans had been producing cars far longer than the Japanese.

*Abusive Supervision.* Abusive supervision was measured through the use of Tepper’s (2000) 15-item measure of abusive supervision. Examples of items are “(Supervisor) tells me my thoughts and feelings are stupid” and “(Supervisor) puts me down in front of others” and participants indicated agreement with each statement using a 5-point response format ranging from 1 (“I cannot remember him/her ever using this behavior with me”) to 5 (“He/she uses this behavior very often with me”). Item scores were averaged to obtain a final score of abusive supervision ( $\alpha=.96$ ).

*Team Abusive Supervision.* The group level variable of Team Abusive Supervision was created by grouping the employees all reporting to and rating the same supervisor then averaging their individual abusive supervision scores as per Priesemuth and colleagues (2014). The interdependency of the employees reporting to the same supervisors is unknown so, even though the construct is Team Abusive Supervision, this is more of a ‘group’ variable rather than a ‘team’ variable. Members of the same teams demonstrated sufficient intermember agreement and

reliability to justify aggregation to the team level ( $rwg = .91$ ;  $ICC = .291$ ). This index was calculated by comparing an observed group variance with an expected random variance. However, in an effort to ensure that sufficient inquiry into the group-level construct, an examination is also made of the dispersion of abusive supervision ratings between team members. As per Roberson and colleagues (2007) recommendations, I also calculated abusive supervision dispersion for each workgroup. The within-team standard deviation for the ratings of individual abusive supervision were computed to obtain the dispersion across group members.

*Overall Organizational Justice.* Overall perceptions about organizational justice were assessed with the 6-item scale developed and validated by Ambrose and Schminke (2009). An example item is “For the most part, my organization treats its employees fairly” ( $\alpha = .93$ ) with a Likert rating scale of 1 to 7 with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 7 being Strongly Agree.

### **Control variables**

Age, gender, race and organizational tenure, were all included in the analysis as control variables for the proposed model.

*PANAS.* The 20-item and Positive Affect Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson, Clark, and Tellegen, 1988) was used to measure affect at work. The scale was developed to reflect the hierarchical structure of self-reported affect and displays acceptable psychometric properties regarding reliability, factor validity, and convergent–discriminant validity (Watson et al., 1988). The PANAS consists of twenty questions; 10 questions for positive affect ( $\alpha = .91$ ) and 10 questions for negative affect ( $\alpha = .89$ ). Respondents used a 5-point scale (1 = very slightly or not at all; 5 = extremely) to indicate how they generally feel at work, using mood-expressive adjectives.

*Explicit Aggression.* The Angry Hostility Scale from the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992) is used to measure the explicit or self-perceived trait of aggression. This scale has been used in previous research that also explored the implicit nature of implicit aggression and demonstrated acceptable psychometric characteristics, including significant validity compared with behavioral indicators of aggression (James et al., 2005). All items in the NEO-PI-R are measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranges from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). High scores on the 8-item Angry Hostility Scale are purported to indicate an individual's tendency to experience anger and frustration. Cronbach's alpha for this study was in line with the test manual ( $\alpha = .741$ ).



## CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

Before testing the hypotheses, I first conducted a series of CFAs to examine the discriminate validity of measures of the constructs in the model. Abusive supervision was aggregated and examined at the individual-level for the baseline model. A five-factor baseline model composed of explicit aggression, organizational justice, positive affect, negative affect, and abusive supervision fit the data well ( $\chi^2(1070) = 1979.539, p < .001; RMSEA = .056; CFI = .895; SRMR = .059$ ). As recommended in Schoen (2015), the CRT-A was not included in the CFA. Together, these analyses demonstrated that the member-rated variables in the model possess discriminate validity with an SRMR less than .08 indicating good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

### Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses were tested with a combination of multilevel hierarchical modeling, correlations, and linear regression depending upon the method required to test each hypothesis. All data analyses were conducted using R version 4.0.3 “Bunny-Wunnies Freak Out”. All variables except for gender and race were grand mean centered. I chose to conduct the data analysis via HLM because this method simultaneously investigates relationships within and between hierarchical levels of grouped data, thereby making it more efficient at accounting for variance among variables at different levels than other existing analyses (Woltman, Feldstain, MacKay, and Rocchi, 2012). This technique estimated the lower-level slopes (subordinate/individual level) and estimated higher-level outcomes (supervisor/team level)

(Woltman et al., 2012). This method also allowed for the investigation of team abusive supervision without losing important information about individual-level abusive supervision.

A first step was to determine if there is systematic within and between group variance in team abusive supervision. The variance within groups included in the level 1 residual was .627 ( $p < .001$ ) while the variance between groups as reflected in the variation in the intercepts was .382 ( $p < .001$ ). This led to an ICC of .377. The intra-class correlations (ICC) represented the percent of variance in abusive supervision that is between groups. Once it was determined that systematic within and between group variance in team abusive supervision existed, I applied a random coefficient regression via HLM to the necessary hypothesis tests determine if there is 1) significant variance in the intercept and slope between subordinate personality and individual level abusive supervision, and 2) significant variance in the intercept and slope between supervisor personality and individual-level abusive supervision both holding overall organizational justice constant.

All hypotheses were tested with and without control variables at the recommendation of Spector and Brannick (2010) to ensure that an overuse of control variables did not erroneously affect the data analysis and are detailed with the individual hypotheses. Table 3 reports the correlations and descriptive statistics for this project for both levels of analysis. Table 4 reports the unstandardized results of the regression and HLM analyses.

**Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Variables**

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Level 1 ( <i>N</i> = 215)												
1. Abusive Supervision	1.678	0.886	(.96)									
2. Implicit Aggression	4.995	2.537	.239**	(.71)								
3. Supervisor Implicit Aggression <sup>a</sup>	4.958	2.321	.365**	.183**	(.71)							
4. Organizational Justice	5.156	1.423	-.515**	-.186**	-.249**	(.93)						
5. Explicit Aggression	3.172	1.173	.308**	.160*	.189**	-.442**	(.74)					
6. Positive Affect	3.437	0.721	0.011	-0.006	-0.049	-0.120	-0.014	(.91)				
7. Negative Affect	2.049	0.656	0.015	-0.036	0.041	0.061	0.051	-.847**	(.89)			
8. Age	35.414	11.037	-0.076	-0.029	-0.054	0.023	-.195**	0.038	-0.110	--		
9. Gender <sup>c</sup>	0.447	0.498	-0.050	0.024	0.085	0.011	0.071	-0.078	0.075	-.150*	--	
10. Race <sup>d</sup>	0.395	0.999	-0.048	.176**	.162*	0.036	0.054	-0.114	0.107	-.158*	0.029	--
11. Organizational Tenure	6.498	5.303	-0.052	-0.024	0.034	0.010	-0.081	0.041	-0.100	.681**	-.166*	-.149*
Level 2 ( <i>N</i> = 58)												
1. Team Abusive Supervision <sup>b</sup>	1.631	0.627										
2. Supervisor Implicit Aggression	5.034	2.263	.519**	(.71)								
3. Supervisor Organizational Justice	5.514	1.330	-0.078	-0.163	(.93)							
4. Supervisor Explicit Aggression	2.856	1.090	-0.123	0.167	-.443**	(.74)						
5. Supervisor Positive Affect	3.326	0.674	0.025	0.106	-0.143	-0.119	(.91)					
6. Supervisor Negative Affect	2.095	0.580	0.030	-0.081	0.166	0.097	-.821**	(.89)				
7. Supervisor Age	39.034	8.295	0.042	-0.008	-.262*	0.243	-0.023	0.046	--			
8. Supervisor Gender <sup>c</sup>	0.345	0.479	-0.063	-0.027	0.116	0.055	0.140	-0.158	-0.104	--		
9. Supervisor Race <sup>d</sup>	0.224	0.563	-0.024	0.063	-0.129	0.068	-0.103	0.073	.306*	-0.161	--	
10. Supervisor Organization Tenure	10.224	5.688	-0.146	-0.100	-.306*	0.120	0.020	0.001	.517**	-0.196	0.181	

Note: Reliability estimates (coefficient alpha) are on the diagonal. <sup>a</sup> Supervisor scores assigned to each team member. <sup>b</sup> Team scores assigned to each team member. <sup>c</sup> Gender : 0 = Male, 1=Female,

<sup>d</sup>Race: 0=White, 1=Black, 2=Hispanic, 3=Asian, 4=other/not specified

\* *p* < .05    \*\**p* < .01 (two-tailed)

**Table 4. Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results – Individual-level Abusive Supervision**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
<b>Subordinate Variables</b>																
Level 1 (N = 215)																
Implicit Aggression	.152**	.025	.143**	.026					.117**	0.022	.120**	.022				
Organizational Justice									-.201**	.041	-.198**	.045				
Explicit Aggression			.139*	.026							-.023	.053				
Positive Affect			.251	.167							.206	.147				
Negative Affect			.283	.185							.275	.161				
Age			-.007	.008							-.008	.007				
Gender			.000	.129							.062	.115				
Race			.014	.066							.044	.056				
Organizational Tenure			.019	.016							.023	.014				
Implicit Aggression * Org. Justice									-.005	.016	-.007	.017				
<b>Supervisor Variables</b>																
Level 2 (N=58)																
Implicit Aggression					.119**	.043	.112**	.137					.093**	.039	.098**	.039
Organizational Justice													-.233**	.071	-.184**	.074
Explicit Aggression							.196*	.086							.138	.090
Positive Affect							.130	0.233							.084	.224
Negative Affect							.101	.269							.120	.261
Age							-.006	.013							-.005	.013
Gender							-.049	.192							-.068	.188
Race							-.017	.168							-.062	.162
Organizational Tenure							.034	.019							.026	.018
Implicit Aggression * Org. Justice													-.013	.032	-.024	.033

*Hypothesis 1:* Hypothesis 1 proposed a positive relationship between subordinate motive to aggress and perceptions of abusive supervision. This hypothesis was tested using regression with subordinate personality as the independent variable (IV) and individual-level abusive supervision as the dependent variable (DV). As demonstrated in Table 4, Model 1, there was a positive relationship between subordinate motive to aggress and perceptions of abusive supervision ( $B = .152, SE = .025, p < .001$ ) without control variables. In an effort to ensure that the constructs of interest were not being affected by extraneous variables (Spector and Brannick, 2010), Table 4 Model 2 provides the results with variables controlling for explicit aggression, positive affect, negative affect, age, gender, race and organizational tenure ( $B = .143, p < .001$ ). Explicit aggression was also significant ( $B = .139, SE = .026, p = .014$ ).

*Hypothesis 2:* Hypothesis 2 proposed a positive relationship between the dispersion of team abusive supervision and the dispersion of the subordinates' motive to aggress. As recommended by Cole and colleagues (2010), I calculated the aggregate (mean) and the dispersion (standard deviation) of team abusive supervision and subordinate motive to aggress for all of the subordinates with the same supervisor. Data was analyzed at the group-level with the primary goal of examining the dispersion of the higher-level responses. This method allowed me to capture the variability of the group members' collective judgements based on the subordinate personality (Cole, Bedeian, Hirschfeld, and Vogel, 2010). With a significant correlation of .179 ( $p=.008$ ), the data does suggest that there is a positive relationship between the dispersion of the ratings of abusive supervision and the dispersion of implicit aggressive personality of the subordinates with the same supervisor (see Table 5 below). The degree of statistical interdependence between the level and dispersion components of an isomorphic group-level construct was also tested by computing the correlation between the team abusive

supervision aggregate (mean) and the team abusive supervision dispersion (standard deviation). The correlation of the team average abusive supervision score and the standard deviation of the abusive supervision score was significant and correlated at .681 ( $p < .001$ ), which is not unexpected, however, it shows that the magnitude and direction of the correlation coefficient to determine that there is not systematic range restriction as the correlation is less than 7.

**Table 5. Correlations for Hypothesis 2**

<b>Correlations</b>			
	Team Abusive Supervision Dispersion	Implicit Aggression Dispersion	Individual Implicit Aggression
Implicit Aggression Dispersion	.179**		
Individual Implicit Aggression	0.115	0.006	
Team Abusive Supervision	.681**	-0.015	.178**

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

*Hypothesis 3:* Hypothesis three proposed a positive relationship between supervisor aggressive personality and individual-level perceptions of abusive supervision. Using HLM to test hypothesis 3, the variability in supervisor personality was analyzed to determine how it is related to individual-level subordinate perceptions of abusive supervision. I also found that supervisor aggressive personality and individual-level perceptions were significantly correlated at .365 ( $p < .001$ ). Though this relationship is often tested dyadically using regression, I used a cross-level analysis since the multiple subordinates are nested under the same supervisor. Using HLM to test the cross-level effects, controlling for individual level predictors with an intercepts-

as-outcomes model, Table 5 Model 5 provides significant fixed effects ( $B = .119, SE = .043, p = .007$ ) without controls ( $B = .112, SE = .137, p < .001$ ) with controls.

**Table 5. Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results – Team Abusive Supervision**

		Model 9		Model 10		Model 11		Model 12	
		B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Level 2 (N=58)									
Supervisor Variables	Implicit Aggression	.197**	.039	.197**	.042	.145**	.032	.147**	.031
	Organizational Justice					.050	.054	.072	0.071
	Explicit Aggression			-.035	.089			-.116	.071
	Postive Affect			-.021	.240			.069	.177
	Negative Affect			.055	.277			.165	.207
	Age			.008	.014			.014	.010
	Gender			-.086	.198			-.121	.150
	Race			-.119	.173			.080	.129
	Organizational Tenure			-.024	0.019			-.019	.014
	Implicit Aggression * Org. Justice					.005	.026	.024	.026

\*p < .05 \*\*p < .01

*Hypothesis 4:* Hypothesis 4 proposed a positive relationship between supervisor aggressive personality and team abusive supervision. This relationship was tested using regression whereby supervisor implicit aggressive personality was used to predict team abusive supervision; a mean aggregate of individual-level abusive supervision. As demonstrated in Table 5, Model 9, this relationship was significant ( $B = .197, SE = .039, p < .001$ ). With added controls for positive affect, negative affect, age, race, and organizational tenure in Model 10, the relationship was still significant ( $B = .197, SE = .042, p < .001$ ).

*Hypothesis 5:* Hypothesis 5 proposed that the subordinate perception of organizational justice would moderate the relationship between the subordinate’s aggressive personality and their perception of their supervisor as abusive. This hypothesis was tested using linear regression with interaction terms to better understand how much the perception of the overall organizational justice affects the relationship between subordinate personality and individual-level abusive

supervision. The interaction terms were individually mean centered then multiplied together within the R coding. Table 4, Model 5 shows that the interaction was not significant ( $B = -.005$ ,  $SE = .016$ ,  $p = .809$ ) however, the relationship between organizational justice and abusive supervision was significant ( $B = -.201$ ,  $SE = .041$ ,  $p < .001$ ). When control variables were added in Model 6, these relationships were not altered significantly with interaction was still not significant ( $B = .120$ ,  $SE = .022$ ,  $p = .783$ ) and the relationship between Organizational Justice and individual-level abusive supervision was significant ( $B = -.198$ ,  $SE = .045$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

*Hypothesis 6:* Hypothesis 6 proposed that supervisor perceptions of organizational justice would moderate the relationship between the supervisor's aggressive personality and individual levels of abusive supervision. Hypothesis 6 was tested using HLM with team abusive supervision as the dependent variable and organizational justice (as rated by the supervisor) added to the model along with the interaction terms of organizational justice and implicit aggressive personality. The tests of the relationships between supervisor aggressive personality and individual-level abusive supervision moderated by the supervisors' perceptions of overall organizational justice were not significant as shown in Table 4, Model 7 ( $B = -.013$ ,  $SE = .032$ ,  $p = .685$ ). However, the relationship between the supervisor perception of overall organizational justice does have a significant relationship with individual-level abusive supervision ( $B = -.233$ ,  $SE = .071$ ,  $p < .001$ ). When controls were added in Model 8, these findings did not change significantly with the interaction ( $B = -.024$ ,  $SE = .033$ ,  $p = .475$ ) and the relationship between organizational justice and the individual-level perceptions of abuse ( $B = -.184$ ,  $SE = .074$ ,  $p < .016$ ).

*Hypothesis 7:* Hypothesis 7 proposed that supervisor perceptions of organizational justice would moderate the relationship between the supervisor's aggressive personality and team



abusive supervision. This hypothesis tested the moderating effect of supervisor organizational justice perceptions have on the relationship between supervisor aggressive personality (IV) and the aggregated measure of team abusive supervision (DV) using linear regression with interaction terms. This relationship was not significant as shown in Table 5, Model 11 ( $B = .005$ ,  $SE = .026$ ,  $p = .843$ ). The relationship between supervisor perceptions of organizational justice were also not significant in Model 12 ( $B = .050$ ,  $SE = .026$ ,  $p = .356$ ). With control variables, neither the interaction ( $B = .024$ ,  $SE = .026$ ,  $p = .371$ ) nor the relationship between organizational justice and team abusive supervision significantly changed ( $B = .014$ ,  $SE = .058$ ,  $p = .807$ ).

## **Discussion**

Overall, the main hypotheses predicting that implicit aggressive personality of supervisors and subordinates affects individual and team perceptions of abusive supervision were supported. For hypothesis 2, even though there is a strong agreement between individuals with the same supervisor regarding perceptions of abuse when the supervisor has an aggressive personality, the variation between subordinates based on the subordinate personality is still meaningful and can be predicted. Organizational justice did not act as a moderator as predicted but, further data analysis shows that implicit aggressive personality is a predictor of organizational justice perceptions as well as being a predictor of abusive supervision. The top quartile of individuals who rated their supervisor as abusive, had a significantly higher rating of aggressive personality than those individuals who did not rate their supervisor as abusive. For the highest quartile of abusive supervision ratings, the supervisor's rating of aggressive personality was significantly higher than those individuals in the lowest quartile of abusive supervision.

This research offers several important insights into the relevancy of personality in the perceptions of abusive supervision at both the individual and team-levels. First, although aggressive behavior and aggressive personality have long been a concept theoretically linked to individual characteristics to the perceptions of abuse, this is the first project to test the relationship between implicit aggressive personality with abusive supervision.

As theorized, subordinates with a higher level of implicit aggressive personality are more likely than their prosocial counterparts to perceive their supervisor as abusive. These findings align with both attribution theory and victimization theory. The subordinate with the implicit aggressive personality is more likely to attribute aggressive intent in the actions of others due to their own inherent biases due to their proclivity to see hostility and antagonism (James et al., 2005). These subordinates are also more likely to believe that more powerful others will seek to harm weaker individuals. By framing themselves as potential victims of more powerful others, the perception of the behavior of anyone deemed as ‘more powerful’ such as a supervisor, will already be negatively skewed (Frost et al., 2007).

Second, as noted in Chapter 2, far fewer studies have examined subordinate characteristics compared to supervisor characteristics. Considering the abusive supervision construct as defined by Tepper is all based on the perception of the subordinate, that more research does not focus on subordinate characteristics is notable. The cognitive process whereby the subordinate works to make sense of the actions of the supervisor and extract intent is highly dependent upon the subordinate’s own schema (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). These data indicate that subordinates with a higher level of implicit aggressive personality do perceive their supervisors as abusive more often than their prosocial counterparts. This means that, even though a subordinate is reporting their supervisor as abusive, it is very possible that the perceptions of

the supervisor's behavior is skewed because of the subordinate's framing of the supervisor's behavior based on the subordinate's own motive to aggress. Similarly, this is also one of the few papers to simultaneously investigate supervisor and subordinate characteristics in the prediction of individual level supervision within the same project. Supervisor characteristics have been tested most often as an antecedent of abusive supervision, but this research demonstrates that subordinate implicit personality is also a very important characteristic when considering whether a supervisor is abusive. Since the implicit aggressive personality of the supervisor also significantly predicts the subordinate and team perceptions of abusive supervision, this research further elucidates the importance of testing the characteristics of both supervisors and subordinates as they are both actors and recipients of each other's actions.

Third, though calls for an investigation into abusive supervision as a multilevel construct went out in 2007, relatively few research projects since then have investigated abusive supervision through a multi-level lens. Furthermore, the previous multi-level studies have largely focused on the outcomes of team abusive supervision. I build on the work of Chen and Farh (2014) to further demonstrate that not only should abusive supervision be investigated as a multilevel phenomenon, but theoretically it is a more robust construct at the team-level when the perceptions of the supervisor as abusive from multiple individuals are aggregated to the team-level. Subordinates are nested under supervisors within an organization and much of the research conducted on abusive supervision is only looking at this construct from the individual or dyadic level. By examining the multi-level antecedents as well as dependent variables at multiple levels, the understanding of the likely underlying instigation for the perceptions of a supervisor are enhanced. Reliance on a single source of information from an individual who may hold certain biases, (i.e. the subordinate), hinders the predictive capability of abusive supervision research.

This is currently one of the main weaknesses of abusive supervision. By aggregating the abusive supervision perceptions of several employees with the same supervisor leads a better though still imperfect insight into whether the supervisor is thought to be abusive by multiple individuals or if the source of the perception of abuse is a skewed interpretation of the behaviors of a supervisor with no ill intent.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The results of this project indicate that aggressive personality of the supervisor and subordinate are significant predictors of abusive supervision. This provides a significant theoretical contribution to the literature in two ways. First, one of the main theoretical models established in abusive supervision is the trickle-down model whereby a supervisor perceives their supervisor (generally an upper-level manager or owner) to be abusive or perceives the organization to be unjust and then takes out their frustrations and negative feelings on their subordinates. The outcomes of these behaviors have been studied extensively (Harris et al., 2011; Mawritz et al., 2012), however, the understanding of which supervisors are likely to behave in this manner has not been established. With the large effect sizes for the relationships between implicit aggressive personality and abusive supervision, this research can contribute to the understanding of which supervisors would be more likely to engage in trickle-down abusive supervision.

Secondly, this research has increased the understanding of the major contributors to individual-level and team abusive supervision. The relationship between subordinate aggressive personality and individual-level abusive supervision had a larger effect size than supervisor aggressive personality. However, supervisor aggressive personality led to a greater consensus among that particular supervisor's subordinates regarding the abusive behaviors of the

supervisor. This is an important theoretical contribution in that it sheds more light on which types of antecedents may have the most impact on individual-level and team abusive supervision, respectively. As demonstrated in chapter 2, the antecedents of abusive supervision, though not large in number, spanned many different categories. The results of this project could provide a better focus for future research whereby there is a greater focus on subordinate characteristics when looking at individual level abusive supervision and a greater focus on supervisor characteristics for team abusive supervision.

### **Practical Implications**

Research states that the outcomes of abusive supervision can have serious negative outcomes for individuals and organizations (Workplace Bullying Institute; Zobeby International, 2014). However, since the current measure of abusive supervision relies on the perceptions of one individual employee, this is a difficult measure for organizations to use in a practical sense to justify taking action against a specific supervisor or in the selection process. However, when the ratings of implicit aggressive personality of both the subordinate and supervisor are taken into account when examining individual perceptions of abuse along with the ratings of team abusive supervision, a much clearer picture of the situation emerges. When all of this information is taken into account, the organization would be able to more accurately predict the likelihood of abuse occurring or determine if the purported abuse is more likely to be one individual's perception.

As the Conditional Reasoning Test of Aggression is already a valid selection tool, with further testing, it may be possible to validate procedure that combines implicit aggressive personality tests for both the subordinates and supervisors with team abusive supervision as a valid and reliable leadership selection tool for promotions from middle to upper management.

Since those individuals with higher levels of aggression as tested by the CRT-A have a higher likelihood of enacting behaviors perceived as abusive by their subordinates, it may be a good tool to use as an additional way to analyze applicants to leadership positions. As most of the current CRT-A research has focused on counterproductive workplace behaviors such as theft, physical violence, absenteeism, traffic violations, lying, and attrition, now abusive supervision can also be added to this nomological network.

This research contributes to our understanding of new antecedents of abusive supervision as implicit aggressive personality of both the supervisor and the subordinate were found to significantly predict individual level abusive supervision. Increasing our understanding of the antecedents of abusive supervision leads us one step further toward being able to detect which individuals will be more likely to engage in "...sustained displays of hostile verbal and non-verbal behavior" (Tepper, 2000) and incorporate this detection into promotional processes in an effort to prevent abusive supervision from occurring.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

While it would be helpful to know if 'actual abuse' is occurring by combining an analysis of the implicit aggressive personality of the supervisor and the subordinate along with the ratings of abusive supervision by several subordinates with the same supervisor, it would be beneficial to conduct future research with objective or observational measures. Actual behaviors were not observed or analyzed so, the best conclusion that this project provides is a more robust analysis of abusive supervision by increasing the likelihood of determining whether abuse is occurring or if the behavior of the supervisor is just being perceived as abusive by a single or a few subordinates based on those subordinates' characteristics. Studying the magnitude of agreement

between individual perceptions and objective or observational methods would make an interesting future research project.

Another limitation of this research project is the fact that it is a cross-sectional study. The two main concerns regarding cross-sectional studies are common method variance (CMV) and the inability to draw causal conclusions (Spector, 2019). However, in an effort to limit common method variance, the surveys were temporally separated and deployed at two different times with a three-week gap. While this is considered an effective strategy to control for some method variances such as mood, more enduring issues such as individual characteristics or measurement methods may still be an issue (Spector, 2019). However, CMV is also mitigated by the fact that the data was collected by using two different types of instruments; implicit and self-reports, and completed by multiple informants which limits the concerns of same source bias.

Comparisons of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies exploring the same (or similar) constructs in meta-analyses have not uniformly found differences in the sizes of the correlations (Nixon, Mazzola, Bauer, Krueger, & Spector, 2011; Pindak & Spector, 2016). As far as the common issue of causality, the general consensus remains that although personality traits and motives play important roles in regulating individual behaviors, traits and the underlying cognitive processes of individual motives are set at a relatively early age and remain generally stable throughout one's lifetime. Therefore, it is unlikely that the causal directions lay in the opposite direction of the hypotheses whereby abusive supervision causes aggressive personality. However, as demonstrated by research in chapter 2 that established the trickle-down model of abusive supervision, it is possible that individuals with abusive supervisors could either model these behaviors as 'appropriate' and mimic them in the workplace once they are promoted (Garcia et al., 2014; Kiewitz et al., 2012). More research beyond the scope of this project would

need to be conducted to further determine the ‘origin’ of the individual’s motives to aggress in order to make that determination.

This data was collected during a pandemic (August 2020 to December 2020) and as such, it is possible that the data is skewed due to the extraordinary circumstances relating to this period of time. Arguments have been made to suggest that with the extreme levels of uncertainty, perceptions of abusive behavior could be altered compared to prior to the pandemic. Due to the pandemic, it is also possible that the shift to remote work has altered working conditions (i.e. remote work, shifted hours, fewer interpersonal interactions) and work relationships (i.e. interactions via electronic means rather than in person). This shift has created major changes to human resource departments, company policies, and changed the dynamics between supervisors and subordinates (Carnevale & Hattak, 2020). These changes could have altered perceptions of supervisor behavior as abusive supervision in unknown ways. Most of the sample was not working remotely, however, much of the behaviors classified as abusive supervision would still hold whether or not individuals were working remotely. It is possible that perceptions of abuse could be exacerbated by remote work situations as it would be easier for communications such as email to be perceived as negative without tone or body language to provide physical clues to the meaning of a message. In that same vein, it would also be easier for supervisors to choose to ignore or exclude individuals which are also considered abusive supervision.

Another limitation of my research approach was a lack of a deeper dive into the interrelatedness of the jobs and relationships of individuals under the same supervisor. In traditional team research, the amount of interaction between co-workers as well as goal alignment of these individuals is considered an important factor when examining team outcomes (Priesmuth et al., 2014). Therefore, though I am examining abusive supervision at two different



levels, this is not traditional 'teams' research. Though, technically, these groups would still be classified as command teams where by the subordinates under the 'command' of the same individual are loosely termed a 'team'. It is very possible that the amount of interaction, relationships, and dependency of individuals of a group of individuals with the same supervisor would lead to an increase or decrease in the consensus of a supervisor as abusive or lead to 'bleed-over' of one person's thoughts or feelings into the perceptions of the other individuals.

Another interesting avenue for future research would involve additional investigations into team member interaction which could have an effect on team level measures. If the supervisor is targeting a specific individual/s within the group, how do all group members deal with that situation? Are the perceptions of the supervisor as abusive different if only one or some of the individual in the team are specifically targeted compared to the abuse being directed generally at all team members? If an abusive supervisor favors a specific team member, is that person ostracized by the group? Could the shared experience of an abusive supervisor bring the team closer together?

This research is specifically looking into the antecedents of abusive supervision but, it would be interesting to make a more direct connection between these specific antecedents and the outcomes previously associated with abusive supervision. This research demonstrates that the relationship between individual characteristics of both the supervisor and the subordinate are major predictors. More specifically, implicit aggressive personality of the subordinate does alter their perceptions of the supervisor's behavior. Implicit aggressive personality of the supervisor is also an indicator that they are more likely to engage in abusive behaviors than the supervisors who do not possess a motive to aggress.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this dissertation was to determine the relevance of personality of both the supervisor and subordinate in the perception of abusive supervision. Results suggest a significant relationship between these constructs with a large effect size. Though there is still much to be understood about the antecedents of abusive supervision, this research contributes to the much theorized but untested aggressive or hostile motivations of those supervisors that engage in abusive supervision as well as those individuals that perceive their supervisor to be abusive. Additionally, this research establishes the importance of treating abusive supervision as a multi-level construct. The relationship with the largest effect size existed between supervisor implicit aggression and team abusive supervision. This demonstrates how important it is to capture the perceptions of multiple individuals with the same supervisor to increase the likelihood of capturing actual abuse versus the likelihood that abuse just being perceived by one person. Also, since the dispersion of the perceptions of team level abusive supervision correlated with the differences in aggressive personality of the individuals with the same supervisor, further analysis beyond the aggregate should be used when examining team abusive supervision.

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## **APPENDIX**

### Abusive Supervision Scale (Tepper, 2000)

Please answer the following questions using the criteria below:

1 = I cannot remember him/her ever using this behavior with me

2 = He/she very seldom uses this behavior with me

3 = He/she occasionally uses this behavior with me

4 = He/she uses this behavior moderately with me

5 = He/she uses this behavior very often with me

My immediate supervisor....

1. Ridicules me	1	2	3	4	5
2. Tells me by thoughts or feelings are stupid	1	2	3	4	5
3. Gives me the silent treatment	1	2	3	4	5
4. Puts me down in front of others	1	2	3	4	5
5. Invades my privacy	1	2	3	4	5
6. Reminds me of my past mistakes and failures	1	2	3	4	5
7. Doesn't give me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort	1	2	3	4	5
8. Blames me to save himself/herself embarrassment	1	2	3	4	5
9. Breaks promises he/she makes	1	2	3	4	5
10. Expresses anger at me when he/she is mad for another reason	1	2	3	4	5
11. Makes negative comments about me to others	1	2	3	4	5
12. Is rude to me	1	2	3	4	5
13. Does not allow me to interact with my coworkers	1	2	3	4	5
14. Tells me I'm incompetent	1	2	3	4	5
15. Lies to me	1	2	3	4	5

**PANAS – X Scale** (Watson & Clark, 1994)

Sample PANAS-X Protocol Illustrating "Past Few Weeks" Time Instructions

This scale consists of a number of words and phrases that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then mark the appropriate answer in the space next to that word. Indicate to what extent you have felt this way during the past few weeks .

Use the following scale to record your answers: 1 2 3 4 5 very slightly a little moderately quite a bit extremely or not at all

\_\_\_\_\_ active \_\_\_\_\_ guilty \_\_\_\_\_ enthusiastic \_\_\_\_\_ attentive \_\_\_\_\_ afraid

\_\_\_\_\_ nervous \_\_\_\_\_ distressed \_\_\_\_\_ excited \_\_\_\_\_ determined \_\_\_\_\_ strong

\_\_\_\_\_ hostile \_\_\_\_\_ proud \_\_\_\_\_ alert \_\_\_\_\_ jittery \_\_\_\_\_ interested \_\_\_\_\_ irritable

\_\_\_\_\_ upset \_\_\_\_\_ ashamed \_\_\_\_\_ inspired \_\_\_\_\_ scared

## Organizational Justice

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- 1) Overall, I'm treated fairly by my organization. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 2) In general, I can count on this organization to be fair. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 3) In general, the treatment I receive around here is fair. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 4) Usually, the way things work in this organization are not fair. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 5) For the most part, this organization treats its employees fairly 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
- 6) Most of the people who work here would say they are often treated unfairly. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

## **Demographics**

**Organization Name:**

**Employee Name:**

**Name of Supervisor Scored:**

**Age:**

**Gender:**

**Number of years with company:**

**Number of years as a supervisor (if applicable):**

# VITA

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## EDUCATION

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**University of Mississippi** – College of Business Administration, University, MS

Ph.D., Management - Human Resources and Organizational Behavior (April 2021)

**University of North Alabama** – College of Business Administration, Florence, AL

Master of Business Administration (December 2014)

**Ashland University** – College of Arts and Sciences, Ashland, OH

Bachelor of Arts in History, Political Science, and English (May 2007)

## DISSERTATION

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*“Relevance of personality in perceptions of abusive supervision: A multilevel analysis”*

Committee: Dr. Walter Davis (Co-Chair), Dr. Jeremy Schoen (Co-Chair), Dr. Paul Johnson, Dr. Tony Ammeter

Dissertation Proposal Approved: 4/9/2020

Defense Passed: 4/23/2021

Summary: The purpose of this dissertation is to determine the relevance of personality of both the supervisor and subordinate in the perception of abusive supervision. A supervisor with an aggressive personality should enact aggressive behaviors that would be perceived as abusive by their individual subordinates. Subordinates with an aggressive personality are more likely to possess a hostile attribution bias whereby they perceive the actions of others to aggressive and hostile more often than prosocial individuals. Consequently, through a multi-level analysis of research conducted in a large organization, I hope to determine if an analysis of subordinate personality, supervisor personality and team-level abusive supervision will help organizations better understand abusive supervision in the workplace.

## **WORKS UNDER REVIEW**

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Berns, J.P. and **Williams, J.L.**, “Calling out the laggards: An examination of shareholder activism and board gender diversity”

Status: **1<sup>st</sup> Round R&R** at *Gender in Management: An International Journal*

Schoen, J., **Williams, J.L.**, Reichin, S., and Meyer, R., “Faking Detection in Conditional Reasoning Tests of Creative Personality and Achievement Motivation”

Status: Under Review at *Journal of Applied Psychology*

## **PUBLISHED BOOK CHAPTER**

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**Williams, J.L.**, and Gentry, R.J. (2017). “Keeping It Real: The benefits of experiential teaching methods in meeting the objectives of entrepreneurship education” in Donald F. Kuratko , Sherry Hoskinson (ed.) *The Great Debates in Entrepreneurship (Advances in the Study of Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Economic Growth, Volume 27)* Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 9 – 20.

## **PEER-REVIEWED CASE STUDIES**

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**Williams, J.L.**, Lillge, A., and Gentry, R.J. (2018) “To Franchise or Not to Franchise?: Is Culver’s ButterBurger a “Better Burger”?” Sage Publications.

**Williams, J.L.** and Gentry, R.J. (2018) “The Role of Human Resources During a Major Product Recall: TS Tech Alabama”. Sage Publications.

**Williams, J.L.**, Albers, K., and Gentry, R.J. “Ingersoll Rand: A Smarter, Connected Future” Sage Publications.

## **PEER-REVIEWED CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

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**Williams, J.L.**, Stewart, S. and Davison, H. K., “Situational Cues Matter: Justice, Aggression, and Positive Workplace Outcomes” Academy of Management Annual Conference 2020, Virtual Conference

Schoen, J., **Williams, J.L.**, Reichin, S., and Meyer, R., “Faking Detection in Conditional Reasoning Tests of Creative Personality and Achievement Motivation” Academy of Management Annual Conference 2020, Virtual Conference

**Williams, J.L.** and Schoen J.B. “The Inclusion of Aggressive Personality as an Antecedent of Abusive Supervision” Society for Industrial Organizational Psychology Annual Conference 2019, National Harbor, MD

**Williams, J.L.** and Berns, J.P. “Announcement of Gender Parity Related Initiatives and Market Reaction” Southern Management Association Annual Conference 2018, Lexington, KY

Berns, J.P. and **Williams, J.L.** “Antecedents of shareholder activism for greater board gender diversity” (2017) Southern Management Association Annual Conference 2017, St. Pete Beach, FL



## **CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECTS**

---

**Williams, J.L.,** Stewart, S. and Davison, H. K., “Situational Cues Matter: Justice, Aggression, and Positive Workplace Outcomes”

Status: *Final Editing*

Target Journal: *Personality and Individual Differences*

Est. Submission Date: *Summer 2021*

**Williams, J.L.** and Schoen, J. “Abusive Supervision: A narrative review of the theories and antecedents”.

Status: Written; Formatting for Journal

Target Journal: *Journal of Management* (Review Issue)

Est. Submission date: *Summer 2021*

Davison, H.K., **Williams, J.L.**, and Stewart, S., “Locus of control as a moderator of the relationship between the interaction of implicit and explicit aggressive personality.”

Status: Data Collected; writing

Target Journal: *Personality and Individual Differences*

Est. Submission Date: Fall 2021

**Williams, J.L.**, “The Effect of Abusive Supervision on Feedback Seeking Behavior”

Status: Conceptual piece; Data collection needed

Target Journal: *Human Relations*

Est. Submission Date: *Fall 2021/Winter 2022*

## **RESEARCH INTERESTS**

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Organizational Behavior (Abusive Supervision, Workplace Deviance, Personality, Aggression, Conditional Reasoning), Cross-cultural Organizational Behavior

My research interests reside primarily in the area of personality and behavior in the workplace. I am concerned with how personality characteristics affect organizational outcomes. More specifically, I hope to contribute to and advance management research on implicit aggressive personality, abusive supervision, and workplace deviance as well as expanding research using conditional reasoning.

## **TEACHING**

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Instructor (ratings out of 5):

- Principles of Management (Hybrid) - Spring 2021
- Training and Development (Online) - Fall 2020
- Principles of Management (Online) - Fall 2020
- Organizational Behavior (Online) - Summer 2020 (4.53 Rating)
- Placement and Selection (Online) - Summer 2020 (5.0 Rating)
- Human Resource Management - Spring 2020 (4.5 Rating)
- Human Resource Management - Summer 2019 (4.2 Rating)
- Principles of Management - Summer 2017 (3.36 Rating)
- Organizational Behavior - June 2021

Teaching Assistant (2 courses; 15 semesters):

- Entrepreneurship and Management (Hybrid Course) Fall 2016 - Winter 2020
- Regulation in New Ventures (Online) Summer 2018

## **INDUSTRY WORK EXPERIENCE**

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### **TS Tech Alabama, LLC.** – *Lead Auditor/HR Associate* (Feb. 2014 – Aug. 2016)

- Led the Quality, Cost and Delivery cross-departmental team
- Collected and analyzed HR data and supported Human Resources as necessary
- Business planning, tracked manpower trends and reported monthly
- Audited home plant quarterly, 12 sister companies and select suppliers annually as a member of the corporate audit team (ISO9001 auditor, ISO14001 auditor, TS16949 auditor)

### **TS Tech Alabama, LLC.** – *Fixed Asset Accountant* (Nov. 2011 – Feb. 2014)

- Created a tracking system and implemented planning, purchasing, tracking and disposal procedure for all company owned fixed assets
- Worked with all departments to research past asset acquisition and status
- Initiated monthly tracking of planned and actual spending for all long-term projects, short-term projects and purchases over \$2,000

### **TS Tech Alabama, LLC.** – *Quality Engineer* (Sept. 2009 – Nov. 2011)

- Investigated internal and supplier quality defects, implemented countermeasures, and tracked effectiveness of the countermeasures
- Assisted in New Model development and led model change quality development

**Professional Softball Player** – The Netherlands (2007), Italy (2008), Switzerland (2009)

## **PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS & SERVICE**

---

### *Member:*

- Academy of Management 2016 - Current
- Southern Management Association 2016 – Current
- Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology 2017 – Current
- Mid-South Management Research Consortium 2016 – Current

### *Reviewer:*

- Academy of Management Conference 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021
- Southern Management Association Conference 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020
- Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship (*Ad Hoc*) since 2018
- Gender in Management: An International Journal (*Ad Hoc*) since 2021

### *Volunteer:*

- Southern Management Association Annual Conference 2017, 2018, 2019, & 2020

- Academy of Management 2021 OB Division PDW Facilitator – “We Got by with a Little Help: Recent Perspectives on the Academic Job Market” (*Submission under review*)

## **CERTIFICATIONS & TRAINING**

---

### *Certifications:*

- eLearning Endorsement Program Online Teaching Certification (May 2020)
- CITI Human Subjects Research Educational Program (December 2016; December 2019)

### *Training:*

- CARMA Multilevel Statistical Analysis with R – Dr. James LeBreton (June 2020)
- CARMA Advanced Multilevel Statistical Analysis with R – Dr. Paul Bliese (June 2020)
- Faculty Hiring Committee Diversity and Inclusion Training (May 2020)
- Conditional Process Models – Dr. Andrew Hayes (October 2018)