

FROM NEGATIVE ACT TO NEGATIVE RELATIONSHIP: UNDERSTANDING HOW  
PATTERNS OF ABUSIVE SUPERVISION EMERGE AND DEVELOP OVER TIME

By

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To my family

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FROM NEGATIVE ACT TO NEGATIVE RELATIONSHIP: UNDERSTANDING HOW  
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By

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Abusive supervision has been defined as “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact,” (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Fundamental to this definition is the notion that abusive supervision is sustained; rather than being occasionally exposed to uncivil acts, subordinates subjected to abusive supervision are repeatedly mistreated. Yet, little is known regarding the processes through which these destructive relational patterns emerge. How do generally functional supervisor-subordinate relationships, characterized by occasional negative events, transform into dysfunctional relationships consumed by such events?

In attempting to help answer this question, I integrate reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1978, 1983), victim precipitation (Elias, 1986), and cognitive appraisal perspectives (Lazarus, 1991a, 1991b) to investigate the processes through which sustained abuse occurs and the extent to which personality influences these processes. Specifically, I argue that personality traits influence subordinates’ emotional and behavioral reactions to supervisors’ negative behaviors. These reactions, in turn, may or may not reinforce the likelihood of future abuse, thus facilitating or inhibiting sustained

abusive patterns. To test this model, longitudinal data were collected over the course of a five month period (six waves) among a sample of 159 employed individuals and their coworkers.

Results offered some support for the abovementioned propositions. In particular, subordinates who possessed high levels of trait withdrawal—a facet of neuroticism—were more likely to endure abusive supervision in general, and also, were more likely to avoid perpetrators in response to mistreatment. Moreover, a reciprocal relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed avoidance emerged. Taken together, this set of findings suggests that high-trait withdrawal individuals might find themselves in abusive relationships, in part, because their own reactions to mistreatment can knowingly or unknowingly reinforce such behavior. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Humans have a fundamental need to belong—to form lasting friendships replete with positive interaction and mutual concern (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The sheer amount of time individuals spend at work coupled with the increased use of teams in organizations (Gordon, 1992) make the workplace a likely breeding ground for such relationships. Indeed, a recent Gallup Poll (Rath, 2006) suggests that nearly one-third of employees work with their “best friend”. Not all relationships formed at work, however, are benign. Numerous researchers have found evidence to suggest that, in addition to cultivating friendship, the workplace can be a major source of interpersonal harm. Particularly common are acts of nonphysical mistreatment (Barling, Dupre, & Kelloway, 2009; Raynor & Hoel, 1997), such as rudeness, taking credit for another’s work, ridicule, and social exclusion. Porath and Pearson (2010), for example, estimated that nearly half of American employees were treated rudely at least once per week in 2005, up from 25% in 1998. Moreover, 96% of employees reported experiencing incivility at least once, and 99% of employees reported witnessing incivility. Likewise, roughly 13.6% of U.S. workers endure an abusive supervisor (Tepper, 2007), and Basch and Fisher (2000) found that, of the myriad events sparking negative emotion in the workplace, 59% involved acts of colleagues or management.

Although scholars have identified many types of interpersonal mistreatment, including abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2001), mobbing (Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996), emotional abuse (Aquino & Douglas, 2003), and social undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002), these behaviors share grave consequences. Tepper

(2007) estimated that organizations lose \$23.8 billion annually as a result of the effects of harmful interpersonal behavior on individuals. Among these effects are decreased performance (Harris, Kacmar, & Zivnuska, 2007) and commitment (Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007), increased stress (Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007), absenteeism (Bowling & Beehr, 2006), and even post traumatic stress disorder (Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996), leading Leymann and Gustafson (1996) to boldly label the workplace, “the only remaining ‘battle field’ where people can ‘kill’ each other without running the risk of being taken to court,” (p. 173).

In this dissertation, I primarily explore one type of interpersonal mistreatment—abusive supervision. Abusive supervision is defined as “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact,” (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). I limit my focus to the supervisor-subordinate relationship, because evidence suggests individuals’ reactions to mistreatment depend to some degree on who enacts it (Inness, LeBlanc, & Barling, 2008; Porath, Overbeck, & Pearson, 2008). Supervisors’ actions seem particularly important to understand, because the power and control of valuable resources typically afforded to such individuals (Magee & Galinsky, 2008) can greatly affect subordinates’ lives.

Perhaps partly for this reason, research examining abusive supervision is quite popular relative to research examining other types of employee mistreatment. Notwithstanding this popularity, our understanding of abusive supervision remains fairly limited. The majority of studies examining abusive supervision have been cross-sectional (Tepper, 2007). Cross-sectional studies of abusive supervision provide insight

into relations involving the aggregated quantity of behaviors that participants remember experiencing over a designated time period. They do not, however, allow researchers to assess growth in the quantity or variety of abusive behaviors, nor do they allow researchers to examine whether employees' reactions to acts of abuse prevent or elicit future mistreatment. Additionally, cross-sectional studies also do not permit researchers to draw causal conclusions. Thus, although previous research provides valuable "snapshots" of abusive supervision's nomological network, it fails to adequately capture the dynamic nature of the supervisor-subordinate relationship. This is especially problematic, given that, central to the definition of abusive supervision is the notion of a sustained pattern of behavior that, necessarily, unfolds over time.

Another gap in the abusive supervision research involves the role of individual differences. To be sure, some research has examined individual differences in who is targeted for and who is most reactive to abuse (c.f., Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006). Yet, the mechanisms underlying these relationships, as well as the extent to which individual differences impact the effectiveness of one's coping strategies for preventing further mistreatment, remain to be explored. Taken together, the aforementioned gaps suggest that we have a poor understanding of the dynamic processes through which generally functional supervisor-subordinate relationships, perhaps characterized by occasional negative events, transform into dysfunctional relationships consumed by such events.

In the current study, then, I collect longitudinal data to help address these gaps. In doing so, I integrate reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1978, 1983), victim precipitation (Elias, 1986), and cognitive appraisal (Lazarus, 1991a, 199b) theories and perspectives,

to examine the extent to which personality traits influence subordinates' emotional and behavioral reactions to abuse as well as the overall levels of abuse subordinates experience. Additionally, I examine whether subordinates' reactions to abuse increase or decrease the likelihood of future mistreatment. These findings should shed considerable light on the processes through which more discrete negative interactions among supervisors and subordinates potentially transform into negative relationships, while simultaneously addressing calls to incorporate the role of time into applied research design (Koslowski, 2009). Using the results of this research, it is my hope that researchers and practitioners will be better able to develop interventions effective in preventing abusive relationships in the workplace.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Abusive Supervision Literature**

In order to understand how patterns of abusive supervision unfold, it is useful to begin by reviewing the literature on abusive supervision. In doing so, I first thoroughly define abusive supervision. I then compare abusive supervision to other popular mistreatment concepts. Following this, I review the antecedents and consequences of abusive supervision, and conclude by discussing the gaps in this work.

#### **Abusive Supervision Defined**

In his seminal work on the topic, Tepper (2000) coined the term abusive supervision to describe, “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact,” (p. 178). Tepper (2000, 2007) elaborated on several features of this definition. By focusing on subordinates’ perceptions, abusive supervision is subjective, based on the perspective of the individual potentially experiencing mistreatment. Abusive supervision is also enduring in that it is likely to continue until the supervisor-subordinate relationship is terminated or until the supervisor modifies his or her behavior. Finally, abusive supervision involves behaviors enacted with a purpose in mind, although, the purpose is not necessarily to harm subordinates. For example, supervisors may engage in abusive behaviors in an effort to increase subordinates’ performance. Examples of behaviors characteristic of abusive supervision include, invading a subordinate’s privacy, making negative comments about a subordinate to others, and being rude or lying to a subordinate. More physical behaviors, such as shoving, do not fall within the conceptual realm of abusive supervision.

## **Related Constructs**

Numerous labels have been used to refer to mistreatment at work, including abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2001), mobbing (Zapf et al., 1996), emotional abuse (Keashly, 1998), general hierarchical abuse (Rospenda, Richman, Wislar, & Flaherty, 2000) victimization (Aquino, 2000), workplace harassment (Björkqvist, Österman, & Hjelt-Bäck, 1994), identity threat (Aquino & Douglas, 2003), and social undermining (Duffy et al., 2002). I do not extensively compare and contrast each of these behaviors individually, as this has been done comprehensively elsewhere (e.g., Aquino & Thau, 2009; Einarsen, 2000; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2005; Tepper, 2007). Instead, I highlight general similarities and differences between abusive supervision and other mistreatment constructs, and provide detailed descriptions only for those constructs that bear the closest resemblance to abusive supervision.

Two frameworks are particularly useful in assisting with this undertaking. First, Tepper (2007) compared the definitions of several mistreatment constructs using four dimensions: whether mistreatment is restricted to being directed downward from supervisor to subordinate, whether mistreatment can involve sexual or physical hostility, whether non-hostile behaviors can be included, and whether the definition refers to intended outcomes (e.g., to diminish one's reputation). Whereas abusive supervision is directed downward and excludes physical and sexual hostility, non-hostile content, and references to intended outcomes, other constructs evaluated by Tepper (2000) differed from abusive supervision on at least one dimension.

In a similar effort, Aquino and Thau (2009) identified three broad dimensions and seven sub-dimensions in order to compare mistreatment constructs. These dimensions

involve the type of needs (physiological or psychological) thwarted by mistreatment, whether mistreatment consists of behaviors that directly (overtly) or indirectly (covertly) harm victims, and the status of the perpetrator (i.e., higher than victim, coworker, or lower than victim). Abusive supervision was classified as thwarting psychological, rather than physiological needs, as consisting of both direct and indirect harm, and as being enacted by a superior toward a subordinate. Like Tepper (2007), Aquino and Thau (2009) found abusive supervision to differ from every other construct examined on at least one dimension. Thus, abusive supervision appears to possess unique properties that conceptually distinguish it from other mistreatment constructs.

Notwithstanding this differentiation, scholars have questioned whether each of the abovementioned constructs necessitates separate theoretical and empirical examination, or whether the literature would be better served by the adoption of a broader perspective (Aquino & Thau, 2009). Consistent with the latter viewpoint, aggression (Neuman & Baron, 2005), counterproductive behavior (Spector & Fox, 2005), and victimization (Aquino & Thau, 2009) have each been nominated as potential “umbrella” constructs. Their proponents suggest that the definitions of these constructs encompass multiple mistreatment behaviors. However, consensus regarding which, if any, of these labels is appropriate has not yet been established, nor has consensus regarding whether aggregation is, in fact, appropriate at all.

Recognizing this, many recent works opt for middle ground by focusing on specific, narrow constructs, while simultaneously drawing from literatures involving “close relatives” in order to garner support for propositions. I follow a similar approach when reviewing the literature. That is, in addition to reviewing the literature focusing

explicitly on abusive supervision, I also incorporate findings involving constructs closely related to abusive supervision. Tepper (2007) identified two such constructs in his recent review: supervisor undermining and supervisor aggression. Additionally, because very few studies examine antecedents to abusive supervision, Tepper (2007) advocated drawing from the workplace victimization literature, which has disproportionately focused on examining antecedents to mistreatment. In the following sections, I discuss these constructs in detail, and compare and contrast them to abusive supervision.

**Supervisor undermining.** Supervisor undermining is part of the broader social undermining construct, defined as “behavior intended to hinder, over time, the ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work related success, and favorable reputation,” (Duffy et al., 2002, p. 332). When the perpetrator of social undermining is confined to one’s supervisor, social undermining is identical to abusive supervision on each of Aquino and Thau’s (2009) proposed dimensions, and differs from abusive supervision on only one of Tepper’s (2007) four dimensions. More specifically, whereas abusive supervision does not ascribe intentions to hostile behavior, supervisor undermining is a slow, enduring, and intentional attempt to harm a subordinate’s career and work relationships.

**Supervisor aggression.** Like supervisor undermining, supervisor aggression is subsumed under a larger construct—workplace aggression. Workplace aggression can be defined as behavior “that is intended to physically or psychologically harm a worker or workers in a work-related context” (Schat, Desmarais, & Kelloway, 2006). When compared using Tepper’s (2007) dimensions, there are two major differences between abusive supervision and supervisor aggression. More specifically, supervisor

aggression includes physical hostility and requires harmful intentions on behalf of a perpetrator, whereas abusive supervision does not. Aquino and Thau (2009) did not include aggression in their comparison of mistreatment constructs, though, if they had, supervisor aggression would differ from abusive supervision in its ability to thwart both psychological and physiological needs, rather than solely psychological needs.

**Victimization.** Compared to supervisor undermining and supervisor aggression, victimization has less in common with abusive supervision. Tepper (2007) noted that victimization differs from abusive supervision on three dimensions. Namely, victimization is not exclusively directed downward from supervisor to subordinate, it can include physically hostile acts, and its definition references intended outcomes. Victimization also differs from abusive supervision on two of Aquino and Thau's (2009) dimensions, as it can thwart both physical and psychological needs, and perpetrators are not confined supervisory roles.

**Conclusion.** After comparing the key features of mistreatment constructs using existing frameworks, it is clear they share much in common. This is especially true for the abusive supervision, supervisor undermining, and supervisor aggression constructs. Additionally, it is worth noting that items typically used to measure various mistreatment constructs overlap considerably. Thus, consistent with Tepper (2007), I include research examining abusive supervision, supervisor undermining, and supervisor aggression in my review of the literature. Also in line with Tepper (2007), I draw from the workplace victimization literature in my discussion of the antecedents to abusive supervision, as there is a dearth of research in this area.

## Review of Empirical Findings

### Antecedents

Characteristics of targets, perpetrators, and the work environment have each been examined as antecedents of abusive supervision and like constructs. I discuss findings involving each of these categories in the sections to follow.

**Target characteristics.** With few exceptions (e.g., Martinko, Harvey, Sikora, & Douglas, 2009; Wu & Hu, 2009), relationships involving targets' characteristics and abusive supervision have been explained using victim precipitation theory. Originating in the criminology literature (Amir, 1967; Curtis, 1974; Wolfgang, 1967), and introduced to the management literature in a series of studies conducted by Aquino and his colleagues (e.g., Aquino, 2000; Aquino & Bradfield, 2000; Aquino, Grover, Bradfield, & Allen, 1999), victim precipitation theory posits that victims may knowingly or unknowingly contribute to their becoming targets of mistreatment. That is, individuals can become attractive targets for abuse because they possess characteristics or behave in ways that make them appear vulnerable to or deserving of mistreatment.

In pursuit of learning which factors increase individuals' susceptibility to mistreatment in the workplace, researchers have linked a number of characteristics to abusive supervision, supervisor undermining, and, most frequently, to victimization. Among the factors positively related to these behaviors are negative affectivity (Aquino & Bradfield, 2000; Aquino et al., 1999; Tepper et al., 2006), aggressiveness (Aquino & Bradfield, 2000), voicing discontent (Kim, Rosen, & Lee, 2009), avoiding, obliging, and integrating conflict management styles (Aquino, 2000), and external (hostile) attributional style (Martinko et al., 2009).

Additionally, several moderators of these relationships have been discovered. One of the more commonly studied moderators has been victims' job status. For example, Aquino (2000) found that individuals occupying lower status jobs were indirectly (i.e., covertly) victimized more often than individuals occupying higher status jobs when they managed conflict with low regard for their own interests and high regard for others' interests (i.e., when they possessed an obliging conflict management style). Conversely, having an integrating conflict management style, characterized by a high concern for one's own and another's interests was positively linked to victimization only for individuals who possessed high status jobs. Also examining the moderating role of job status, Aquino et al., (1999) found that negative affectivity was related to indirect (covert) victimization solely for individuals who occupied lower status jobs. In sum, although the findings are not particularly straightforward, the results of these studies collectively suggest that job status is important to consider when investigating mistreatment's relationships with other variables.

Two additional studies have also examined moderators. Kim et al., (2009) found that managers were more likely to engage in social undermining when cynical (rather than trusting) employees voiced discontent with company policy. This relationship was mediated by the motives supervisors attributed to employees. Specifically, supervisors perceived cynical employees' voicing of discontent as a personal attack, whereas they perceived trusting employees' voicing of discontent as being due to health or moral concerns. In a final study examining moderation, Martinko et al., (2009) found that a tendency to make stable attributions for others' behavior amplified the positive effects of external attributions on abusive supervision. Moreover, the effects of external

attributions on abusive supervision were mediated by poor leader-member exchange relationships.

At this point, it is worth noting that each of the antecedents discussed thus far has been positively linked to abusive supervision and/or other closely related constructs. Some researchers, however, have identified factors that shield individuals from mistreatment. One such factor is core self-evaluations (CSE; Wu & Hu, 2009), or general self-concept (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997). In line with self-consistency theory (Lecky, 1945), Wu and Hu (2009) argued that high-CSE individuals process social information in a manner consistent with their positive self-concept. Thus, compared to low-CSE individuals, high-CSE individuals are more attentive to positive stimuli and less attentive to negative stimuli. As a consequence of allocating attentional resources in this fashion, high-CSE individuals perceive less mistreatment than their low-CSE counterparts.

Like CSE, self-determination, defined as the experience of a perceived locus of causality (Deci & Ryan, 1985), has also been negatively linked to victimization (Aquino et al., 1999). Aquino et al. (1999) argued that self-determined individuals are empowered to control when, how, and with whom they interact, and thus, to avoid exchanges with suspected perpetrators. Additionally, Aquino et al. (1999) reasoned that the sense of control afforded to self-determined individuals better empowers them to defend themselves and, therefore, detracts from their appearing vulnerable or helpless.

Another factor examined for its ability to protect individuals from victimization is job status (Aquino 2000; Aquino & Bradfield, 2000; Aquino et al., 1999; Aquino & Bommer, 2003). Typically, researchers have proposed that the formal power characteristic of high

status positions better equips individuals occupying these positions to retaliate against aggressors. Fear of retaliation, in turn, deters less powerful individuals from directing hostility toward those possessing high status jobs. Interestingly, despite the seemingly intuitive nature of this argument, findings regarding job status have been mixed; only one (Aquino, 2000) of four studies (Aquino 2000; Aquino & Bradfield, 2000; Aquino et al., 1999; Aquino & Bommer, 2003) examining the job-status – victimization relationship has found job status to be negatively related to victimization, and this relationship held only for more overt forms of victimization.

In a final study examining factors that detract from victimization, Aquino and Bommer (2003) found subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior to be negatively related to perceived victimization. They argued that, by engaging in citizenship behavior, employees create positive reciprocity norms, thereby obligating others to favorable treatment. Race and job status also moderated the organizational citizenship behavior – victimization relationship, such that it was stronger for White than for African American employees. Contrary to the authors' expectations that high-status indicators like race and job status facilitate the creation of stronger reciprocity norms, however, possessing low job status was actually found to amplify the negative effects of organizational citizenship behavior on victimization. To explain this finding, Aquino (2000) suggested that high status employees are typically perceived as socially attractive (Georgeson & Harris, 1998), and thus, should be viewed positively regardless of whether or not they engage in citizenship behavior. This positive image, in turn, should make high status individuals less susceptible to victimization irrespective of whether or not they are good citizens.

In addition to factors that either increase or decrease victimization, researchers have also identified one trait that is curvilinearly related to victimization. Specifically, Aquino and Byron (2002) found that males possessing high and low levels of dominance were victimized more often than males who possessed moderate levels of dominance. One explanation of this finding is that individuals who lack appropriate levels of dominance come across as weak or vulnerable, whereas overly dominant individuals provoke conflict and appear hostile; instilling these unfavorable impressions upon others can result in increased victimization.

**Supervisor and work environment characteristics.** Relative to research examining characteristics of targets, fewer studies have focused on identifying hostility-eliciting characteristics of perpetrators and the work environment. Researchers who have focused on these characteristics have tended to develop integrative models depicting supervisor characteristics as moderators or mediators of the effects of work environment features on abusive supervision. Quite frequently, the relationships contained within these models are explained as manifestations of displaced aggression (e.g., Aryee et al., 2007; Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Wayne, Hoobler, Marinova, & Johnson, 2008; Tepper et al., 2006). According to this perspective, dissatisfying features of the work environment produce negative emotions that leave supervisors ready and willing to aggress against convenient targets. Supervisors' fear of retaliation from more powerful individuals makes less influential subordinates opportune targets against which to aggress.

Consistent with this explanation, Wayne et al. (2008) found that supervisors who were abused by their managers became cynical which, in turn, resulted in their abusing

subordinates. In another study, Hoobler and Brass (2006) found that supervisors who experienced psychological contract violations were more likely to abuse subordinates, though this relationship was stronger for supervisors who possessed a tendency to infer hostile intentions for others' behaviors (i.e., hostile attribution bias).

Several studies have also examined supervisors' perceptions of organizational justice as an antecedent of subordinates' perceived levels of abusive supervision. Tepper et al. (2006) found that supervisors' perceptions of procedural injustice were positively related to abusive supervision among a sample of National Guard employees. This effect was mediated by supervisors' depression. Interestingly, mediation was stronger when subordinates were high in negative affectivity, perhaps because subordinates possessing high levels of negative affect are more submissive or provocative, and thus, appear to be "safer" or more deserving targets. Contrary to the findings of Tepper et al. (2006), however, a more recent study by Rafferty, Restobug, and Jimmieson (2010) found that supervisors' levels of interactional, but not procedural justice predicted subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision. This effect was amplified when supervisors experienced higher levels of psychological distress. A final study investigating supervisors' justice perceptions (Aryee et al., 2007) found that supervisors who possessed authoritarian leadership styles were more likely to abuse their subordinates. Furthermore, authoritarian leadership style moderated the relationship between supervisors' perceptions of interactional justice and abusive supervision, such that interactional justice was positively related to abusive supervision only for authoritarian leaders. Aryee et al. (2007) reasoned that abuse satisfied authoritarian leaders' needs for control, and also that authoritarian leaders were less

able to manage their emotions when experiencing interactional injustice, resulting in their lashing out at subordinates. In sum, findings involving procedural justice offer mixed support for its role as an antecedent to abusive supervision, whereas findings involving interactional justice are more consistently supportive. It does appear important, however, to consider moderators when assessing these relationships.

The most recent study to investigate antecedents to abusive supervision linked subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision to supervisors' Machiavellianism (Kiazad, Restobug, Zagencyk, Kiewitz, & Tang, 2010) using samples of Australian and Pilipino employees. In both samples, the effect of Machiavellianism on perceived abusive supervision was fully mediated by authoritarian leadership. Finally, subordinates' organization-based self-esteem—evaluations of their meaningfulness and worthiness within the organization (Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, & Dunham, 1989)—moderated the relationship between authoritarian leadership and abusive supervision, such that employees who possessed lower levels of organization-based self-esteem were more likely to perceive authoritarian leadership as abusive. Kiazad et al. (2010) reasoned that their findings supported dispositional rather than displaced aggression explanations for abusive supervision.

**Evaluative summary of antecedents.** Overall, there is a dearth of research examining antecedents to abusive supervision when the scope of one's interest is limited strictly to research that examines Tepper's (2000) construct. However, when one is willing to venture into closely related literatures (i.e., victimization), the research is more plentiful. By linking certain personality traits and behaviors to mistreatment, findings from both literatures cumulatively offer support for the victim precipitation

model. The traits and behaviors examined as antecedents to mistreatment, however, do remain somewhat limited. Consequently, research investigating how other target characteristics relate to mistreatment would be a welcome addition to the abusive supervision literature.

Compared to the literature examining characteristics of the targets of abuse, less research has focused on the perpetrator and work environment characteristics that elicit mistreatment. Existing findings seem consistent with a displaced aggression explanation—supervisors subjected to unfavorable working conditions react by abusing subordinates because they are “easy targets”, although some evidence seems to support supervisor trait-based explanations (e.g. Kiazad et al., 2010). More research is needed, however, to draw firm conclusions in both areas. Additionally, the presence of several moderators in research examining all categories of mistreatment antecedents implies that it is especially important to consider boundary conditions when investigating antecedents to abusive supervision.

## **Consequences**

The literature examining consequences of abusive supervision is quite voluminous. The most commonly studied outcomes include job satisfaction and related attitudes (i.e., job involvement); stress and strain; withdrawal cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors; and extra-role performance (i.e., counterproductive and citizenship behaviors). In the sections to follow, I review consequences representing each of these categories, among others less studied.

**Subordinates' attitudes.** Abusive supervision has been linked to decreased job satisfaction (Breux, Perrewé, Hall, Frink, & Hochwater, 2008; Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, & Pagon, 2006; Schat et al., 2006; Tepper, 2000; Tepper, Duffy, Hoobler, &

Ensley, 2004), job involvement (Duffy et al., 2006), and life satisfaction (Tepper, 2000). In one study examining students' relationships with their advisors, abusive supervision was also negatively related to thesis project satisfaction, though only for those students who did not receive social support from their colleagues (Hobman, Restubog, Bordia, & Tang, 2009). In seeking to explain the abusive supervision – job satisfaction relationship, Tepper (2000) examined the role of organizational justice and found evidence for full mediation. Also in support of a fairness-related explanation, Duffy et al. (2006) found that being singled out by one's supervisor for abuse exacerbated the negative relationships between abusive supervision and job satisfaction and job involvement. Specifically, consistent with fairness theory's (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001) predictions, Duffy et al. (2006) argued that singled out subordinates were more likely hold their supervisors accountable for abusive behavior, and thus, to react more negatively.

**Subordinates' withdrawal.** A number of withdrawal-related constructs, including subordinates' organizational commitment (Aryee et al., 2007; Duffy et al., 2002; Schat et al., 2006; Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2004; Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone, & Duffy, 2008), turnover intentions (Burris, Detert, & Chiaburu, 2008; Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, & Pagon, 2006; Harvey, Stoner, Hochwater, & Kacmar, 2007; Schat et al., 2006; Wayne et al., 2008), and voluntary turnover (Tepper, 2000) have been linked to abusive supervision, though not all findings have been consistent. For instance, contrary to some findings (e.g., Aryee, 2007; Tepper, 2000; Tepper et al., 2004; Tepper et al., 2008), Tepper et al. (2004) did not find abusive supervision to be linked to affective commitment among a random sample of Midwestern U.S. employees, nor did

Burriss et al. (2008) in a sample of restaurant employees. As with job satisfaction, researchers have found the effects of abusive supervision on organizational commitment to be mediated by organizational justice (Aryee et al, 2007; Tepper, 2000) and, beyond that, to be exacerbated when abusive supervisors simultaneously exhibit supportive behaviors (Duffy et al., 2002). Likewise, the abusive supervision – voluntary turnover relationship has also been found to be mediated by organizational justice (Tepper, 2000) and to be exacerbated when subordinates feel they are singled out for abuse (Duffy et al, 2006). Finally, subordinates' ingratiation behaviors have been found to attenuate the effects of abusive supervision on subordinates' turnover intentions (Harvey et al., 2007).

**Subordinates' stress and strain.** One of the most studied outcomes of abusive supervision has been subordinates' stress and strain. Indeed, abusive supervision has been positively associated with these outcomes in many forms, including anxiety (Gant, Nagda, Brabson, Jayaratne, Chess, & Singh, 1993; Hobman et al., 2009; Tepper, 2000; Tepper, Moss, Lockhart, & Carr, 2007), emotional exhaustion (Aryee, Chen, & Debrah, 2008; Breaux et al., 2008; Grandy & Kern, 2004; Grandey et al., 2007; Tepper et al., 2007; Harvey et al., 2007; Tepper, 2000; Wu & Hu, 2009), ego depletion (Thau & Mitchell, 2010), job tension (Breaux et al., 2008; Harvey et al., 2007), somatic complaints (Duffy et al., 2000; Gant et al., 1993), depression (Duffy et al., 2006; Gant et al., 1993; Tepper, 2000), work-family conflict (Tepper, 2000), psychological and physical health, (Schat et al., 2006), psychological distress (Rafferty et al., 2010; Yagil, 2006), job strain (Harris et al., 2005), irritability (Gant et al., 1993), depersonalization (Gant et al., 1993), intrusive thoughts (Thau & Mitchell, 2010), negative affect (Yagil, Ben-Zur, &

Tamir, 2011), and psychological well-being (Hobman et al., 2009). Researchers have also identified a number of factors that serve to either exacerbate or mitigate stress. Among the stress-exacerbating factors are supervisor support (Duffy et al., 2002; Hobman et al., 2009), susceptibility to emotional contagion (Wu & Hu, 2009), being singled out for abuse (Duffy et al., 2006), self-esteem (Rafferty et al., 2010), and regulative maintenance strategies (i.e., stretching the truth to avoid problems; Tepper et al., 2007).

Conversely, variables that have been shown to buffer stress include job mobility (Tepper, 2000), subordinates' power (Grandey & Kern, 2004), direct maintenance communication strategies (e.g., communication efforts designed to convey relational expectations, and openly discuss problems with supervisors; Tepper et al., 2007), and subordinates' ingratiation attempts (Harvey et al., 2007), though, the effects of ingratiation have been found to be more effective for individuals who possess higher levels of dispositional positive affectivity (Harvey et al., 2007). Coworker support has also been examined as a potential buffer to stress, but findings have been mixed. That is, coworker support has sometimes been found to buffer stress (Duffy et al., 2002; Hobman et al., 2009) and has other times been found to exacerbate it (Wu & Hu, 2009). Collectively, the abovementioned findings suggest that many additional factors can affect the abusive supervision – stress relationship. However, despite the multitude of research examining the moderators of this relationship, little is known regarding the mechanisms through which abusive supervision impacts stress; to date, organizational justice (Tepper, 2000) and support-seeking and avoidant coping strategies (Yagil et al., 2011) remain the only known mediators. It should be noted that Yagil et al. (2011) also

examined whether three other coping strategies—directly communicating with one’s supervisor, ingratiation, and reframing—mediated the abusive supervision–negative affect relationship. Although abusive supervision positively predicted ingratiation and reframing, none of the three coping strategies emerged as significant mediators.

**Subordinates’ counterproductive behaviors and deviance.** Counterproductive behaviors include volitional acts that harm or are intended to harm organizations or individuals in organizations (Spector & Fox, 2005), whereas deviance similarly defines volitional behavior that violates organizational norms and harms the organization or its employees (Hollinger, 1986; Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Subordinates’ deviant and counterproductive behaviors have primarily been studied as outcomes to abusive supervision based on the premise that subordinates seek to retaliate using such behaviors when they are the victims of abuse. However, when subordinates fear retaliating against a perpetrator or when the perpetrator is unavailable, they may direct their hostility to less threatening targets, including fellow coworkers. Whereas more retaliatory explanations are consistent with the concept of reciprocity (Blau, 1964), aggressing against less powerful others who are not perpetrators is consistent with the concept of displaced aggression. Supporting these perspectives, abusive supervision has been positively linked to deviance and/or counterproductive behavior directed toward supervisors (Dupre, Inness, Connelly, Barling, & Hopton, 2006; Inness, Barling, & Turner, 2005; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Tepper, Carr, Breaux, Geider, Hu, & Hua, 2009; Thau, Bennett, Mitchell, & Marrs, 2009; Thau & Mitchell, 2010), coworkers (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Schat et al., 2006; Schaubhut, Adams, & Jex, 2004; Thau et al., 2009), and the organization (Duffy et al., 2002; Duffy et al., 2006; Mitchell &

Ambrose, 2007; Tepper et al., 2009; Thau & Mitchell, 2006; Schaubhut et al., 2004; Tepper et al., 2008; Thau et al., 2009), as well as to counterproductive behavior at the unit level (Detert, Treviño, Burris, & Andiappan, 2007).

As with stress and strain, several moderators of these relationships have been identified. For example, Mitchell and Ambrose (2007) found that negative reciprocity beliefs—beliefs that negative acts should be reciprocated (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005)—amplified the relationship between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed deviance (but not coworker-directed or organizational-directed deviance). Likewise, Tepper et al. (2009) found that abusive supervision was more strongly related to retaliating against one's supervisor and organization when an employee intended to leave the organization. The authors reasoned that power differences often characteristic of supervisor-subordinate dyads were reduced for individuals who intended to leave the organization because allocation of the subordinate's job rewards and other organizational resources would not remain under the discretion of the current supervisor.

Other factors also amplify the abusive supervision – counterproductive behavior relationship. Thau et al. (2009) found that the effects of abusive supervision on workplace deviance were exacerbated under conditions of high uncertainty (i.e., when a supervisor had a less authoritative management style or when perceptions of managements' actions were seen as uncertain). Consistent with uncertainty management theory (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002), the authors argued that when environmental uncertainty is high, employees pay more attention to fairness-related information such as treatment they receive from authorities in order to help make sense

of the environment. Accordingly, abusive supervision should become more salient in uncertain environments, and thus, should result in more negative reactions.

Working largely for financial reasons (Dupre et al., 2006), supervisor support (Duffy et al., 2002), and being singled out (Duffy et al., 2006) for abuse also amplify the abusive supervision – organizational deviance relationship. One factor—working primarily for reasons having to do with personal fulfillment—has actually been shown to buffer abusive supervision’s effect on supervisor-directed deviance (i.e., aggression; Dupre et al., 2006), most likely because individuals working primarily to obtain personal fulfillment are less dependent on their employers compared to employees who must remain employed for financial reasons. As a result, the former group should have more freedom as to whether to endure an abusive environment or to exit (Dupre et al., 2006).

In addition to the more situational moderators discussed above, two individual differences have been found to amplify abusive supervision’s effects on deviance. Schaubhut et al. (2004) found that individuals with high self-esteem were more likely to engage in interpersonal and organizational deviance when faced with abusive supervisors, presumably because abusive supervision is more threatening to individuals who are used to maintaining a positive self-concept than for those who already possess low self-esteem. Similarly, Thau and Mitchell (2006) found that individuals possessing more of a dispositional need to maintain their self-worth (i.e., trait validation seeking) were more likely than those who did not possess this need to engage in organizational deviance in response to an abusive supervisor.

In an attempt to better understand the mechanisms underlying the abusive supervision – deviance relationship, Tepper et al. (2008) examined the potential

mediating role of affective commitment. These authors argued that affective commitment would mediate abusive supervision's effects on organizational deviance because abusive supervisors are unlikely to make subordinates feel as though they are valued members of the organization. As a result, these subordinates are unlikely to develop a sense of attachment to the organization and should be less hesitant to engage in organizational deviance. Consistent with this line of reasoning, results revealed that affective commitment mediated the effects of abusive supervision on organizational deviance, and that this effect was stronger when employees perceived their coworkers to be more approving of deviant behaviors and when coworkers themselves reported engaging in more deviant behaviors.

The most recently published study (Thau & Mitchell, 2010) involving the abusive supervision – deviance relationship offers a fresh explanation for the relationship among the two variables. The authors argued that self-regulation impairment might explain the relationship between abusive supervision and deviant behaviors, because the experience of abuse often results in victims spending substantial amounts of time attempting to comprehend and interpret the causes and consequences of their supervisors' behavior. This thought process can deplete subordinates' resources, resulting in lowered inhibitions and, thus, a proneness to counter-normative behavior such as deviance. To test whether self-regulation impairment or the more traditional self-gain perspective—which argues that subordinates retaliate because it balances the social exchange and might deter future harm—better explains the abusive supervision – deviance relationship, Thau and Mitchell (2010) used distributive justice as a moderator of the relationship between abusive supervision and various types of deviance (i.e.,

organizational deviance, supervisor-directed deviance, and antisocial behavior) among three samples. If distributive justice amplified the abusive supervision – deviance relationships, they reasoned, then results would support the self-regulation impairment perspective because distributive justice is inconsistent with abusive treatment and would require more resources for cognitive processing. Thus, subordinates would have few resources available for maintaining appropriate behavior. On the other hand, if distributive justice attenuated the relationships between abusive supervision and deviance, then it would seem that subordinates' interpreted distributive justice as a fair reward that compensated them for the costs of abuse. Across the three studies, results tended to be more supportive of the self-regulation impairment view, in that the effects of abusive supervision on subordinates' deviance were typically amplified when distributive justice was high. There also appeared to be a moderated mediation effect whereby distributive justice amplified the extent to which ego depletion and intrusive thoughts mediated the abusive supervision – deviance relationships.

**Subordinates' resistance behaviors.** Because there are often repercussions for engaging in counterproductive behavior regardless of who is targeted, subordinates may sometimes retaliate against abusive supervisors by engaging in behaviors that are less noticeably hostile. Such “resistance behaviors” are thought to offer a safer means through which subordinates can convey nonconformity (Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw, 2001). In investigating whether or not employees do, in fact, engage in such behaviors, Tepper et al., (2001) found that abusive supervision was positively related to subordinates' use of constructive resistance behaviors, such as requesting clarification on an assignment or negotiating a deadline, as well as to subordinates' use of more dysfunctional,

passive-aggressive resistance behaviors, such as acting like one did not hear or is too busy to complete a request. Additionally, Tepper et al. (2001) found that individuals who were less conscientious and less agreeable were more likely to respond to abusive supervision using these destructive resistance behaviors. Conversely, the positive relationship between abusive supervision and constructive resistance was stronger among subordinates who were more conscientious.

Bamberger and Bacharach (2006) found a similar moderating effect for the abusive supervision – problem drinking (i.e., alcoholic drinking) relationship. Specifically, they found abusive supervision to be less strongly associated with problem drinking for individuals who were both more agreeable and more conscientious. It is interesting to note that, although problem drinking is often portrayed as a dysfunctional response to stress, Bamberger and Bacharach (2006) found no evidence that somatic stress mediated the abusive supervision – problem drinking relationship. Thus, Bamberger and Bacharach (2006) concluded that problem drinking better represented a form of subordinates' resistance.

**Subordinates' citizenship behaviors.** Organizational citizenship behaviors include discretionary behaviors that are beneficial to the organization and that are not explicitly recognized by the formal reward system (Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983). Several studies have found abusive supervision to be negatively related to various forms of subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior (Aryee et al., 2007; Aryee et al., 2008; Burriss et al., 2008; Hmieleski & Ensley, 2007; Wayne et al., 2008; Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002). Moreover, consistent with findings identifying the mechanisms underlying many other abusive supervision – outcome relationships, organizational

justice has been shown to mediate this effect (Aryee et al., 2007; Zellars et al., 2002). Other mediators have also been identified, including subordinates' cynicism (Wayne et al., 2008), emotional exhaustion (Aryee et al., 2008), and psychological detachment (Burriss et al., 2008).

The abusive supervision – citizenship relationship is exacerbated when the organization's structure is organic rather than mechanistic (Aryee et al., 2008), presumably because organic organizations possess decentralized control and authority, reducing the power imbalances between supervisor and subordinate. This reduced power imbalance should, in turn, minimize the tendency for supervisors to become overbearing and, ultimately, abusive. Also amplifying the effects of abusive supervision on subordinates' citizenship behaviors, along with the extent to which organizational justice mediates the abusive supervision – citizenship behavior relationship, is the degree to which subordinates believe citizenship behavior is not within their set of formal job requirements (Zellars et al., 2002). As with resistance behaviors, withholding citizenship behavior is thought to be a safer method of retaliation than engaging in counterproductive behavior or decreasing task performance. Consequently, when subordinates believe citizenship behavior to be a job requirement, they are unlikely to purposely withhold it when mistreated.

In the only study that has examined the effects of abusive supervision at the team level, Hmieleski and Ensely (2007) found that environmental uncertainty attenuated abusive supervision's effects on subordinates' citizenship behavior. These authors argued that in uncertain or dynamic environments, abusive behaviors should be attributed to the stressful environmental conditions rather than to the disposition of the

leader. By alleviating supervisors from blame for abusive behavior, subordinates should perceive abuse as less unfair, and thus, should react less negatively. It should be noted that this finding is somewhat at odds with that of Thau et al. (2009), who argued and found support for the notion that the effects of abuse would be amplified in uncertain environments.

**Unit performance and subordinates' task performance.** Findings involving abusive supervision's effects on task and firm performance have been mixed. Two studies have focused on performance at the firm or team level. Whereas Detert et al. (2007) found abusive supervision to be unrelated to firm performance, Hmieleski and Ensley (2007) found abusive supervision to be negatively related to firm performance. As with citizenship behavior, environmental uncertainty attenuated this relationship.

In the only study to examine individual level task performance as a substantive variable, Harris et al. (2007) found abusive supervision to be negatively related to both supervisor ratings and formal appraisals of job performance among a sample of automotive workers. However, this effect existed only for individuals who derived a high degree of meaning from their work. Moreover, the moderating effect of the meaning also held for self-ratings of job performance, despite the absence of a main effect of abusive supervision. Based on the propositions of Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources theory, Harris et al. (2007) argued that abusive supervision could require subordinates—especially those who derive meaning from their work—to invest valuable time and effort into managing their relationships with supervisors. These relationship maintenance efforts can tax subordinates resources, leaving fewer available to contribute to adequate job performance. Harris et al. (2007) also offered a social

exchange based explanation, whereby employees decrease their performance in order to retaliate for abuse. In a final study, Hoobler and Brass (2006) found that abusive supervision was negatively related to subordinates' performance, though, in this study, performance was relegated to the status of control variable.

**Subordinates' self-concept.** A handful of studies have investigated abusive supervision's effects on subordinates' self-concepts. Specifically, Duffy et al. (2002) found that abusive supervision was negatively related to subordinates' self efficacy, and that supervisor support exacerbated this relationship. Additionally, Hobman et al. (2009) and Burton and Hoobler (2006) both found abusive supervision to be negatively related to subordinates' self-esteem, though Burton and Hoobler (2006) found this effect to be stronger for females. In interpreting this finding, these authors suggested that females' self-esteem is traditionally garnered more from the opinions of others and less from achievements, whereas the opposite is true for males. Vulnerability to others opinions, in turn, makes abusive supervision more detrimental for females' self-esteem than for males' self-esteem.

**Trust and justice.** Abusive supervision is negatively related to trust in one's supervisor (Duffy & Ferrier, 2003; Duffy et al., 2006) as well as to procedural (Tepper, 2000; Zellars et al., 2002), distributive (Tepper, 2000), and interactional justice (Aryee et al., 2007; Tepper, 2000). Typically, however, organizational justice has been conceptualized as a mediator in studies linking abusive supervision to other outcomes.

**Miscellaneous.** A small number of studies have examined outcomes that cannot be neatly classified into any of the previously mentioned categories. For example, Hoobler and Brass (2006) found that subordinates seemed to displace aggression

derived from their supervisors' abusive supervision by undermining family members. In another study, Tepper et al. (2007) examined the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' upward maintenance communication strategies. They found that individuals with abusive supervisors were more likely than their non-abused counterparts to use regulative maintenance strategies—consisting of behaviors such as stretching the truth to avoid problems and talking superficially—when communicating with supervisors, whereas the use of more direct communication strategies was not directly related to abusive supervision. Abusive supervision has also been positively associated with fear of future aggression from one's supervisor (Schat et al., 2006), irritation (Schat et al., 2006), cynicism (Wayne et al., 2008), and insomnia (through psychological distress; Rafferty et al., 2010), but has been found to be unassociated with positive affect (Yagil et al., 2011).

Two studies have portrayed abusive supervision as a moderator. In a longitudinal study, Tepper et al. (2004) found that abusive supervision moderated the effects of coworkers' citizenship behaviors on employees' job satisfaction and commitment seven months later, even after controlling for initial levels of commitment and job satisfaction. Specifically, when supervisors were abusive, coworkers' citizenship behaviors were negatively related to employee job satisfaction and were unrelated to commitment. When supervisors were not abusive, coworkers' citizenship behaviors were positively related to satisfaction and commitment. These authors reasoned that coworkers' citizenship behaviors were likely to be attributed to less altruistic motives when supervisors were abusive. Supporting this explanation, a follow up study showed that negative attributions for coworkers' citizenship behaviors mediated this interaction. In a

final longitudinal study, Breux et al. (2008) found that accountability predicted subordinates' unfavorable psychological outcomes, including job tension, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction only when supervisors were abusive.

**Evaluative summary of consequences.** After reviewing the literature examining the consequences of abusive supervision, it is clear that abusive supervision covaries with a myriad of undesirable states and situations. It is also clear that a number of factors moderate these relationships—for some individuals, the effects of abusive supervision seem less detrimental than for others. Notwithstanding these findings, a number of areas deserve further investigation.

Three such areas that might be well-served by future research are non-work, group, and supervisor outcomes of abusive supervision. Less than a handful of studies have examined abusive supervision's effects on group level outcomes and subordinates' non-work lives. Moreover, no studies have examined how abusive supervision affects supervisors who behave abusively. This seems like an interesting area of investigation. Given the negative effects of abusive supervision on subordinates, it would seem that supervisors would derive little instrumental benefit from acting abusively. Even if abusive supervision can, in some instances, increase subordinates' job performance and, therefore, presumably supervisors' performance, it seems probable that other negative consequences, including subordinates' increased counterproductive behavior and stress, would counteract any positive effects. In this way, perhaps supervisors' reasons for acting abusively are misguided.

I now turn to discussing limitations of the existing literature that are not specific to the consequences of abusive supervision, but are better discussed as limitations of the abusive supervision literature in its entirety.

### **Limitations of the Existing Literature**

Collectively, this review of the existing literature highlights several theoretical and empirical gaps in the examination of abusive supervision. Most importantly, models of abusive supervision have overwhelmingly conceptualized abusive supervision as an *antecedent* to detrimental consequences. Such models are overly simplistic not only because they do not consider antecedents to abusive supervision, but also because they do not portray abusive supervision as part of a dynamic pattern of social interaction between supervisor and subordinate. In doing so, these models fail to consider how subordinates' actions and reactions to abuse contribute to or detract from initial and continued mistreatment. This problem becomes even more evident once one considers that, when viewed from a victim precipitation perspective, many of the proposed consequences of abusive supervision become probable antecedents. For example, whereas Aquino and Bommer (2003) cogently argue that the social attractiveness afforded to individuals who engage in citizenship behavior makes them unlikely to be targeted for mistreatment, Zellars et al. (2002) provide an equally convincing argument as to why subordinates withhold citizenship behavior as a means of retaliating for abuse. Using similar arguments, other variables, including counterproductive behavior, can also easily be envisaged as both antecedents to and consequences of abusive supervision. Thus, reciprocal relationships seem likely. That nearly all research involving abusive supervision to date has either been cross-sectional or has not controlled for alleged outcomes when longitudinally testing abusive supervision –

outcome relationships, however, makes it impossible to assess whether most variables studied in relation to abusive supervision are truly antecedents, truly consequences, or both.

Second, we have a limited understanding of the mechanisms through which abusive supervision might impact subordinates. Studies examining mediators of the effects of abusive supervision have primarily focused on organizational justice. And, although a handful of studies have examined other mechanisms, these efforts can hardly be described as voluminous. Noticeably absent from the abusive supervision literature, for example, is research examining the potential mediating role of subordinates' emotions. This omission is quite surprising when one considers the evidence implicating emotions as fundamental determinants of human behavior, and therefore, most likely of reactions to abusive supervision.

A final limitation involves the role of individual differences. Although a plethora of moderators have been linked to abusive supervision, in only a few instances have these involved subordinates' personality traits. Evidence of the amplifying effects of self-concept-related variables (i.e., self-esteem, validation seeking) on the abusive supervision – counterproductive behavior relationship as well as the buffering effects of conscientiousness and agreeableness on the abusive supervision – resistance relationship, however, offers preliminary support for the notion that individuals who possess different personalities can react differently to abuse. If certain individuals do indeed consistently react more dysfunctionally to abuse, it seems likely that these reactions can elicit further abuse, which in turn can elicit further dysfunctional reactions, and so on. Thus in addition to acting in ways that might elicit initial mistreatment as the

victim precipitation model suggests, individuals' responses to mistreatment might also result in a self-reinforcing pattern of mistreatment, whereby a vicious circle of counterproductive supervisor and subordinate interactions emerges.

### CHAPTER 3 THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

In light of the numerous gaps in the abusive supervision literature, this dissertation intends to make several contributions to abusive supervision theory and research. In order to address the first limitation, I extend research on abusive supervision by longitudinally examining reciprocal relationships between abusive supervision and three types of subordinate behavior: supervisor-directed deviance, supervisor-directed avoidance, and supervisor-directed citizenship behavior. I examine reciprocal relationships based on the concept of reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1978, 1983), which suggests that “people are both producers and products of social systems” (Bandura, 1997, p. 6). More specifically, I use the concept of reciprocal determinism as an overarching framework to integrate arguments supporting the notion that subordinates’ behavior can both cause and be caused by abusive supervision.

Concerning the second limitation, I examine three emotion-based mediators of abusive supervision’s influence on subordinates’ behaviors—anger, fear, and compassion. In doing so, I illuminate how emotional appraisals of abusive behavior influence subordinates’ reactions to mistreatment. Portraying emotions as mediators of the abusive supervision – subordinate behavior relationship is also consistent with the propositions of Lazarus’s (1991a, 1991b) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion. According to this process-based theory, emotional reactions to an event or stressor depend on whether the event is appraised as being personally relevant to an individual’s goals and well-being (primary appraisal), and whether or not an individual believes he or she can change the conditions responsible for the event (secondary

appraisal). These emotional reactions, in turn, lead to associated coping efforts and behavioral responses.

Lazarus (1991a, 1991b) further suggested that dispositions could influence reactions to stimuli, in part, through their influence on appraisals. Thus, in order to address the final limitation referenced in the literature review, I examine whether personality influences subordinates' emotional and behavioral reactions to abuse. Personality's influence is particularly important to understand; if certain individuals are more likely than others to consistently respond to abuse in a manner that further provokes it, then these individuals are at greater risk for potentially setting in motion a vicious cycle of mistreatment, whereby their own reactions to abuse continually reinforce its occurrence. This proposition is also consistent with the central tenet of victim precipitation theory—that individuals can knowingly or unknowingly contribute to their own mistreatment (Elias, 1986).

The conceptual model guiding this research and integrating the three aforementioned contributions is depicted in Figure 3-1. The remainder of this chapter focuses on establishing theoretical support for each of the model's linkages. More specifically, I begin by discussing the emotional pathways via which abusive supervision can influence subordinates' behaviors. I then discuss how subordinates' behaviors can influence abusive supervision. Finally, I discuss the extent to which personality influences these processes.

### **Emotion-Mediated Pathways**

In this section, I argue that abusive supervision influences subordinates' emotions and that subordinates' emotions, in turn, influence their behaviors. I ground my hypotheses primarily in Lazarus's (1991a, 1991b) cognitive-motivational-relational

theory of emotions. This theory is useful because it not only provides general predictions about the emotion process by listing key variables and the manners in which they interrelate, but also because it offers specific propositions for each discrete emotion. In light of this organizational scheme, I will begin my discussion by first describing the general emotion process. I will then draw from Lazarus's (1991a, 1991b) work on more discrete emotions, along with other relevant literature, to garner support for hypotheses involving specific emotions.

### **The Emotion Process**

Lazarus argued that individuals' emotional reactions to an encounter in the environment depend on their cognitive appraisals—or their evaluations of the personal significance of what is happening in the encounter. There are two parts to this appraisal process. During primary appraisal, individuals determine whether or not they have a stake in an encounter. That is, they determine whether or not an encounter is relevant to their goals. In the context of Lazarus's model, goals are broadly defined and can refer to, among other things, achieving career related success, or maintaining social relationships or self-esteem. If no personal goal is at stake, emotion will not be generated. If, however, a personal goal is at stake, individuals further evaluate whether or not the environmental encounter is harmful or beneficial to their goals. Encounters harmful to one's goals generate negative emotions, whereas encounters beneficial to one's goals generate positive emotions. The specific emotion experienced depends on the content of the goal that is at stake, and also, on the secondary appraisal process. Secondary appraisal mainly involves individuals' options and prospects for coping. More specifically, during secondary appraisal, individuals determine whether to blame or credit themselves or another, whether anything can be done to alter the situation (if

negative) for the better, and, if so, what, and whether the situation can worsen or improve over time.

Each subjective emotional state corresponds to a certain action tendency or state of action readiness that drives a person to behave in a certain way. These behaviors are thought to be biologically driven and relatively automatic and rigid, but can, in some instances be suppressed or transformed. Coping—what Lazarus (1991a) deemed the “psychological analogue” (p. 830) of action tendencies—can also follow subjective emotional states, and is more complex, deliberate, and planful than are action tendencies. Coping can also shape subsequent emotions.

In applying this framework to abusive supervision, I argue that abusive supervision can obstruct subordinates’ goals and, therefore, elicit emotional reactions, including anger, fear, and lack of compassion. The subjective experience of these emotions, in turn, generates certain action tendencies and coping responses. I now turn to discussing these relationships in detail.

## **Anger**

One likely emotional response to abusive supervision is subordinates’ anger. According to Lazarus (1991a, 1991b), anger is a consequence of blaming another for a demeaning offense that is appraised as threatening to one’s ego identity, or self-esteem. Other researchers have conceptualized anger in a similar manner (Allred, 1999; Averill, 1983; Gibson & Callister, 2010; Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), and empirical research corroborates anger as resulting from an individual blaming another for an unjustified offense (Averill, 1983).

Abusive supervision can be inferred to meet the criteria for eliciting anger-inducing appraisals because it has been shown to reduce self-esteem, and thus, to be ego-

threatening (Burton & Hoobler, 2006), and because it is often perceived as unjustified (e.g., Aryee et al., 2007), thereby implying that subordinates blame supervisors for abusive behavior. Additionally, because abusive supervision can be viewed as an abuse of power in that it violates norms of respect in the workplace, abused subordinates are also likely to feel moral outrage—or what Folger and Skarlicki (2005) term deontic anger. Thus,

**Hypothesis 1:** Abusive supervision positively predicts subordinates' anger.

Lazarus (1991a, 1991b) argued that each emotion possesses its own innate action tendency. For anger, this action tendency consists of ameliorating the effects of a demeaning offense by attacking the perpetrator (Lazarus, 1991a, 1991b). Consistent with this view, Roseman et al. (1994), found that college students who experienced anger reported feeling like yelling, hitting, saying something nasty, and wanting to hurt or “get back at” a perpetrator. Lazarus (1991a, 1991b) also argued that individuals' appraisals regarding coping with anger, like the action tendency, typically suggest attack. However, because instantly and overtly attacking a perpetrator is unlikely to be successful if it invites further retaliation or social disapproval, individuals often attempt to cope with anger by enacting revenge in a more planful manner. Recognizing this, scholars have acknowledged that, although reactions to anger share a common motivational goal—to retaliate for another's perceived wrongdoing—behavioral manifestations of this goal can be exceedingly diverse. In the words of Roseman et al. (1994), “a punch in the nose, praise that is too faint, the silent treatment, and air let out of automobile tires may have no physical properties in common, but they can all be recognized as actions with the common goal of getting back at someone toward whom

one is angry,” (p. 218). Thus, rather than arguing that anger directed at one’s supervisor predicts more extreme behaviors like physical violence, I argue that anger is more likely to predict less intense behaviors, such as gossiping about or making fun of one’s supervisor.

It is worth noting that, although subordinates can displace their aggression by lashing out at nonsupervisory targets, reciprocity norms typically imply that, when possible, individuals seek revenge against the source of their anger. This is done, in part, to punish and deter offenders from future abuse. In this way, revenge can be viewed as a rational and legitimate response enacted to restore justice and to defend oneself from future mistreatment (Bies & Tripp, 2005). Therefore, in this study, I limit my focus to subordinates’ behavioral reactions toward supervisors, rather than toward coworkers or to the organization in general.

**Hypothesis 2:** Subordinates’ anger positively predicts subordinates’ supervisor-directed deviance.

The abovementioned arguments positively link abusive supervision to anger and anger to increased supervisor-directed deviance. Abusive supervision has also been empirically linked to increased supervisor-directed deviance (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Thau et al., 2009). Together, this theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that one reason subordinates’ respond to abusive supervision with increased supervisor-directed deviance is because abuse angers subordinates and drives them to seek revenge. Thus, I hypothesize that anger partially mediates the relationships between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed deviance. Partial rather than full mediation is

expected because other potential mediators of this relationship exist, including ego depletion and intrusive thoughts (Thau & Mitchell, 2010).

**Hypothesis 3:** Subordinates' anger partially mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed deviance.

## **Fear**

Another emotion likely to arise in response to abusive supervision is fear. Lazarus (1991b) defined fear as a response to a concrete, sudden, and overwhelming physical danger. Although Lazarus (1991b) emphasizes fear as a response to sudden, physical danger, other researchers, including myself, take a more liberal approach and assume that fear can arise from less sudden, nonphysical danger (e.g., Kish-Gephart, Detert, Trevino, & Edmonson, 2009; Smith, & Ellsworth, 1985). In any case, as a reaction to threat, fear induces a captivating sense of uncertainty regarding when danger will occur and whether or not it can be avoided.

Very little research has been conducted on fear in organizations (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009). However, logic suggests that abusive supervision can spark both the threat and uncertainty appraisals necessary to induce fear. More specifically, subordinates can come to view abusive supervision as threatening to their livelihoods if it causes them to believe they are devalued and thus unlikely to fair well during performance evaluation processes that dictate raises, promotions, and employment. Moreover, because abusive behaviors are not always directly contingent on factors within subordinates' control (e.g., blame for something one did not do), subordinates may feel uncertain as to whether future incidences of abuse can be avoided. Taken together, the abovementioned arguments suggest that abusive supervision can invoke appraisals involving both threat and uncertainty, and therefore, has the potential to induce fear.

**Hypothesis 4:** Abusive supervision positively predicts subordinates' fear.

When experiencing fear, individuals possess an innate action tendency to escape or avoid its source (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991b; Roseman et al., 1994)—to move oneself out of harm's way. As with anger, however, individuals can cope with fear using more planful strategies. For example, when the supervisor is the source of one's fear, rather than actually physically running away from him or her, it seems likely that one will instead seek to minimize contact, reserving communication for times only when it is absolutely necessary; I refer to this response as supervisor-directed avoidance.

**Hypothesis 5:** Subordinates' fear positively predicts subordinates' supervisor-directed avoidance.

Abusive supervision has been positively linked to both avoidant coping strategies (Yagil et al., 2011) and the use of regulative maintenance strategies (Tepper et al., 2007)—attempts to maintain the supervisor-subordinate relationship by distorting messages (e.g., avoiding asking for direction and stretching the truth to avoid problems) and avoiding contact (Lee, 1998). Moreover, in a review of the incivility literature, Porath and Pearson (2010) found that 63% of individuals surveyed lost time avoiding a perpetrator. These findings suggest a positive relationship between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed avoidance.

If, as I have argued, abusive supervision also induces fear, and, if fear results in supervisor-directed avoidance, then it seems logical to assume that fear is one mechanism through which abusive supervision results in supervisor-directed avoidance. Therefore, I hypothesize that fear partially mediates the abusive supervision –

supervisor-directed avoidance relationship. As with anger, partial mediation is expected because factors other than fear, such as disliking one's supervisor, are likely mediators.

**Hypothesis 6:** Subordinates' fear partially mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed avoidance.

### **Compassion**

Lazarus (1991b) argued that compassion arises from being moved by another's suffering and, subsequently, wanting to help. Typically, for compassion to arise, neither the person who is suffering nor the observer can be appraised to be at fault for the distressing circumstance. If the suffering individual is to blame, the observer is less likely to feel compassion and more likely to feel anger; if the observer is to blame, he or she is likely to feel guilty for causing distress (Lazarus, 1991b). Additionally, feelings of compassion are usually reserved for individuals who are important to one's well-being (e.g., one's supervisor), who are generally of good character, and who are good candidates for subsequent cooperation and reciprocated altruism (Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010).

As with fear, very little is known about the causes and consequences of compassion in the workplace. There is, however, reason to believe that abusive supervision negatively predicts compassion. A long history of research shows that, when making attributions for the behavior of others, individuals have a tendency to over-value dispositional explanations and under-value situational explanations for observed behaviors (Ross, 1977). This implies that, rather than viewing supervisors as blameless victims of unprovoked suffering, subordinates are prone to holding supervisors responsible for engaging in abusive behavior. As a result, subordinates' compassion for their supervisor is likely to be replaced with more hostile emotions such as anger

(Lazarus, 1991b). Of course, if abusive supervision is appraised to be a manifestation of suffering, it is certainly possible for subordinates to feel compassion for abusive supervisors. Nonetheless, attribution research suggests that the typical response is far less altruistic, especially when negative events are involved (Malle, 2006).

**Hypothesis 7:** Abusive supervision negatively predicts subordinates' compassion.

Lazarus (1991b) and others (e.g., Goetz et al., 2010) have argued that compassion drives individuals to express sympathy and to help those who are suffering (Goetz et al., 2010;). Consistent with this perspective, meta-analyses have shown sympathy to be linked to increased helping behavior (Rudolph, Roesch, Greitemeyer, & Weiner, 2004). Thus,

**Hypothesis 8:** Subordinates' compassion positively predicts subordinates' supervisor-directed citizenship behavior.

I have already provided arguments for why abusive supervision might be negatively related to compassion and for why compassion should positively predict supervisor-directed citizenship behavior. Prior research has also found abusive supervision to result in subordinates' withholding citizenship behavior (Wayne et al., 2008). Cumulatively, these theoretical and empirical arguments suggest that one reason subordinates withhold citizenship behavior from abusive supervisors is because they lack compassion for these individuals, and, therefore, the desire to offer help. Thus, I hypothesize that compassion partially mediates the effects of abusive supervision on subordinates' supervisor-directed citizenship behavior. Partial, rather than full mediation is hypothesized because other mediators of the abusive supervision – citizenship

behavior relationship, such as organizational justice have been identified (Aryee et al., 2007; Zellars et al., 2002)

**Hypothesis 9:** Subordinates' compassion partially mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed citizenship behavior.

### **Effects of Subordinates' Behavior on Abusive Supervision**

Most research involving leader behavior, including abusive supervision, investigates its influence on subordinates (Sims & Manz, 1984). Consistent with this research stream, in the previous section, I argued that abusive supervision influences subordinates' behavior. This view, however, largely ignores the perspective of victim precipitation theorists—that subordinates may play a role in knowingly or unknowingly contributing to their own mistreatment (Elias, 1986). Thus, in this section, I formulate arguments to suggest that subordinates' behavior can also influence supervisors. As noted previously, the idea that supervisor and subordinate behaviors can mutually influence one another is consistent with the concept of reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1978, 1983), or the idea that person and environment determine one another.

### **Subordinates' Supervisor-Directed Deviance and Abusive Supervision**

For many of the same reasons that abusive supervision elicits supervisor-directed deviance, supervisor-directed deviance should also incite abusive supervision. Namely, subordinates' deviance can be viewed as unjustified and ego threatening, and, therefore, can induce both anger and a subsequent desire to retaliate in supervisors.

Supervisors can perceive subordinates' deviance as unfair for a number of reasons. First, organizational norms generally dictate that subordinates treat supervisors with courtesy and respect. Because engaging in supervisor-directed

deviance is in strict violation of these norms, and because norm violations can be seen as unfair (Güroğlu, van den Bos, Rombouts, & Crone, 2010) such behaviors are likely to be perceived as injustices. Second, and related, supervisor-directed deviance may be viewed as insubordination. Given that organizational policies typically require subordinates to submit to authority, supervisor-directed deviance can be perceived as unfair rule violation, deserving of punishment. Third, evidence suggests that supervisors are often unaware of the extent to which their behavior affects subordinates (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009). This lack of awareness implies that even when supervisor-directed deviance is enacted by subordinates for retaliatory reasons, supervisors are unlikely to recognize their role in provoking subordinates' aggression. In this way, supervisors are prone to view subordinates' behaviors as groundless attacks that warrant retaliation or punishment. Though some supervisors surely punish subordinates through the use of formal organizational procedures, others may resort to the more informal behaviors characteristic of abusive supervision (e.g., yelling).

In addition to being appraised as unfair, supervisor-directed deviance might also be perceived as ego-threatening. More specifically, subordinates' supervisor-directed deviance can be viewed as a status challenge (Porath et al., 2008), and can signal to supervisors that they lack adequate control over subordinates. Because possessing a certain level of order and control in the workplace is typically an important job requirement for individuals occupying supervisory roles, such status challenges can imply that a supervisor is performing his or her job poorly and thus, can threaten his or her self-esteem (Gardner, Van Dyne, & Pierce, 2004). In order to reestablish a sense control and preserve their self-esteem, supervisors may engage in abusive behavior to

assert their power and also to deter others from acting defiantly (Bushman, Baumeister, Thomaes, Ryu, Begeer, & West, 2009).

**Hypothesis 10:** Subordinates' supervisor-directed deviance positively predicts abusive supervision.

### **Subordinates' Supervisor-Directed Citizenship Behavior and Abusive Supervision**

Researchers have argued that interpersonally directed organizational citizenship behavior can prevent mistreatment by others because it increases social attractiveness and forms bonds of mutual obligation and reciprocity (Aquino & Bommer, 2003). These same explanations are likely to apply when discussing the relationship between supervisor-directed citizenship behavior and abusive supervision. More specifically, because poor citizens tend to be less cooperative and often fail to exhibit appropriate levels of social sensitivity, they are viewed as less socially attractive than good citizens (Bolino, 1999). These findings, coupled with findings that negatively link social attractiveness to mistreatment (Furr & Funder, 1999; Parker & Asher, 1987) imply that supervisor-directed citizenship behavior predicts abusive supervision.

Another explanation for the citizenship behavior – mistreatment relationship proposes that, by engaging in supervisor-directed citizenship behavior, subordinates can help establish a history of positive social interaction (Aquino & Bommer, 2003). This history cultivates a norm of positive reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) whereby supervisors feel obligated to return subordinates' goodwill with favorable treatment. Because directing abusive supervision toward good citizens would violate this norm, supervisors should feel compelled to restrain from mistreating those who treat them benevolently (Cialdini, 2001). Conversely, subordinates who abstain from engaging in supervisor-directed citizenship are unlikely to found relationships with their supervisors that

possess positive reciprocity norms. In the absence of such norms, supervisors are less obligated to refrain from mistreating subordinates who may otherwise be viewed as vulnerable or deserving of abuse (Aquino & Bommer, 2003). Thus, subordinates' supervisor-directed citizenship behavior should be negatively related to abusive supervision.

**Hypothesis 11:** Subordinates' supervisor-directed citizenship negatively predicts abusive supervision.

### **Subordinates' Supervisor-Directed Avoidance and Abusive Supervision**

Though one may well argue that avoiding one's supervisor prevents mistreatment simply because the subordinate is less available to abuse, Tepper et al. (2007) proposed three convincing reasons as to why this effect is likely to be short-lived. First, avoiding one's supervisor can induce role ambiguity, because it can cause one to lose access to information and resources necessary for adequate job performance. Second, and related, to the extent one invests effort in avoidance rather than in performing his or her work, avoidant behavior is prone to interfere with job productivity. Decreased job performance, in turn, may signal to supervisors that the subordinate is an unmotivated employee further deserving of abuse. Finally, by showing that one is affected by abuse in such a way that he or she is unlikely to retaliate, he or she reinforces an image of vulnerability that can breed further victimization. Together, these reasons provide sound logic for why supervisor-directed avoidance can, rather than prevent abuse, result in increased mistreatment.

**Hypothesis 12:** Subordinates' supervisor-directed avoidance positively predicts abusive supervision.

## **Main and Moderating Effects of Personality**

In the previous sections, I have provided arguments not only for why abusive supervision influences subordinates' behaviors, but also for why subordinates' behaviors influence supervisors' behaviors. These mutually reinforcing behaviors suggest multiple pathways through which vicious cycles of dysfunctional behavior can emerge, resulting in sustained patterns of subordinates' abuse. However, these arguments do not consider individual differences in supervisors' and subordinates' reactions to one another's behaviors, and how these reactions can continue to perpetuate or put an end to such patterns.

Thus, in an effort to partially address this gap, in the sections to follow, I draw from both cognitive-motivational-relational (Lazarus, 1991a, 1991b) and victim precipitation theories (Elias, 1986) to propose that subordinates' personalities influence their emotional and behavioral reactions to abusive supervision. More specifically, in line with the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotions (Lazarus, 1991a, 1991b), I argue that individuals with different personality traits can appraise abusive behaviors differently. These different appraisals should result in distinct emotional and subsequent behavioral reactions. Furthermore, consistent with the victim precipitation perspective (Elias, 1986), to the extent that these reactions result in increased supervisor-directed deviance, supervisor-directed citizenship behavior, supervisor-directed avoidance, and/or other potentially maladaptive behaviors, they may bring about further abuse. This implies that, over time, individuals with certain personality traits can experience more overall mistreatment, in part, because of their reactions to previous incidences of it. Accordingly, I also hypothesize that subordinates' emotions and supervisor-directed

deviance, supervisor-directed citizenship behavior, and supervisor-directed avoidance partially mediate the effects of subordinates' personality traits on abusive supervision.

As shown in Figure 3-1, I focus on three personality traits: volatility, withdrawal, and compassion. These traits are narrow facets of the Big Five personality taxonomy (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Digman, 1990) derived by DeYoung, Quilty, and Peterson (2007). Based on work in the behavioral genetics field (Jang, Livesly, Angleitner, Riemann, & Verbon, 2002), DeYoung et al. (2007) proposed and found evidence to suggest that each of the Big Five traits could be further subdivided into two lower-order factors with distinct biological substrates. I focus on these traits rather than the broader Big Five dimensions because they allow for more specific theorizing regarding the influence of subordinates' personality traits on emotions and behaviors. I now turn to describing these relationships in detail.

### **Trait Volatility**

In his work on schoolyard bullying, Olweus (1978) identified two types of victims, submissive victims and provocative victims. Submissive victims tend to be anxious, insecure, cautious, sensitive, quiet, and low in self-esteem, and thus appear vulnerable to abuse, whereas provocative victims tend to engage in behaviors that elicit retaliatory responses from others. Aquino and Byron (2002) and others (e.g., Tepper et al., 2006) have argued that submissive and provocative victims are also likely to exist in the workplace, and thus, have sought to recognize factors that could identify such victims. As a result of these efforts, Tepper et al. (2006) found that subordinates' negative affectivity predicted the extent to which they experienced abusive supervision. However, Tepper et al. (2006) offered both submissive and provocative victim explanations for their results. This dual explanation implies that using broad personality traits like

negative affectivity does not enable one to distinguish between provocative and submissive victims.

One possible solution to this problem may be to examine more narrow personality traits as predictors of abuse and of the mediating mechanisms that lead to it. Here, the facets of neuroticism proposed by DeYoung et al. (2007)—volatility and withdrawal—are likely to be especially useful. On the one hand, volatility describes individuals who possess problems of disinhibition, leading to the outward expression of negative affect. Volatile individuals are prone to “emotional lability, irritability or anger, and difficulty controlling emotional impulses” (De Young et al., 2007, p. 885). Withdrawal, on the other hand, describes individuals who possess problems of inhibition, causing negative affect to be directed inward. Such individuals are prone to feeling vulnerable, afraid, worried, and self-conscious.

At first glance, it appears that trait volatility may characterize more provocative victims, whereas trait withdrawal may typify more submissive victims. Thus, I test whether volatility can be used to identify more provocative victims by examining whether it amplifies subordinates’ anger and deviant reactions to abusive supervision—responses theoretically characteristic of provocative victims. Likewise, I examine whether withdrawal can be used to identify more submissive victims by examining whether it amplifies subordinates’ fear and avoidance reactions to abusive supervision—responses theoretically characteristic of submissive victims. I also examine whether volatility predicts abusive supervision through its effects on subordinates’ anger and supervisor-directed deviance and whether withdrawal predicts abusive supervision through its effects on subordinates’ fear and avoidance.

In discussing these relationships, I first focus on describing how trait volatility can amplify subordinates' anger reactions to abusive supervision. One reason that volatile individuals may be prone to anger is that they tend to appraise events in such a way that elicits it. This notion is consistent with Lazarus' (1991) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion, which suggests that individuals' dispositions' can influence their cognitive appraisals and, thus, their emotional reactions. In support of this general proposition, several studies have linked personality traits to individuals' cognitive appraisal styles (c.f., Gardner, Rozell, & Walumbwa, 2004), and cognitive appraisal styles have been linked to individuals' emotional reactions (c.f., Aquino, Douglas, & Martinko, 2004). Though I am aware of no studies that have linked trait volatility to individuals' cognitive appraisal styles, some research has examined how trait anger influences cognitive appraisals (c.f., Tafrate, Kassinove, & Dundin, 2002).

In one study, Hazebroek, Howells, and Day (2001) asked a group of university students to rate two social interaction scenarios, both of which had negative consequences. The researchers also varied the intentions of the antagonists and the cognitive load of participants. They found that high trait anger individuals tended to assign more blame to antagonists, to evaluate the identified situations as being personally relevant, and to respond more angrily to the situations than low trait anger individuals. Moreover, these appraisal biases were exacerbated for high trait anger individuals when there was some ambiguity as to the whether or not the provoking event was deliberate. Because trait anger reflects a narrower component of trait volatility, it seems likely that volatile individuals will exhibit similar appraisal patterns, and thus, increased state anger reactions to events. In further extending this logic to the

abusive supervision – anger relationship, it follows that volatility will amplify the effects of abusive supervision on subordinates' anger because highly volatile individuals will be more likely than less volatile individuals to appraise supervisors' mistreatment in an anger eliciting manner.

**Hypothesis 13:** Trait volatility moderates the effect of abusive supervision on subordinates' anger, such that the positive relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' anger is amplified for subordinates who possess high levels of trait volatility.

If volatile individuals are more likely to react angrily to mistreatment, and if, as I have previously argued, anger is positively related to supervisor-directed deviance, then, it follows that volatility should also amplify the effects of abusive supervision on supervisor-directed deviance, in part, through its effects on subordinates' anger.

**Hypothesis 14:** Trait volatility moderates the effect of abusive supervision on subordinates' supervisor-directed deviance, such that the positive relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed deviance is amplified for subordinates who possess high levels of trait volatility.

Continuing with this line of thought, if trait volatility amplifies abusive supervisions' effects on supervisor-directed deviance, and if these behaviors, in turn, predict further abusive supervision, then volatility should also positively predict abusive supervision. More specifically, to the extent that volatile subordinates' hostile reactions to discrete incidences of abuse invite retaliation in the form of further mistreatment, a negative reciprocity norm can be established. The generation of this norm can facilitate an escalating pattern of mistreatment between supervisor and subordinate (Andersson &

Pearson, 1999), and therefore, increase overall levels of abusive supervision. This line of reasoning suggests that subordinates' anger and supervisor-directed deviance partially mediate the effects of trait volatility on abusive supervision.

Partial mediation is hypothesized because other factors are likely to influence the extent to which volatile subordinates perceive abusive supervision. For example, volatile individuals may provoke conflicts with coworkers if they attribute harmful motives to accidental behaviors. Increased conflict, in turn, may decrease productivity in the workgroup, resulting in frustrated supervisors who are prone to lashing out at subordinates. Similarly, volatile subordinates may be more likely to perceive supervisors' ambiguous behaviors as hostile (Martinko et al., 2009), and thus, to report abusive supervision even when it does not objectively exist.

**Hypothesis 15a:** Trait volatility is positively related to abusive supervision.

**Hypothesis 15b:** Anger and supervisor-directed deviance partially mediate the effects of subordinates' trait volatility on abusive supervision.

### **Trait Withdrawal**

Like trait volatility, trait withdrawal should also influence subordinates' cognitive appraisals of abuse, and, therefore, their emotional reactions. Because no studies have linked trait withdrawal to cognitive appraisals, however, it is useful to draw from the literature involving similar narrow traits. One such trait is trait anxiety. In a review of the literature involving personality traits and cognitive appraisals, Winter and Kuiper (1997) concluded that trait anxiety was positively related to the tendency to appraise environments as stressful and threatening. Additionally, in a later study, Roesch and Rowley (2005) found trait anxiety to be negatively related to challenge appraisals (i.e., believing that one can positively attack stress) and positively related to threat

appraisals, appraisals that one lacks resources necessary to cope with stress, and appraisals that stress is central to one's life and will negatively impact it. Extending these findings to trait withdrawal implies that individuals possessing high levels of withdrawal will appraise abusive supervision as more threatening and as less manageable, and, thus, as something to be feared.

**Hypothesis 16:** Trait withdrawal moderates the effect of abusive supervision on subordinates' fear, such that the positive relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' fear is amplified for subordinates who possess high levels of trait withdrawal.

I have previously argued that fear is positively related to supervisor-directed avoidance. Therefore, if high trait withdrawal amplifies the abusive supervision – fear relationship, then, it seems logical to assume that trait withdrawal also amplifies the effects of abusive supervision on supervisor-directed avoidance. Thus,

**Hypothesis 17:** Trait withdrawal moderates the effect of abusive supervision on subordinates' supervisor-directed avoidance, such that the positive relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed avoidance is amplified for subordinates who possess high levels of trait withdrawal.

Withdrawal should be linked to increased levels of abusive supervision for several reasons. One such reason is that the tendency for individuals who possess high levels of trait withdrawal to appraise situations as more stressful might cause them to seek unusually high levels of social support from others. By reaching out to others for help in coping with seemingly trivial stressors, high withdrawal individuals can come across as “complainers” or “whiners,” and, thus, as vulnerable, annoying, and perhaps, to some

degree, as deserving of abuse. Additionally, avoiding potentially challenging work assignments because they are appraised as threatening or difficult and dedicating substantial resources to avoiding one's supervisor can, as previously argued, decrease job performance. Poor performance, in turn, is likely to reinforce the notion that the subordinate is deserving of abuse.

A final explanation for the trait withdrawal – abusive supervision relationship involves partial mediation through supervisor-directed fear and avoidance. More specifically, if individuals who possess high levels of trait withdrawal tend to be more fearful and avoidant in response to mistreatment, they are also prone to come across as “easy targets” for abuse because they are unlikely to retaliate. The abovementioned interaction patterns suggest that high trait withdrawal individuals can find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle of dysfunctional behavior, whereby their own behavior results in initial victimization and reinforces its use.

**Hypothesis 18a:** Trait withdrawal is positively related to abusive supervision.

**Hypothesis 18b:** Fear and supervisor-directed avoidance partially mediate the effects of trait withdrawal on abusive supervision.

### **Trait Compassion**

DeYoung et al. (2007) defined trait compassion—a facet of agreeableness—as a compassionate emotional affiliation with others. Individuals possessing high levels of trait compassion tend to exhibit warmth, sympathy, and tenderness, and to affiliate with others emotionally. Rather than helping to distinguish between provocative and submissive victims, I argue that trait compassion can instead protect individuals from abusive supervision. This shielding effect likely occurs because trait compassion can

cause individuals to appraise or reappraise abusive supervision in such a way that it is responded to with state compassion.

Unfortunately, virtually no studies have examined the appraisal styles of individuals possessing trait compassion, trait sympathy, or other related narrow facets of agreeableness. However, research has linked agreeableness to positive reappraisal (Vickers, Kolar, & Hervig, 1989; Watson & Hubbard, 1996) and to forgiveness (McCullough, 2001)—an active coping mechanism designed to change a victim's behavior toward and thoughts and feelings about an offender (Aquino, Grover, Goldman, & Folger, 2003). Additionally, given that, by definition, compassionate individuals tend to have warm feelings toward others, it follows that compassionate subordinates are also prone to liking others. Liking, in turn, has been associated with a tendency to both forgive and avoid blaming transgressors (Bradfield & Aquino, 1999). Together, these findings suggest that subordinates who possess high levels of trait compassion make more benevolent attributions for supervisors' transgressions and/or are more forgiving of transgressors. As a result, subordinates possessing high levels of trait compassion are more likely to feel state compassion in response to mistreatment compared to their less compassionate counterparts.

**Hypothesis 19:** Trait compassion moderates the effect of abusive supervision on subordinates' state compassion, such that the negative relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' state compassion becomes positive for subordinates who possess high levels of trait compassion.

Provided trait compassion moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and state compassion, it should also moderate the relationships between

abusive supervision and supervisor-directed citizenship behavior. More specifically, if, as previously argued, state compassion is positively related to supervisor directed citizenship behavior, and if trait compassion reverses the negative abusive supervision – state compassion relationship, then, logically, abusive supervision should also reverse the abusive supervision – supervisor-directed citizenship behavior relationship so that it becomes positive.

**Hypothesis 20:** Trait compassion moderates the effect of abusive supervision on subordinates' supervisor-directed citizenship behavior, such that the negative relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed citizenship behavior becomes positive for subordinates who possess high levels of trait compassion.

As with trait volatility and trait withdrawal, the effects of trait compassion should be partially mediated by subordinates' emotions and behavior. In particular, if individuals possessing high levels of trait compassion appraise abuse in such a way that they can explain away mistreatment by attributing it to a supervisor's stressful workload or family problems, then they are likely to feel increased compassion for their supervisors. Consequently, they are more likely to help or offer support. In this way, compassionate individuals' reactions to discrete acts of mistreatment are unlikely to contribute to a spiraling effect of dysfunctional behavior that can elicit a more sustained pattern of abusive supervision.

Also as with volatility and withdrawal, I hypothesize partial, rather than full mediation because other potential mechanisms explain why trait compassion negatively predicts abusive supervision. For instance, compassionate individuals may lend a

sympathetic ear to coworkers' problems, and in doing so, help to facilitate a climate of cohesiveness that increases job performance. To the extent the supervisor recognizes and appreciates the compassionate subordinate's role in this effort, it can result in the establishment of a positive reciprocity norm that obligates the supervisor to treat the subordinate favorably.

**Hypothesis 21a:** Trait compassion negatively predicts abusive supervision.

**Hypothesis 21b:** State compassion and supervisor-directed citizenship behavior partially mediate the effects of trait compassion on abusive supervision.

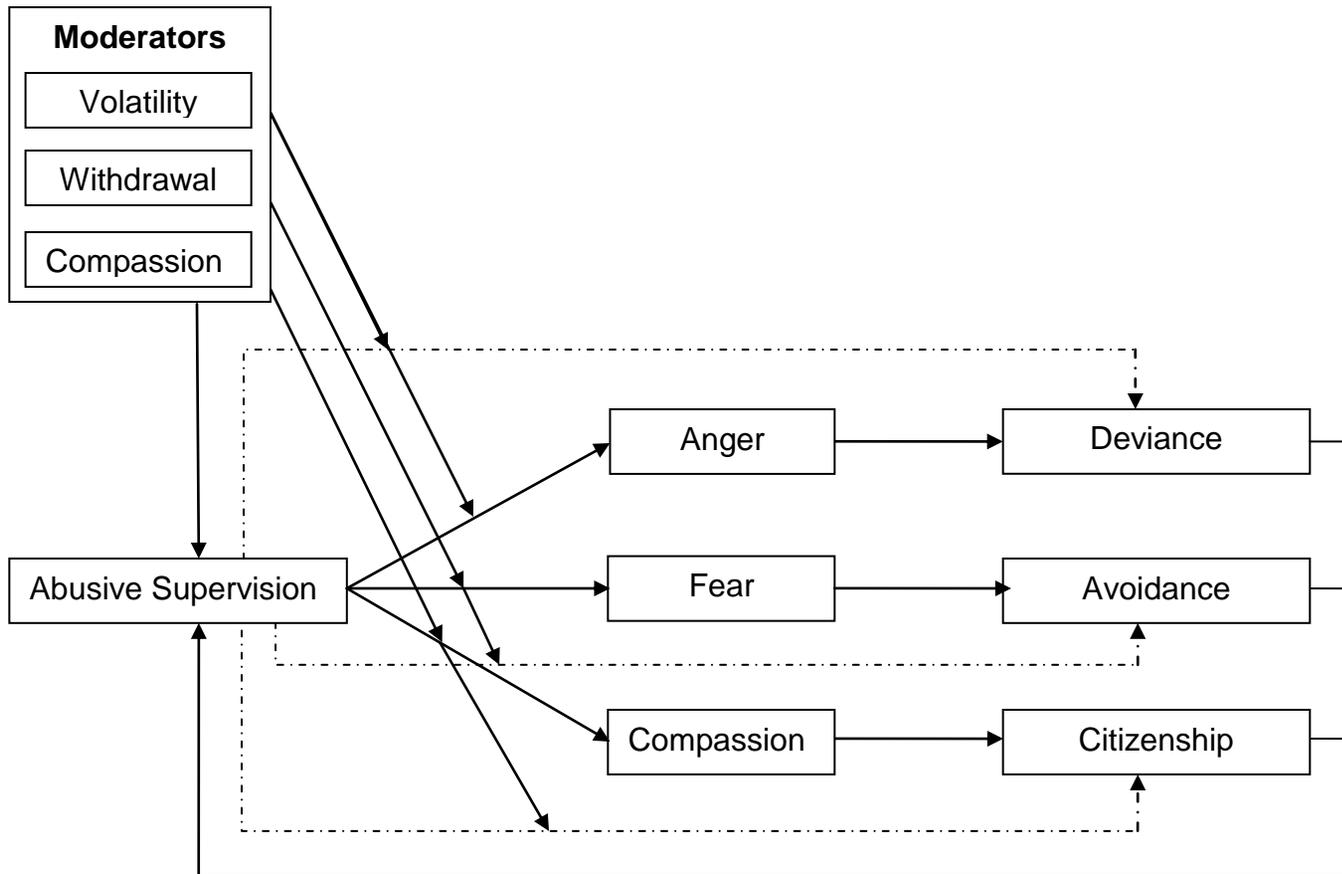


Figure 3-1. Conceptual model

## CHAPTER 4 METHODS

### Sample and Procedure

The initial sample for this study consisted of 159 full-time employees who represented a variety of industries including education, medicine, social work, finance, accounting, insurance, information technology, travel, engineering, law, transportation, and communications. To recruit participants, I placed announcements on several popular classified advertising websites. The announcements instructed individuals who were interested in participating in a university study about “social interaction in the workplace” to email me so that I could send them a link to a brief online registration form. In order to qualify for the study, participants were required to be U.S. citizens, to work full-time, and to have an immediate supervisor. Additionally, during the registration process, each participant was asked to provide the name and email address of one coworker who could be contacted to complete a single survey at the start of the study.

To capture the dynamic, multilevel nature of the relationships proposed in this study, participants were asked to complete a series of seven surveys over the course of a five month period (six waves). All surveys were conducted online and were distributed through email. The first survey contained measures of potential time-invariant control variables (e.g., demographics) as well as a measure of perceived abusive supervision over the previous six months<sup>1</sup>, and was available to complete for a one week period. On

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<sup>1</sup> To assess whether subordinates' self-reported levels of abusive supervision reflected “objective” reality, I compared both self- and coworker-reports of focal participants' abusive supervision. Using Tepper's (2000) measure, participants were asked to rate how often their immediate supervisors engaged in each abusive behavior (directed toward the participant) “during the past six months.” The same items were administered to the focal participant's coworker, though items and instructions were modified to refer to the focal participant. Self- and coworker-reports were highly correlated ( $r = .58, p < .01$ ), providing some evidence that abusive supervision is more than merely a perceptual phenomenon.

the Tuesday morning following the initial survey, participants began receiving a monthly survey containing measures of abusive supervision, emotions, and behaviors. Monthly surveys were available to participants from the first Tuesday morning through the first Thursday evening of each month, beginning in September 2010 and ending in February 2011. Finally, at the start of the study, participants' coworkers were also asked to complete a single survey available during the same time period as the focal participants' initial surveys. The coworker survey assessed focal participants' personality traits and experienced levels of abusive supervision during the six month period prior to the initial survey. A \$90 honorarium was awarded to those individuals who entirely completed the study.

Of the 159 individuals who registered for the study, 148 completed the initial survey, and 143 completed at least one monthly survey. Twelve of these individuals' coworkers did not complete surveys, further reducing the number of participants who provided usable data to 128. A small number participants ( $n = 6$ ) either changed jobs or were assigned a different supervisor during the course of the study. In these instances, only data obtained prior to when the supervisor or job change occurred were included in the final set of analyses. In sum, after listwise deletion, usable data were available for 119 focal participants, and the number of data points yielded from the monthly surveys ranged from 484 to 489 for lagged analyses and from 621 to 625 for non-lagged analyses.

Participants included in the final set of analyses worked at their current organization for an average of 5.63 years ( $SD = 5.71$ ) and with their current supervisor for an average of 3.09 years ( $SD = 2.83$ ). The sample was predominantly female and

Caucasian (78.3%), and the average age of participants was 37.92 ( $SD = 11.47$ ). Most participants (85.8%) had obtained at least a bachelor's degree, and 60% of the sample was married or residing with a romantic partner.

## Measures

### Personality

Coworkers assessed focal participants' trait volatility, trait withdrawal, and trait compassion using 30 items from DeYoung et al. (2007). Sample items designed to measure trait volatility included, "I see my coworker as someone who gets angry easily," and "I see my coworker as someone who gets upset easily." Trait withdrawal sample items included, "I see my coworker as someone who feels threatened easily," and "I see my coworker as someone who worries about things." Finally, trait compassion sample items included, "I see my coworker as someone who sympathizes with others' feelings," and "I see my coworker as someone who is indifferent to the feelings of others" (reverse-coded). Respondents used a rating scale ranging from 1 = *Very Inaccurate* to 5 = *Very Accurate*. Cronbach's alpha for these measures were: Volatility,  $\alpha = .88$ ; Withdrawal,  $\alpha = .86$ ; Compassion,  $\alpha = .87$ .

### Abusive Supervision

Abusive supervision was measured using Tepper's (2000) 15-item scale. Respondents were asked to rate the frequency with which their immediate supervisor, "Ridiculed me," "Told me my thoughts and feelings were stupid," "Put me down in front of others," "Has been rude to me," "Told me I'm incompetent," etc., "during the past month". Items use a response scale ranging from 1 = *Never* to 5 = *Very often*. Cronbach's alpha for this scale, pooled over the time intervals, was  $\alpha = .94$ .

## Emotions

Because emotions tend to be target specific (c.f., Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), participants were asked to rate how they felt “during the past month” when interacting with or thinking about their immediate supervisor. Specifically, participants responded to the following stem: “The section below contains a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Please indicate to what extent you felt this way during the past month, when thinking about or interacting with your immediate supervisor. Please click the option that accurately reflects your response to each question using the response scale provided. During the past month, when I thought about or interacted with my immediate supervisor, I felt:” Responses were given on a *1 = Very Slightly to Not at All* to *5 = Very much* scale.

Anger was assessed with a combination of three items from Rodell and Judge (2009) and Crossley (2009). Rodell and Judge (2009) measured anger using two items from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule-Expanded Form (PANAS-X; Watson & Clark, 1994)—“Angry” and “Hostile.” To these, Crossley (2009) added the item, “Enraged”. Six items from the PANAS-X (Watson & Clark, 1994) were used to assess fear: “Afraid,” “Scared,” “Frightened,” “Nervous,” “Jittery,” and “Shaky.” In order to measure compassion, I used six items identified by Goetz et al. (2010) as representing the subjective experience of compassion. These items were drawn from a number of sources (e.g., Batson, Fultz, & Schoenrade, 1987; Batson, O’Quin, Fultz, Vanderplas, & Isen, 1983; Batson, Sager, Garst, & Kang, 1997) and include, “Compassionate,” “Sympathetic,” “Moved,” “Tender,” “Warm,” and “Softhearted.” Cronbach’s alpha for each of these measures, pooled over the time intervals, was: Anger,  $\alpha = .92$ ; Fear,  $\alpha = .92$ ; Compassion,  $\alpha = .96$ .

## Behaviors

Participants' behaviors were assessed using a frequency scale ranging from 1 = *Never* to 5 = *Very Often*. Items were prefaced with the following instructions: "The questions on this page refer to behaviors—both positive and negative—that you may or may not have engaged in during the past month. For each of the items, please indicate how often you engaged in the behavior during the past month using the response scale below. Please be open and honest in your responding and remember that your responses are completely confidential. During the past month, I:"

**Supervisor-directed deviance.** Supervisor-directed deviance was measured using seven items from Mitchell and Ambrose (2007). Items included, "Made fun of my supervisor," "Acted rudely toward my supervisor," "Gossiped about my supervisor," "Publicly embarrassed my supervisor," "Refused to talk to my supervisor," "Said something hurtful to my supervisor," and "Swore at my supervisor." Cronbach's alpha for this scale, pooled over the time intervals, was  $\alpha = .84$ .

**Supervisor-directed avoidance.** Supervisor-directed avoidance was measured using seven items. Four items were adapted from Wade (1989) to reference the supervisor as the target of avoidance. These (adapted) items included, "Avoided my supervisor," "Lived as if my supervisor didn't exist," and "Kept as much distance as possible between my supervisor and me." An additional four items were adapted from Moss, Valenzi, and Taggart (2003). Their measure was originally designed to measure actions taken to avoid receiving feedback from one's supervisor, though, these items can be easily modified to measure more general supervisor-directed avoidance behaviors. Modified items used in this study included, "Went the other way when I saw my supervisor coming," "Pretended to be sick and stayed home in order to avoid my

supervisor,” “Took vacation days in order to avoid any interaction with my supervisor,” and “Tried to avoid eye contact with my supervisor so that (s)he didn’t start a conversation with me.” Cronbach’s alpha for this scale, pooled over the time intervals, was  $\alpha = .88$ .

**Supervisor-directed citizenship.** Supervisor-directed citizenship was measured using five items from Malatesta (1995). Items included, “Accepted added responsibility to help my supervisor,” “Helped my supervisor when he/she had a heavy workload,” “Assisted my supervisor with his/her work when not asked,” “Took a personal interest in my supervisor,” and “Passed along work-related information to my supervisor.” Cronbach’s alpha for this scale, pooled over the time intervals, was  $\alpha = .89$ .

### **Control Variables**

I controlled for a number of variables that can potentially influence the relationships examined within this study. First, I controlled for subordinate-supervisor tenure, given its potential influence on perceptions of social interaction at work (Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002). Second, I controlled for subordinates’ job mobility because it provides workers with a sense of personal control that can influence coping resources and strain reactions (Frazier, Mortensen, & Steward, 2005; Perrewe & Ganster, 1989), and because it can potentially affect the manner in which supervisors act toward subordinates. To do so, I used two items from Tepper et al. (2007): “I would have no problem finding an acceptable job if I quit,” and “If I were to quit my job, I could find another one that is just as good.” Third, I controlled for demographic variables (gender and race) and job status because these variables may influence individuals’ levels of social attractiveness (Aquino & Bommer, 2003), and therefore, their social interaction patterns. Fourth, I controlled for extraversion, trait volatility, trait withdrawal,

and trait compassion, given prior research findings that show personality to be linked to emotion, behavior, and social interaction (Judge, Klinger, Simon, & Yang, 2008). Finally, because I lag the data to test for reciprocal relationships, for all lagged analyses relating abusive supervision to subordinates' behaviors, I controlled for the prior month's levels of the dependent variable.

## CHAPTER 5 RESULTS

### **Analyses Overview**

Because monthly measures of abusive supervision, subordinates' emotions, and subordinates' behaviors were nested within individuals, I estimated hierarchical linear models (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Snijders & Bosker, 1999) using HLM 6 (Raudenbush, Bryk, & Congdon, 2005) to test my hypotheses. Prior to testing the hypothesized models, however, I estimated null models—consisting only of intercepts and no predictors—in order to examine the extent to which variance in each of the Level 1 variables (abusive supervision, subordinates' emotions, and subordinates' behaviors) was partitioned within and between individuals. If the Level 1 variables do not exhibit substantial within-individual fluctuation, then hierarchical linear modeling is unnecessary because there ceases to be within-individual variation to explain. Between- and within-individual variance components for abusive supervision and subordinates' emotions and behaviors are displayed in Table 5-1. As shown in the table, 24.27% of the variance in abusive supervision is within-individual, 34.77% of the variance in anger is within-individual, 39.29% of the variance in fear is within individual, 29.04% of the variance in compassion is within-individual, 28.88% of the variance in supervisor-directed deviance is within-individual, 22.30% of the variance in supervisor-directed avoidance is within-individual, and 27.64% of the variance in supervisor-directed citizenship is within-individual. Moreover, significant between individual variance existed for each Level 1 variable. Taken together, the null model results suggest that there is sufficient within-individual variance to explain and, thus, that hierarchical linear modeling is appropriate for testing the study hypotheses.

Table 5-2 displays means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. Within-individual correlations—calculated by standardizing regression coefficients derived from HLM models with a single predictor—are above the diagonal. Between-individual correlations are below the diagonal and were calculated using aggregated Level 1 scores (and therefore do not properly reflect multilevel relationships).

## **Tests of Hypotheses**

### **Main Effects of Abusive Supervision on Emotions**

To test hypotheses linking abusive supervision to emotions, I specified a series of HLM regression equations in which each emotion was regressed on abusive supervision at Level 1. Data were lagged such that Level 1 independent variables were measured one month prior to each dependent variable. Moreover, in all analyses, subordinates' extraversion, trait volatility, trait withdrawal, trait compassion, gender, race, supervisor tenure, job mobility, and job status were entered as Level 2 control variables, and supervisor – subordinate interaction time was entered as a Level 1 control. Level 1 variables were also uncentered in all analyses. As shown in Table 5-3, abusive supervision positively predicted anger ( $\hat{\beta} = .48, p < .01$ ) and fear ( $\hat{\beta} = .29, p < .01$ ), and abusive supervision negatively predicted compassion ( $\hat{\beta} = -.30, p < .01$ ). Thus, Hypotheses 1, 4, and 7 were supported.

### **Emotion-Mediated Pathways**

To test the mediational hypotheses, I used Baron and Kenny's (1986) causal steps approach. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), mediation occurs when: (1) an initial independent variable predicts the outcome variable; (2) the independent variable predicts the mediating variable; (3) the mediating variable predicts the outcome variable

when the effect of the independent variable on the outcome variable is also modeled; and (4) the effect of the independent variable on the outcome variable becomes non-significant when the mediating variable is included as a predictor of the outcome variable.

The previously discussed set of analyses linking abusive supervision to subordinates' emotions offers support for the second causal step. To examine whether results supported Step 1, each behavior was regressed on abusive supervision and the control variables. Additionally, prior month's levels of the dependent variable were entered at Level 1 so that results would capture change in the dependent variable from one time period to the next. As with the former set of analyses, a one month lag between the independent and dependent variables was modeled. Results are displayed in Table 5-4. Although abusive supervision positively predicted change in supervisor-directed deviance ( $\hat{\beta} = .12, p < .05$ ) and supervisor-directed avoidance ( $\hat{\beta} = .22, p < .01$ ), the effect of abusive supervision on supervisor-directed citizenship behavior ( $\hat{\beta} = -.16, n.s.$ ) was non-significant. Thus, criteria for Step 1 of the mediational process were met for supervisor directed-deviance and supervisor-directed avoidance outcomes, but not for supervisor-directed citizenship behavior.

Results for Step 3 are displayed in Table 5-5. For these analyses, a series of equations was estimated in which each potential emotion mediator, measured concurrently with each corresponding dependent variable, was added to the equations estimated for Step 1. To allow the model to be estimated, Level 1 slopes between each mediator and outcome variable were fixed (i.e., they did not vary between individuals). All other Level 1 slopes were allowed to vary between individuals. Results supported

Hypotheses 2, 5, and 8 in that anger positively predicted supervisor-directed deviance ( $\hat{B} = .09, p < .01$ ), fear positively predicted supervisor-directed avoidance ( $\hat{B} = .23, p < .01$ ), and compassion positively predicted supervisor-directed citizenship behavior ( $\hat{B} = .20, p < .01$ ). Thus, criteria for Baron and Kenny's (1986) third causal step were met for each dependent variable.

To examine whether the data met criteria for Step 4 of the mediational process—which requires that the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable become non-significant when the mediators are entered into the model—I compared the coefficients for the effect of abusive supervision on supervisor-directed deviance and supervisor-directed avoidance in Table 5-4 with those displayed in Table 5-5. As shown in Table 5-5, the effect of abusive supervision on supervisor-directed deviance becomes non-significant when anger is entered as a potential mediator ( $\hat{B} = .06, n.s.$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 3 appears to be supported in that the criteria for each causal step are met. Comparing Tables 5-4 and 5-5 also reveals that the effect of abusive supervision on supervisor-directed avoidance is reduced, but remains significant ( $\hat{B} = .16, p < .05$ ), when fear is entered as a potential mediator. In support of Hypothesis 6, this result, together with results for Steps 1 through 3, suggests partial mediation of the abusive supervision – supervisor-directed avoidance relationship via fear. Partial mediation occurs when the effects of the independent variable are reduced, but remain significant, when a significant mediating variable is entered into the model.

According to the Baron and Kenny (1986) logic, because criteria for Step 1 were not fulfilled for the abusive supervision—citizenship relationship, there is no effect to be mediated. However, it remains possible that an indirect effect of abusive supervision on

citizenship behavior exists even in the absence of a direct effect. Such a situation might occur when an overall direct effect is concealed by conflicting indirect effects (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). To ascertain the significance of an indirect effect, I conducted a Sobel (1982) test. Results of the Sobel test reveal a significant indirect effect of abusive supervision on citizenship behavior through compassion ( $Z = 3.32, p < .01$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 9, which argues for at least partial mediation of the effect of abusive supervision on supervisor-directed citizenship behavior, was supported. Sobel tests for the indirect effects of abusive supervision on supervisor-directed deviance through anger ( $Z = 2.88, p < .01$ ) and abusive supervision on supervisor-directed avoidance through fear ( $Z = 2.35, p < .05$ ) were also significant, further supporting Hypotheses 3 and 6.

### **Effects of Subordinates' Behavior on Abusive Supervision**

To examine whether subordinates' behaviors predicted abusive supervision, I simultaneously entered supervisor-directed deviance, supervisor-directed avoidance, and supervisor-directed citizenship behavior as Level 1 predictors of abusive supervision. Like the analyses examining subordinates' behaviors as outcomes of abusive supervision, I lagged the data so that the independent variables were measured one month prior to the dependent variable. Additionally, along with controls, I also entered abusive supervision measured concurrently with the independent variables as a Level 1 predictor. To allow the model to be estimated, Level 1 slopes between supervisor-directed deviance, supervisor-directed avoidance, supervisor-directed citizenship behavior and abusive supervision were fixed (i.e., they did not vary between individuals). The supervisor interaction – abusive supervision slope was allowed to vary between individuals. Results for these analyses are displayed in Table 5-6. As shown in

the table, supervisor-directed deviance ( $\hat{B} = .06$ , n.s.) and supervisor-directed avoidance ( $\hat{B} = .15$ ,  $p < .01$ ) positively predicted abusive supervision, whereas supervisor-directed citizenship ( $\hat{B} = -.01$ , n.s.) negatively predicted abusive supervision. However, only the effect of supervisor-directed avoidance on abusive supervision was significant. Thus, Hypothesis 12 was supported, but results failed to support Hypotheses 10 and 11.

### **Moderating Effects of Personality on Abusive Supervision and Emotions**

To test hypotheses involving the moderating role of personality traits on the abusive supervision – emotion relationships, I entered relevant personality traits, centered at their respective sample means, as Level 2 predictors of within-individual slopes of these relationships. There was a one month lag between the independent and dependent variables. Results of these analyses are displayed in Table 5-7. Contrary to Hypotheses 13 and 16, trait volatility did not moderate the abusive supervision – anger relationship ( $\hat{B} = .12$ , n.s.), and trait withdrawal did not moderate the abusive supervision – fear relationship ( $\hat{B} = .11$ , n.s.). Trait compassion did moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and state compassion ( $\hat{B} = -.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, Figure 5-1 reveals the form of this interaction was not as hypothesized. Instead, the relationship between abusive supervision and state compassion tended to be more strongly negative ( $m = -.54$ ,  $p < .01$ ) for individuals who possessed higher levels of trait compassion than for individuals who possessed lower levels of trait compassion ( $m = -.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 19 was not supported.

## **Moderating Effects of Personality on Abusive Supervision and Behaviors**

Table 5-8 contains the results of analyses conducted to examine whether personality moderated the relationships between monthly levels of abusive supervision and subordinates' behaviors. To conduct these analyses, I added relevant personality predictors of the Level 1 abusive supervision – subordinate behavior slopes to the equations modeling the main effects of abusive supervision on subordinates' behaviors. Contrary to Hypothesis 14, trait volatility did not emerge as a significant moderator of the abusive supervision – supervisor-directed deviance relationship ( $\hat{\beta} = .06$ , n.s.). Likewise, trait compassion did not moderate the relationship between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed citizenship behavior ( $\hat{\beta} = -.01$ , n.s.). Thus, Hypothesis 20 was not supported. A final hypothesis involving moderation—Hypothesis 17—suggested that trait withdrawal would amplify the positive relationship between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed avoidance. Table 5-8 shows the abusive supervision – trait withdrawal interaction term to be significant ( $\hat{\beta} = .13$ ,  $p < .01$ ). A plot of the interaction (see Figure 5-2) reveals the pattern of relationships to be consistent with those proposed in Hypothesis 17. For individuals who possessed high levels of trait withdrawal, the abusive supervision – supervisor-directed avoidance simple slope was more strongly positive ( $m = .28$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than for individuals who possessed low levels of trait withdrawal ( $m = .08$ , n.s.).

## **Main Effects of Personality on Abusive Supervision**

To test whether personality predicted overall levels of abusive supervision, subordinates' levels of trait volatility, trait withdrawal, and trait compassion were simultaneously entered as predictors of abusive supervision. Results of these analyses

are displayed in Table 5-9. In support of Hypothesis 18a, trait withdrawal positively predicted abusive supervision ( $\hat{\beta} = .21, p < .05$ ). Neither trait volatility ( $\hat{\beta} = .09, n.s.$ ) nor trait compassion ( $\hat{\beta} = -.11, n.s.$ ), however, significantly predicted abusive supervision. Therefore, Hypotheses 15a and 21a were not supported.

### **Mediators of the Relationship between Personality and Abusive Supervision**

To test whether subordinates' emotions and behaviors mediated the relationships between their personality traits and overall levels of abusive supervision, I again used Baron and Kenny's (1986) causal steps approach. Results for Step 1 are described in the previous section. Tables 5-10 and 5-11 contain results for analyses involving Step 2. As shown in the tables, subordinates' personality traits were generally unrelated to their emotions and behaviors. More specifically, trait volatility was unrelated to both anger ( $\hat{\beta} = .13, n.s.$ ) and supervisor-directed deviance ( $\hat{\beta} = -.01, n.s.$ ). Likewise, trait compassion was neither related to state compassion ( $\hat{\beta} = .08, n.s.$ ) nor supervisor-directed citizenship behavior ( $\hat{\beta} = .21, n.s.$ ). Finally, although trait withdrawal was positively and significantly related to fear ( $\hat{\beta} = .20, p < .05.$ ), it was unrelated to supervisor-directed avoidance ( $\hat{\beta} = .19, n.s.$ ).

Results involving Step 3 of the mediational analyses are displayed in Table 5-12. In examining potential mediators of the trait volatility – abusive supervision relationship, analyses revealed that both anger ( $\hat{\beta} = .35, p < .01$ ) and deviance ( $\hat{\beta} = .28, p < .05$ ) positively predicted abusive supervision. Among the potential mediators of the trait withdrawal – abusive supervision relationship, avoidance ( $\hat{\beta} = .60, p < .01$ )—but not fear ( $\hat{\beta} = .15, n.s.$ )—significantly predicted abusive supervision. None of the proposed

mediators of the trait compassion – abusive supervision relationship were significant (compassion:  $\hat{B} = -.09$ , n.s.; supervisor-directed citizenship:  $\hat{B} = -.02$ , n.s.).

To assess whether the data met the criteria for Step 4, I compared coefficients for the effects of relevant personality traits on abusive supervision displayed in Table 5-9 with those displayed in Table 5-12. In all cases, effect sizes were reduced when potential mediators were included as predictors. However, because results of Step 1 only revealed a significant overall effect of withdrawal on abusive supervision, and because results tended to be mixed for Steps 2 and 3, all four causal steps were not met for any of the proposed mediated relationships. Sobel tests confirmed these findings in that none of the tests revealed the existence of significant indirect effects. More specifically, Sobel statistics for each proposed mediator were as follows: Anger,  $Z = .96$ ; Supervisor-directed deviance,  $Z = .15$ ; Fear,  $Z = 1.45$ ; Avoidance,  $Z = 1.39$ ; Compassion,  $Z = .64$ ; Supervisor-directed citizenship behavior,  $Z = .20$ . Thus, Hypotheses 15b, 18b, and 21b were not supported.

Table 5-1. Variance decomposition of Level 1 variables

	HLM variance estimate		Variance decomposition	
	Between	Within	Between	Within
Abusive supervision	0.25534	0.50531	75.73%	24.27%
Anger	0.59036	0.31474	65.23%	34.77%
Fear	0.20719	0.13407	60.71%	39.29%
Compassion	0.97315	0.39834	70.96%	29.04%
Deviance	0.19426	0.07890	71.12%	28.88%
Avoidance	0.34205	0.09818	77.70%	22.30%
Citizenship	0.77400	0.29563	72.36%	27.64%

Note: Variance decompositions are computed by dividing the between- or within-individual variance components by the sum of the two (between and within) variance estimates.

Table 5-2. Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations among study variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Abusive supervision (L1)	1.32	0.58	1.00	.47**	.37**	-.18**	.34**	.59**	-.01	-.02									
2. Anger (L1)	1.54	0.94	.78**	1.00	.44**	-.10	.21**	.34**	.03	.05									
3. Fear (L1)	1.25	0.56	.68**	.65**	1.00	-.07	.20**	.38**	-.01	.03									
4. Compassion (L1)	2.22	1.19	-.21*	-.20*	-.07	1.00	.02	-.16**	.24**	.16**									
5. Deviance (L1)	1.28	0.53	.67**	.62**	.58**	-.09	1.00	.53	.06	.01									
6. Avoidance (L1)	1.37	0.65	.81**	.75**	.67**	-.29**	.66**	1.00	-.08	-.10									
7. Citizenship (L1)	3.38	1.04	-.08	-.05	-.09	.55**	-.13	-.27**	1.00	.15**									
8. Supervisor interaction (L1)	30.94	24.78	.01	.02	.03	.35**	.17	-.12	.41**	1.00									
9. Volatility (L2)	2.16	0.81	.39**	.32**	.27**	-.14	.28**	.28**	.00	.08	1.00								
10. Withdrawal (L2)	2.18	0.78	.40**	.33**	.32**	-.11	.33**	.31**	-.06	.11	.69**	1.00							
11. Compassion(L2)	4.23	0.68	-.22*	-.17	-.23*	.16	-.27**	-.26**	.15	-.15	-.39**	-.31**	1.00						
12. Extraversion (L2)	3.68	0.96	.04	-.06	.05	.23	.02	-.01	.19*	-.00	-.13	-.31**	.33**	1.00					
13. Supervisor tenure (L2)	3.09	2.83	.02	.03	-.01	.12	.12	.03	.14	.14	.04	.01	-.07	.08	1.00				
14. Gender (L2)	0.25	0.43	.05	.04	.05	-.08	-.03	.01	-.04	-.10	-.01	-.07	-.09	.05	-.04	1.00			
15. Race (L2)	0.79	0.41	-.11	-.15	-.00	.02	-.15	-.10	.03	-.15	.00	-.01	.05	.04	.05	.11	1.00		
16. Job mobility (L2)	3.11	1.17	-.01	-.07	-.06	.09	-.06	.01	.14	-.08	-.08	-.11	.09	.10	-.06	.03	.14	1.00	
17. Job status (L2)	0.08	0.28	.17	.18	.24**	-.11	.20*	.08	-.02	.02	.14	.16	.03	-.02	-.21*	.18	.01	-.04	1.00

Notes: *N* = 119. L1 = Level 1 (within-individual) variables; L2 = Level 2 (between-individual) variables. Between-individual correlations are below the diagonal. Within-individual correlations are above the diagonal.

\*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

Table 5-3. HLM regression results for the effects of abusive supervision on subordinates' emotions

Parameter	Anger			Fear			Compassion		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value
Intercept, $B_{00}$	0.844	0.161	5.24**	0.846	0.074	11.37**	2.461	0.156	15.81**
Gender, $B_{01}$	0.078	0.133	0.59	0.145	0.076	1.91	-0.132	0.174	-0.76
Race, $B_{02}$	-0.395	0.205	-1.93	-0.040	0.064	-0.62	-0.118	0.227	0.52
Job status, $B_{03}$	0.264	0.213	1.24	-0.050	0.102	-0.49	0.007	0.361	0.02
Supervisor tenure, $B_{04}$	0.003	0.011	0.24	-0.005	0.007	-0.63	0.046	0.029	1.59
Job mobility, $B_{05}$	0.007	0.038	0.18	-0.005	0.018	-0.27	0.043	0.081	0.54
Extraversion, $B_{06}$	-0.042	0.067	-0.63	0.003	0.031	0.10	0.229	0.096	2.39*
Volatility, $B_{07}$	0.055	0.104	0.53	-0.032	0.049	-0.66	-0.195	0.135	-1.44
Withdrawal, $B_{08}$	0.093	0.106	0.88	0.101	0.045	2.23*	0.138	0.137	1.01
Compassion, $B_{09}$	-0.051	0.109	-0.47	-0.001	0.049	-0.01	0.018	0.127	0.14
Supervisor interaction (t – 1), $B_{10}$	0.001	0.002	0.92	0.000	0.001	0.26	0.003	0.002	1.34
Abusive supervision (t – 1), $B_{20}$	0.477	0.110	4.33**	0.292	0.068	4.30**	-0.298	0.069	-4.29**
Pseudo $R^2$	0.34			0.69			.09		

Notes: *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient. *SE* = standard error. T – 1 indicates variable was measured one month prior to the dependent variable.

\*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

Table 5-4. HLM regression results for the effects of abusive supervision on subordinates' behaviors

Parameter	Supervisor-directed deviance			Supervisor-directed avoidance			Supervisor-directed citizenship		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value
Intercept, $B_{00}$	0.413	0.047	8.74**	0.243	0.057	4.29**	2.429	0.248	9.79**
Gender, $B_{01}$	-0.014	0.026	-0.54	0.008	0.032	0.24	0.065	0.107	0.61
Race, $B_{02}$	-0.057	0.047	-1.22	-0.109	0.051	-2.12*	-0.063	0.141	-0.45
Job status, $B_{03}$	0.152	0.081	1.89	-0.051	0.045	-1.13	0.029	0.226	0.13
Supervisor tenure, $B_{04}$	0.001	0.004	0.26	-0.000	0.005	-0.04	0.030	0.021	1.43
Job mobility, $B_{05}$	0.015	0.011	1.39	0.024	0.012	1.94	0.128	0.050	2.55*
Extraversion, $B_{06}$	0.017	0.019	0.89	0.001	0.017	0.08	0.126	0.063	2.00*
Volatility, $B_{07}$	-0.013	0.029	-0.44	-0.004	0.028	-0.13	0.054	0.089	0.60
Withdrawal, $B_{08}$	0.023	0.034	0.70	0.041	0.035	1.18	0.006	0.103	0.06
Compassion, $B_{09}$	-0.030	0.025	-1.19	-0.040	0.029	-1.37	0.124	0.080	1.56
Supervisor interaction (t – 1), $B_{10}$	0.002	0.001	1.78	0.000	0.001	0.48	0.006	0.002	2.93**
Dependent variable (t – 1), $B_{20}$	0.512	0.064	8.03**	0.597	0.066	9.03**	0.283	0.054	5.28**
Abusive supervision (t – 1), $B_{30}$	0.115	0.057	2.03*	0.224	0.068	3.33**	-0.155	0.101	-1.53
Pseudo $R^2$	0.58			0.71			0.31		

Notes: *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient. *SE* = standard error. T – 1 indicates variable was measured one month prior to the dependent variable.

\*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

Table 5-5. HLM regression results depicting emotions as mediators of the relationships between abusive supervision and subordinates' behaviors

Parameter	Supervisor-directed deviance			Supervisor-directed avoidance			Supervisor-directed citizenship		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value
Intercept, <i>B</i> <sub>00</sub>	0.395	0.044	8.93**	0.094	0.052	1.81	1.772	0.242	7.33**
Gender, <i>B</i> <sub>01</sub>	-0.024	0.025	-0.97	-0.021	0.031	-0.66	0.097	0.091	1.06
Race, <i>B</i> <sub>02</sub>	-0.034	0.042	-0.82	-0.106	0.052	-2.04*	-0.053	0.133	-0.40
Job status, <i>B</i> <sub>03</sub>	0.144	0.081	1.79	-0.017	0.045	-0.39	0.050	0.173	0.29
Supervisor tenure, <i>B</i> <sub>04</sub>	0.000	0.004	0.11	0.000	0.005	0.05	0.012	0.019	0.63
Job mobility, <i>B</i> <sub>05</sub>	0.013	0.011	1.21	0.028	0.012	2.22*	0.116	0.042	2.79**
Extraversion, <i>B</i> <sub>06</sub>	0.024	0.018	1.40	0.003	0.015	0.19	0.065	0.049	1.32
Volatility, <i>B</i> <sub>07</sub>	-0.014	0.028	-0.52	0.006	0.028	0.23	0.092	0.075	1.23
Withdrawal, <i>B</i> <sub>08</sub>	0.020	0.033	0.60	0.014	0.035	0.41	-0.058	0.090	-0.65
Compassion, <i>B</i> <sub>09</sub>	-0.035	0.024	-1.46	-0.052	0.027	-1.96	0.096	0.067	1.44
Supervisor interaction (t – 1), <i>B</i> <sub>10</sub>	0.001	0.001	1.63	0.000	0.001	0.31	0.005	0.002	2.54*
Dependent variable (t – 1), <i>B</i> <sub>20</sub>	0.490	0.064	7.70**	0.572	0.069	8.23**	0.316	0.055	5.74**
Proposed emotion mediator, <i>B</i> <sub>30</sub>	0.087	0.022	3.95**	0.226	0.080	2.81**	0.199	0.038	5.25**
Abusive supervision (t – 1), <i>B</i> <sub>40</sub>	0.057	0.055	1.03	0.155	0.078	2.00*	-0.043	0.100	-0.43
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.59			0.72			0.40		

Notes: *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient. *SE* = standard error. T – 1 indicates variable was measured one month prior to the dependent variable. Anger is the proposed emotion mediator of the abusive supervision – supervisor-directed deviance relationship. Fear is the proposed emotion mediator of the abusive supervision – supervisor-directed avoidance relationship. Compassion is the proposed emotion mediator of the abusive supervision – supervisor-directed citizenship relationship.

\* *p* < .05, two-tailed. \*\* *p* < .01, two-tailed.

Table 5-6. HLM regression results for the effects of subordinates' behaviors on abusive supervision

Parameter	Abusive supervision		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value
Intercept, $B_{00}$	0.392	0.087	4.52**
Gender, $B_{01}$	0.029	0.038	0.76
Race, $B_{02}$	-0.063	0.040	-1.59
Job status, $B_{03}$	0.014	0.061	0.23
Supervisor tenure, $B_{04}$	-0.002	0.004	-0.52
Job mobility, $B_{05}$	0.016	0.012	1.36
Extraversion, $B_{06}$	0.015	0.012	1.24
Volatility, $B_{07}$	0.026	0.023	1.51
Withdrawal, $B_{08}$	0.045	0.027	1.68
Compassion, $B_{09}$	-0.016	0.021	-0.74
Supervisor interaction (t – 1), $B_{10}$	0.001	0.001	1.27
Abusive supervision (t – 1), $B_{20}$	0.490	0.052	9.41**
Deviance (t – 1), $B_{30}$	0.059	0.046	1.27
Avoidance (t – 1), $B_{40}$	0.150	0.051	2.94**
Citizenship (t – 1), $B_{50}$	-0.014	0.017	-0.81
Pseudo $R^2$	0.43		

Notes: *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient. *SE* = standard error. T – 1 indicates variable was measured one month prior to the dependent variable.

\*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

Table 5-7. HLM regression results depicting personality traits as moderators of the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' emotions

Parameter	Anger			Fear			Compassion		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value
Intercept, $B_{00}$	0.873	0.159	5.48**	0.885	0.074	12.03	2.557	0.162	15.77**
Gender, $B_{01}$	0.084	0.132	0.64	0.138	0.076	1.83	-0.166	0.165	-1.01
Race, $B_{02}$	-0.390	0.204	-1.91	-0.038	0.065	-0.58	-0.106	0.207	-0.51
Job status, $B_{03}$	0.267	0.207	1.29	-0.042	0.102	-0.41	0.054	0.319	0.17
Supervisor tenure, $B_{04}$	0.003	0.011	0.26	-0.005	0.007	-0.72	0.048	0.028	1.71
Job mobility, $B_{05}$	0.005	0.038	0.14	-0.005	0.018	-0.25	0.053	0.075	0.70
Extraversion, $B_{06}$	-0.046	0.067	-0.68	0.004	0.031	0.14	0.228	0.094	2.43*
Volatility, $B_{07}$	-0.095	0.149	-0.64	-0.032	0.049	-0.66	-0.178	0.127	-1.40
Withdrawal, $B_{08}$	0.088	0.104	0.84	-0.021	0.085	-0.24	0.163	0.128	1.27
Compassion, $B_{09}$	-0.053	0.108	-0.49	-0.008	0.050	-0.16	0.372	0.217	1.71
Supervisor interaction (t – 1), $B_{10}$	0.001	0.002	0.93	0.000	0.001	0.23	0.003	0.002	1.47
Abusive supervision (t – 1), $B_{20}$	0.447	0.110	4.06**	0.256	0.066	3.88**	-0.387	0.065	-6.00
Abusive supervision (t – 1) × Personality trait, $B_{21}$	0.121	0.098	1.24	0.105	0.068	1.56	-0.228	0.105	-2.18*
Pseudo $R^2$	0.36			0.70			0.10		

Notes: *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient. *SE* = standard error. T – 1 indicates variable was measured one month prior to the dependent variable. Trait volatility is the proposed moderator of the abusive supervision – anger relationship. Trait withdrawal is the proposed moderator of the abusive supervision – fear relationship. Trait compassion is the proposed moderator of the abusive supervision – compassion relationship.  
 \*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

Table 5-8. HLM regression results depicting personality traits as moderators of the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' behavior

Parameter	Supervisor-directed deviance			Supervisor-directed avoidance			Supervisor-directed citizenship		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value
Intercept, $B_{00}$	0.438	0.059	7.46**	0.332	0.077	4.31**	2.454**	0.257	9.56**
Gender, $B_{01}$	-0.011	0.026	-0.45	-0.000	0.033	-0.00	0.063	0.110	0.57
Race, $B_{02}$	-0.059	0.048	-1.25	-0.126	0.054	-2.34*	-0.061	0.143	-0.42
Job status, $B_{03}$	0.161	0.080	2.01*	-0.007	0.046	-0.15	0.032	0.232	0.14
Supervisor tenure, $B_{04}$	0.001	0.004	0.32	-0.002	0.005	-0.42	0.030	0.021	1.42
Job mobility, $B_{05}$	0.014	0.011	1.33	0.028	0.013	2.22*	0.127	0.051	2.50*
Extraversion, $B_{06}$	0.017	0.019	0.87	0.005	0.017	0.32	0.125	0.063	1.98*
Volatility, $B_{07}$	-0.086	0.058	-1.50	-0.004	0.029	-0.14	0.054	0.090	0.60
Withdrawal, $B_{08}$	0.021	0.033	0.64	-0.117	0.060	-1.96	0.004	0.104	0.03
Compassion, $B_{09}$	-0.032	0.025	-1.30	-0.057	0.030	-1.89	0.131	0.162	0.81
Supervisor interaction, $B_{10}$	0.002	0.001	1.74	0.000	0.001	0.33	0.006	0.002	2.90**
Dependent variable ( $t - 1$ ), $B_{20}$	0.514	0.064	8.09**	0.563	0.068	8.24**	0.277	0.054	5.18**
Abusive supervision ( $t - 1$ ), $B_{30}$	0.090	0.062	1.46	0.180	0.077	2.32*	-0.160	0.117	-1.36
Abusive supervision ( $t - 1$ ) × Personality trait, $B_{31}$	0.060	0.041	1.47	0.126	0.035	3.56**	-0.005	0.113	-0.04
Pseudo $R^2$	0.58			0.71			0.30		

Notes: *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient. *SE* = standard error.  $T - 1$  indicates variable was measured one month prior to the dependent variable. Trait volatility is the proposed moderator of the abusive supervision – supervisor-directed deviance relationship. Trait withdrawal is the proposed moderator of the abusive supervision – supervisor-directed avoidance relationship. Trait compassion is the proposed moderator of the abusive supervision – supervisor-directed citizenship relationship.

\*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

Table 5-9. HLM regression results for the effects of subordinates' personality traits on abusive supervision

Parameter	Abusive supervision		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value
Intercept, $B_{00}$	1.366	0.062	22.18**
Gender, $B_{01}$	0.096	0.129	0.75
Race, $B_{02}$	-0.222	0.104	-2.12*
Job status, $B_{03}$	0.253	0.219	1.16
Supervisor tenure, $B_{04}$	0.006	0.016	0.41
Job mobility, $B_{05}$	0.029	0.033	0.90
Extraversion, $B_{06}$	0.099	0.044	2.27**
Volatility, $B_{07}$	0.089	0.071	1.26
Withdrawal, $B_{08}$	0.205	0.094	2.18*
Compassion, $B_{09}$	-0.106	0.074	-1.44
Supervisor interaction, $B_{10}$	-0.001	0.001	0.45
Pseudo $R^2$	0.15		

Notes: *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient. *SE* = standard error.  
 \*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

Table 5-10. HLM regression results for the effects of personality traits on subordinates' emotions

Parameter	Anger			Fear			Compassion		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value
Intercept, $B_{00}$	1.509	0.087	17.39**	1.245	0.053	23.53**	1.918**	0.096	20.00**
Gender, $B_{01}$	0.109	0.175	0.63	0.030	0.117	0.26	-0.050	0.185	-0.27
Race, $B_{02}$	-0.321	0.184	-1.75	-0.013	0.083	-0.16	0.042	0.203	0.21
Job status, $B_{03}$	0.399	0.322	1.24	0.362	0.270	1.34	-0.334	0.287	-1.17
Supervisor tenure, $B_{04}$	0.015	0.021	0.70	0.000	0.018	0.00	0.015	0.029	0.51
Job mobility, $B_{05}$	-0.007	0.046	-0.15	-0.005	0.024	-0.22	0.068	0.078	0.87
Extraversion, $B_{06}$	0.034	0.087	0.39	0.103	0.058	1.78	0.209	0.091	2.31*
Volatility, $B_{07}$	0.129	0.132	0.97	-0.018	0.081	-0.22	-0.187	0.135	-1.39
Withdrawal, $B_{08}$	0.224	0.153	1.46	0.199	0.089	2.24*	0.108	0.141	0.76
Compassion, $B_{09}$	-0.055	0.131	-0.42	-0.142	0.079	-1.80	0.081	0.120	0.68
Supervisor interaction, $B_{10}$	0.001	0.002	0.77	0.000	0.001	0.39	0.009	0.002	3.73**
Pseudo $R^2$	0.08			0.09			0.09		

Notes: *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient. *SE* = standard error.

\*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

Table 5-11. HLM regression results for the effects of personality traits on subordinates' behaviors

Parameter	Deviance			Avoidance			Citizenship		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value
Intercept, $B_{00}$	1.304	0.058	22.60**	1.473	0.075	19.57**	3.200**	0.103	31.08**
Gender, $B_{01}$	-0.034	0.118	-0.29	0.106	0.142	0.75	-0.030	0.157	-0.19
Race, $B_{02}$	-0.161	0.099	-1.62	-0.225	0.113	-1.99*	0.049	0.174	0.28
Job status, $B_{03}$	0.372	0.192	1.93	0.265	0.182	1.45	-0.033	0.275	-0.12
Supervisor tenure, $B_{04}$	0.033	0.022	1.52	0.023	0.024	0.93	0.043	0.023	1.85
Job mobility, $B_{05}$	0.013	0.030	0.44	0.047	0.033	1.41	0.130	0.064	2.02
Extraversion, $B_{06}$	0.087	0.041	2.13*	0.076	0.044	1.71	0.114	0.082	1.40
Volatility, $B_{07}$	-0.013	0.081	-0.16	0.038	0.088	0.43	0.135	0.127	1.06
Withdrawal, $B_{08}$	0.190	0.122	1.56	0.187	0.133	1.41	-0.088	0.134	-0.66
Compassion, $B_{09}$	-0.164	0.079	-2.08*	-0.183	0.086	-2.13*	0.211	0.122	1.73
Supervisor interaction, $B_{10}$	-0.001	0.001	-0.28	-0.003	0.001	-2.64*	0.007	0.002	3.74**
Pseudo $R^2$	0.13			0.10			0.09		

Notes: *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient. *SE* = standard error.

\*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

Table 5-12. HLM regression results depicting subordinates' emotions and behaviors as mediators of the relationships between personality and abusive supervision

Parameter	Volatility – abusive supervision relationship			Withdrawal – abusive supervision relationship			Compassion – abusive supervision relationship		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	T-value
Intercept, $B_{00}$	1.369	0.046	29.97**	1.323	0.043	30.93**	1.353**	0.061	22.06**
Gender, $B_{01}$	0.067	0.071	0.94	0.087	0.067	1.30	0.080	0.127	0.63
Race, $B_{02}$	-0.057	0.088	-0.65	-0.097	0.071	-1.36	-0.213	0.105	-2.02*
Job status, $B_{03}$	0.013	0.104	0.12	0.108	0.080	1.36	0.228	0.225	1.02
Supervisor tenure, $B_{04}$	-0.006	0.008	-0.75	0.002	0.005	0.31	0.011	0.015	0.71
Job Mobility, $B_{05}$	0.030	0.026	1.16	0.012	0.021	0.59	0.037	0.032	1.17
Extraversion, $B_{06}$	0.060	0.029	2.04*	0.026	0.023	1.13	0.120	0.046	2.63*
Volatility, $B_{07}$	0.060	0.046	1.30	0.089	0.036	2.47*	0.076	0.069	1.10
Withdrawal, $B_{08}$	0.068	0.049	1.41	0.038	0.042	0.90	0.214	0.093	2.29*
Compassion, $B_{09}$	-0.036	0.050	-0.71	0.032	0.036	0.88	-0.088	0.075	-1.17
Supervisor interaction, $B_{10}$	-0.001	0.001	-1.15	0.001	0.001	0.79	-0.000	0.001	-0.24
Proposed emotion mediator, $B_{20}$	0.348	0.071	4.88**	0.145	0.108	1.35	-0.093	0.050	-1.87
Proposed behavior mediator, $B_{30}$	0.281	0.122	2.30*	0.598	0.095	6.31**	-0.015	0.077	-0.20
Pseudo $R^2$	0.51			0.61			0.16		

Notes: *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient. *SE* = standard error. Anger is the proposed emotion mediator and supervisor-directed deviance is the proposed behavior mediator of the trait volatility – abusive supervision relationship. Fear is the proposed emotion mediator and supervisor-directed avoidance is the proposed behavior mediator of the trait withdrawal – abusive supervision relationship. Compassion is the proposed emotion mediator and supervisor-directed citizenship behavior is the proposed behavior mediator of the trait compassion – abusive supervision relationship.  
 \*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

Table 5-13. Summary of study findings

	Hypothesis	Finding
H1	Abusive supervision positively predicts subordinates' anger.	Supported
H2	Subordinates' anger positively predicts subordinates' supervisor-directed deviance.	Supported
H3	Subordinates' anger partially mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed deviance.	Supported
H4	Abusive supervision positively predicts subordinates' fear.	Supported
H5	Subordinates' fear positively predicts subordinates' supervisor-directed avoidance.	Supported
H6	Subordinates' fear partially mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed avoidance.	Supported
H7	Abusive supervision negatively predicts subordinates' compassion.	Supported
H8	Subordinates' compassion positively predicts subordinates' supervisor-directed citizenship behavior.	Supported
H9	Subordinates' compassion partially mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed citizenship behavior.	Supported
H10	Subordinates' supervisor-directed deviance positively predicts abusive supervision.	Not supported
H11	Subordinates' supervisor-directed citizenship negatively predicts abusive supervision.	Not supported
H12	Subordinates' supervisor-directed avoidance positively predicts abusive supervision.	Supported
H13	Trait volatility moderates the effect of abusive supervision on subordinates' anger, such that the positive relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' anger is amplified for subordinates who possess high levels of trait volatility.	Not supported

Table 5-13. Continued

	Hypothesis	Finding
H14	Trait volatility moderates the effect of abusive supervision on subordinates' supervisor-directed deviance, such that the positive relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed deviance is amplified for subordinates who possess high levels of trait volatility.	Not supported
H15a	Trait volatility is positively related to abusive supervision.	Not supported
H15b	Anger and supervisor-directed deviance partially mediate the effects of subordinates' trait volatility on abusive supervision.	Not supported
H16	Trait withdrawal moderates the effect of abusive supervision on subordinates' fear, such that the positive relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' fear is amplified for subordinates who possess high levels of trait withdrawal.	Not supported
H17	Trait withdrawal moderates the effect of abusive supervision on subordinates' supervisor-directed avoidance, such that the positive relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed avoidance is amplified for subordinates who possess high levels of trait withdrawal.	Supported
H18a	Trait withdrawal is positively related to abusive supervision.	Supported
H18b	Fear and supervisor-directed avoidance partially mediate the effects of trait withdrawal on abusive supervision.	Not supported
H19	Trait compassion moderates the effect of abusive supervision on subordinates' state compassion, such that the negative relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' state compassion becomes positive for subordinates who possess high levels of trait compassion.	Not supported

Table 5-13. Continued

	Hypothesis	Finding
H20	Trait compassion moderates the effect of abusive supervision on subordinates' supervisor-directed citizenship behavior, such that the negative relationship between abusive supervision and subordinates' supervisor-directed citizenship behavior becomes positive for subordinates who possess high levels of trait compassion.	Not supported
H21a	Trait compassion negatively predicts abusive supervision.	Not supported
H21b	State compassion and supervisor-directed citizenship behavior partially mediate the effects of trait compassion on abusive supervision.	Not supported

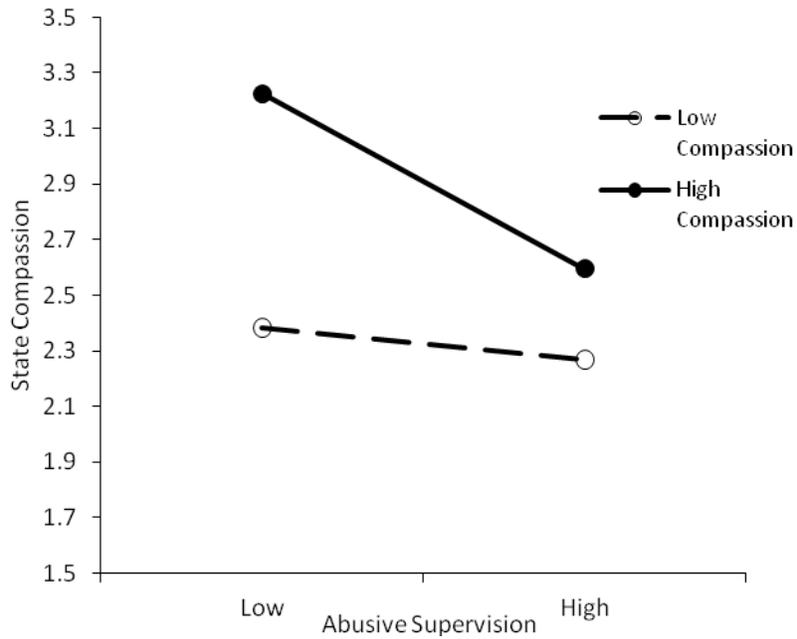


Figure 5-1. Plot of the moderating effect of trait compassion on the relationship between abusive supervision and state compassion

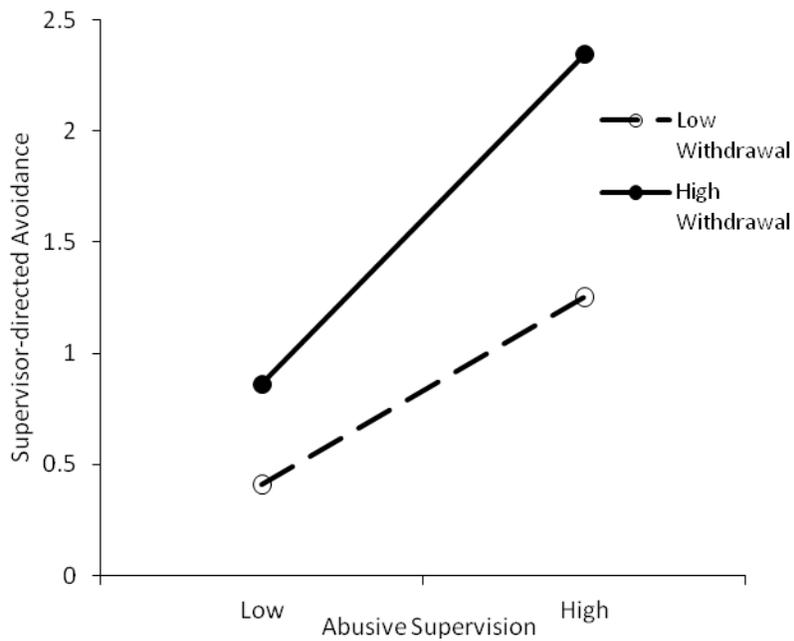


Figure 5-2. Plot of the moderating effect of trait withdrawal on the relationship between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed avoidance

## CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION

Perhaps because mistreatment can influence us so powerfully, a burgeoning literature has examined its prevalence and correlates in the workplace. Beyond these findings, however, much remains to be discovered regarding the dynamic nature of destructive workplace relationships, and numerous scholars have called for such research (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Barling et al., 2009; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Rodriguez-Munoz, Baillien, De Witte, Moreno-Jimenez, & Pastor, 2009). The current study's six-wave longitudinal design was, in part, an effort to respond to these calls, and allowed a number of dynamic processes potentially involved in the development of abusive supervisor – subordinate relationships to be brought to light.

One of the most interesting sets of findings demonstrated that the causal nature of the relationships between abusive supervision and subordinates' behaviors varied with the type of behavior examined. Abusive supervision emerged as a predictor, but not as a consequence of supervisor-directed deviance; abusive supervision and supervisor-directed avoidance were reciprocally related; and abusive supervision and supervisor-directed citizenship behavior were unrelated directly.

Results also revealed that emotions played a substantial role in mediating the effects of abusive supervision on subordinates' behaviors. Anger fully mediated the abusive supervision – supervisor-directed deviance relationship, and fear partially mediated the abusive supervision – supervisor-directed avoidance relationship. Furthermore, although abusive supervision had no impact alone on supervisor-directed citizenship behavior, individuals who felt less compassion for their supervisors after falling prey to mistreatment tended to withhold such citizenship behavior.

A final set of findings demonstrated that personality influenced the amount of abuse employees experienced as well as their reactions to mistreatment. In particular, compared to low-trait withdrawal individuals, high-trait withdrawal individuals were more likely to endure abuse and, also, to steer clear of their supervisors in response to it. Interestingly, although trait withdrawal moderated the abusive supervision – supervisor-directed avoidance relationship, and although it was linked to higher general levels of fear, trait withdrawal did not influence whether individuals responded to mistreatment with fear. It was also unrelated to supervisor-directed avoidance, and its effects on abusive supervision were not mediated by fear or supervisor-directed avoidance. Taken together, this pattern of findings reveals an interesting dynamic. High-trait withdrawal individuals are more likely to experience overall levels of abusive supervision not because they are more likely to be fearful or avoidant in general, but at least, in part, because they are prone to reacting to abuse with avoidance (which, in turn, tends to incite further abuse).

One additional personality trait influenced how subordinates responded to abusive supervision. Contrary to my predictions, high-trait compassion individuals were especially lacking in state compassion after experiencing mistreatment. Although unexpected, this finding does have a viable explanation. Cognitive affective personality systems theory (CAPS; Mischel & Shoda, 1995) argues that behaviors in given situations vary reliably within individuals, not necessarily that a given trait predicts similar behaviors across all situations. Applying this theory to the current set of findings involving compassion means that, even though some individuals might possess a tendency to respond compassionately across several situations (typifying the high-trait

compassion individual), in certain instances these individuals can feel reliably less compassionate than their low-trait compassion counterparts. For instance, because of their underlying prosocial values, high-trait compassion individuals might respond with heightened compassion towards someone who has been harmed, but especially without compassion toward the perpetrator responsible for the harm. These seemingly disparate responses are both consistent with the fundamental prosocial motivation often thought to characterize agreeable individuals, and may explain why high-trait compassion individuals are especially lacking in compassion for abusive supervisors.

### **Theoretical Implications**

By shedding light on the dynamic nature of certain supervisor-subordinate social interactions, this study contributes to our understanding of how subordinates' behaviors can encourage and reinforce abusive supervision, and thus, how discrete episodes of mistreatment can develop into dysfunctional relationships over time. Of each of the potential behavioral reactions to abusive supervision examined, supervisor-directed avoidance appeared to be the most destructive, in that it was the most likely to “backfire” and lead to more, not less, mistreatment. This reciprocal relationship suggests that, in some instances, abusive relationships are the product of self-fulfilling prophecies (Merton, 1948)—beliefs that either directly or indirectly cause themselves to be true as a result of positive feedback between the belief and behavior. In this instance, a subordinate who experiences an episode of mistreatment might come to believe that his or her supervisor is prone to treating employees poorly and thus, should be avoided. The supervisor, in turn, might misinterpret this reaction as indicative of a subordinate's lack of motivation—a characteristic perhaps perceived as deserving of further mistreatment. Subsequent abuse can reinforce the subordinate's initial belief,

resulting in additional avoidant behavior that further serves to reinforce the supervisor's belief regarding the employee's motivation, and so on. Such interactions set the stage for a vicious cycle of dysfunctional behavior that can eventually transform a positive working relationship, punctuated by occasional unpleasant social interaction, into a destructive one. Other behaviors, such as supervisor-directed deviance and supervisor-directed citizenship behavior did not appear to predict increases in abuse, and thus, from the subordinate's perspective, appear to be more effective coping mechanisms.

The results of this study also have implications for victim precipitation theory, which proposes that victims may knowingly or unknowingly contribute to their becoming targets of mistreatment (Amir, 1967; Curtis, 1974; Wolfgang, 1967). That the relationship between abusive supervision and avoidance was largely mediated by subordinate's fear, and that individuals who possessed a dispositional tendency to react to mistreatment with avoidance experienced higher levels of overall abuse lends credence to the notion that individuals who respond to abusive supervision with avoidance are likely to become "submissive victims". According to Olweus (1978), submissive victims, who appear to be anxious, sensitive, and low in self-esteem, are vulnerable to abuse because they are "easy targets."

Contrary to my expectations, however, findings did not support the idea that individuals who engage in deviance or who are dispositionally aggressive (i.e., possessing high levels of trait volatility) become what Olweus (1978) described as "provocative victims"—individuals prone to aggressive behavior that invites retaliatory responses from others. Likewise, contrary to other cross-sectional findings (e.g., Aquino & Bommer, 2003), I found no support for the proposition that acting favorably toward

one's supervisor, or that possessing high levels of trait compassion decreased one's likelihood of further victimization.

With respect to deviance, perhaps such behavior, acts as a deterrent for mistreatment in certain instances. This proposition is consistent with a growing stream of literature suggesting that anger and aggression can be functional in a number of circumstances (c.f., Averill, 1983). If true in certain instances for the supervisor-directed deviance – abusive supervision relationship, any positive effect of supervisor-directed deviance on abusive supervision might be suppressed. Thus, moderators of this relationship should be investigated to gain a better understanding of the conditions under which supervisor-directed deviance positively and negatively predicts abusive supervision.

Regarding the supervisor-directed citizenship – abusive supervision relationship, one explanation for the failure of supervisor-directed citizenship behavior to predict abusive supervision might have to do with whether or not supervisors perceived supervisor-directed citizenship behavior to be “part of the job” (i.e., not truly extra-role). More specifically, if some supervisors consider citizenship behavior to be within the realm of subordinates' regular job duties, it seems unlikely that it would foster the positive reciprocity norms typically generated by behaviors viewed as more benevolent. As a result, supervisors would not necessarily feel obligated to treat employees that engage in supervisor-directed citizenship especially well.

A final theoretical implication involves the role of emotions in adversarial interactions. The results of this study suggest that being mistreated by one's supervisor is a highly emotional experience. Even when controlling for personality traits that are

especially associated with the tendency to experience emotion (i.e., extraversion, neuroticism) subordinates who perceived that their supervisor had mistreated them tended to feel angrier, more fearful, and less compassionate toward their supervisor. Furthermore, that fear partially mediated the relationship between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed avoidance and that anger fully mediated the relationship between abusive supervision and supervisor-directed deviance provides evidence that these emotions play a central role in fueling subordinates' behavioral reactions to abusive supervision.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The results of this study should be interpreted with its limitations in mind. One limitation is that the data collected to assess many of the relationships in this study were gathered from a single source, raising the possibility that common method variance might have inflated some of the effect sizes (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). However, many aspects of the study design should mitigate this concern. First, for several of the analyses, the independent and dependent measures were separated in time. Temporal separation diminishes the transfer of contextually relevant retrieval cues from one time point to another because previously recalled information is likely to leave individuals' short term memories (Podsakoff et al., 2003). By controlling for extraversion and neuroticism (i.e., trait volatility and trait withdrawal), the possibility that trait affectivity is responsible for the significant relationships found in this study has also been reduced. Finally, the use of within-person analyses helps to rule out individual differences and stable environmental factors as possible explanations for the relationships between abusive supervision and subordinates' emotions and behaviors.

A more substantive limitation stemming from the fact that abusive supervision and subordinates' behaviors were assessed solely by subordinates, is that the results of this study do little to show exactly what the driving forces are behind supervisors' responses to subordinates' behaviors. Although theory provides convincing arguments for why supervisors respond to subordinates in certain ways, future research is necessary to bolster these arguments with empirical support. Relatedly, it would also be beneficial to obtain a more accurate view of how supervisors' and subordinates' personalities might interact to influence patterns of mistreatment. To do so, researchers should collect longitudinal data from both supervisors and subordinates.

Finally, although I have discussed several advantages of using longitudinal data to understand dynamic relational patterns, there are some potential drawbacks to measuring predictor and criterion variables separately. One such drawback involves the appropriateness of the lag time between measurements. If lag times are too long, they can result in increased sample attrition and may also mask relationships that truly exist if the causal effect fades over time (Podsokoff et al., 2003). Likewise, if lag times are too short, the process of interest will not have sufficient time to unfold. Thus, it is essential that the lag times incorporated into longitudinal study designs correspond to the process of interest as it naturally occurs. However, as noted by Selig and Preacher (2009), "often there is no theoretical or empirical basis for choosing lags," (p. 150). For this study, the choice of a lag time was especially difficult. On the one hand, emotions tend to be fleeting and short-lived, whereas relational patterns may take a comparatively longer time to establish. In light of trying to capture both emotional and relational aspects of abusive supervision, a one month lag seemed appropriate. However, future

research may wish to implement other lag times to better understand how they influence findings.

### **Practical Implications**

Unlike with sexual and physical harassment, in the United States, there is no legislation to guard employees from psychological harassment. However, there are hints that the legal landscape may soon change. Laws already protect workers in Australia, Canada, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, and at least 16 U.S. states have proposed legislation. Thus, although it is important to better understand how abusive supervision and related phenomena (e.g., workplace bullying) emerge and develop over time for financial and psychological reasons, such an understanding also seems especially important for legal reasons. To this end, it is crucial to identify the mechanisms that perpetuate abusive supervision so that they can be targeted for training and intervention. Obtaining an understanding of dispositional predictors of abusive supervision would also be useful in enabling managers to identify applicants and employees most likely to become victims and perpetrators of mistreatment.

This study helps to accomplish some of these objectives. Knowledge that subordinates' reactions to abusive supervision can help sustain mistreatment suggests that training programs and interventions targeting both subordinates' and supervisors—rather than only supervisors—would be useful in stopping or preventing abusive supervision. Such programs might provide organizational members with information about what abusive and avoidant behaviors entail as well as with information about how these behaviors can destructively reinforce one another. Training of this nature should enable supervisors and subordinates to better recognize when their own actions or

those of their coworkers are fueling a vicious cycle of behavior—one that could ultimately mature into a full-fledged, psychologically abusive relationship.

In cases when it is impractical to provide such training for all organizational members, it would be sensible to identify individuals who are most likely to be victimized for enrollment into these programs. The finding that high-trait withdrawal individuals are both more likely to react to abuse in a manner that reinforces it (i.e., with avoidance) and more likely to experience higher levels of abusive supervision suggests that selecting candidates based on levels of trait withdrawal would be one way to accomplish this goal. Of course, it would also be useful to identify characteristics of those who are prone to becoming abusive so that, they too, can enroll in training programs. Unfortunately, the data collected for this study do not allow me to identify any such characteristics, and few studies have explored them. Thus, this is another area in much need of future research.

### **Conclusion**

For both instrumental and affective reasons, developing and maintaining positive social relationships is vital to our well-being. Our social environments “send us powerful messages about who we are and how we are valued,” (Gersick, Bartunek, & Dutton, 2000, p.1026). They shape our identities, help us make sense of our surroundings, and fulfill our innate needs for belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). What is more, when social relationships become adversarial, we are often deeply affected; research suggests that the damaging effects of negative social interaction can far outweigh the benefits derived from interactions more positive in nature (Rook, 1984).

This dissertation provided insight into how such adversarial relationships—particularly those among supervisors and subordinates—come to be. Findings show that, at least in some instances, victims and perpetrators in abusive relationships engage in behaviors that are mutually reinforcing. These findings are important because they can be used to arm supervisors and subordinates with the knowledge to understand when and why destructive relational patterns are beginning to occur. Such knowledge—I hope—will empower individuals to alter their behavior and prevent “negative acts” from cascading into the “negative relationships” we know to be so psychologically damaging.

APPENDIX A  
LIST OF ITEMS USED IN INITIAL SURVEY (COWORKER REPORT)

**Trait volatility**

I see my coworker as someone who...

- Gets angry easily.
- Rarely gets irritated.
- Gets upset easily.
- Keeps his/her emotions under control.
- Changes his/her mood a lot.
- Rarely loses his/her composure.
- Is a person whose moods go up and down easily.
- Is not easily annoyed.
- Gets easily agitated.
- Can be stirred up easily.

**Trait withdrawal**

I see my coworker as someone who...

- Seldom feels blue.
- Is filled with doubts about things.
- Feels comfortable with his/her self.
- Feels threatened easily.
- Rarely feels depressed.
- Worries about things.
- Is easily discouraged.
- Is not embarrassed easily.
- Becomes overwhelmed by events.
- Is afraid of many things.

**Trait compassion**

I see my coworker as someone who...

- Is not interested in other people's problems.
- Feels others' emotions.
- Inquires about others' well-being.
- Can't be bothered with others' needs.
- Sympathizes with others' feelings.
- Is indifferent to the feelings of others.
- Takes no time for others.
- Takes an interest in other people's lives.
- Doesn't have a soft side.

- Likes to do things for others.

### **Extraversion**

I see my coworker as someone who...

- Is the life of the party.
- Doesn't talk a lot.
- Talks to a lot of different people at parties.
- Keeps in the background.

### **Abusive supervision**

During the past six months, my coworker's immediate supervisor has:

- Ridiculed my coworker.
- Told my coworker his/her thoughts and feelings were stupid.
- Given my coworker the silent treatment.
- Put my coworker down in front of others.
- Invaded my coworker's privacy.
- Reminded my coworker of his/her past mistakes and failures.
- Not given my coworker credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort.
- Blamed my coworker to save him/herself embarrassment.
- Broken promises he/she made to my coworker.
- Expressed anger at my coworker when he/she was mad for another reason.
- Made negative comments about my coworker to others.
- Been rude to my coworker.
- Not allowed my coworker to interact with other coworkers.
- Told my coworker he/she is incompetent.
- Lied to my coworker.

APPENDIX B  
LIST OF ITEMS USED IN INITIAL SURVEY (SELF-REPORT)

**Demographics**

- What is your gender? (Male, Female)
- What is your ethnicity? (Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian/Pac Isle, Other)
- About how long have you been reporting to your current immediate supervisor?
- What best characterizes the nature of your present job position? (Entry level; Non-managerial, experienced employee; Managerial, non-professional; Non-managerial, professional; Managerial, professional; CEO or top executive)

**Job mobility**

- I would have no problem finding an acceptable job if I quit.
- If I were to quit my job, I could find another one that is just as good.

**Abusive supervision**

During the past six months, my immediate supervisor has:

- Ridiculed me.
- Told me my thoughts and feelings were stupid.
- Given me the silent treatment.
- Put me down in front of others.
- Invaded my privacy.
- Reminded me of my past mistakes and failures.
- Not given me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort.
- Blamed me to save him/herself embarrassment.
- Broken promises he/she made.
- Expressed anger at me when he/she was mad for another reason.
- Made negative comments about me to others.
- Been rude to me.
- Not allowed me to interact with my coworkers.
- Told me I'm incompetent.
- Lied to me.

APPENDIX C  
LIST OF ITEMS USED IN MONTHLY SURVEY

**Anger**

During the past month, when thinking about or interacting with my immediate supervisor, I have felt...

- Angry
- Hostile
- Enraged

**Fear**

During the past month, when thinking about or interacting with my immediate supervisor, I have felt...

- Afraid
- Scared
- Frightened
- Nervous
- Jittery
- Shaky

**Compassion**

During the past month, when thinking about or interacting with my immediate supervisor, I have felt...

- Compassionate
- Sympathetic
- Moved
- Tender
- Warm
- Softhearted

**Supervisor-directed deviance**

During the past month, I have...

- Made fun of my supervisor.
- Acted rudely toward my supervisor.
- Gossiped about my supervisor.
- Publicly embarrassed my supervisor.
- Refused to talk to my supervisor.
- Said something hurtful to my supervisor.
- Swore at my supervisor.

### **Supervisor-directed avoidance**

During the past month, I have...

- Avoided my supervisor.
- Lived as if my supervisor didn't exist.
- Kept as much distance as possible between my supervisor and me.
- Went the other way when I saw my supervisor coming.
- Pretended to be sick and stay home in order to avoid my supervisor.
- Took vacation days in order to avoid any interaction with my supervisor.
- Tried to avoid eye contact with my supervisor so that (s)he didn't start a conversation with me.

### **Supervisor-directed citizenship**

During the past month, I have...

- Accepted added responsibility to help my supervisor.
- Helped my supervisor when he/she had a heavy workload.
- Assisted my supervisor with his/her work when not asked.
- Took a personal interest in my supervisor.
- Passed along work-related information to my supervisor.

### **Abusive supervision**

During the past month, my immediate supervisor has...

- Ridiculed me.
- Told me my thoughts and feelings were stupid.
- Given me the silent treatment.
- Put me down in front of others.
- Invaded my privacy.
- Reminded me of my past mistakes and failures.
- Not given me credit for jobs requiring a lot of effort.
- Blamed me to save him/herself embarrassment.
- Broken promises he/she made.
- Expressed anger at me when he/she was mad for another reason.
- Made negative comments about me to others.
- Been rude to me.
- Not allowed me to interact with my coworkers.
- Told me I'm incompetent.
- Lied to me.

### **Time spent interacting with supervisor**

- During the past month, roughly what percentage of your time at work did you spend interacting with your immediate supervisor?

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