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Linking Abusive Supervision to Employee Engagement and Exhaustion

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ABSTRACT

This research extends the differentiated job demands–resource model by integrating the main propositions of the transactional theory of stress to examine how cognitive appraisal processes link employee perceptions of abusive supervision to engagement and exhaustion. Two studies were conducted using a broad sample of employees. Study 1 developed the abusive supervision demand appraisal measure (ABSDAM). Study 2 examined the role that challenge or hindrance demand appraisals play in employee reactions to perceptions of abusive supervision. Study 1 determined that the ABSDAM was a valid means to measure how employees appraise abusive supervision as a challenge and/or hindrance demand. Study 2 found that hindrance demand appraisals mediate the relationship between perceived abusive supervision and exhaustion, while challenge demand appraisals mediate the relationship between perceived abusive supervision and engagement. This study suggests that accounting for demand appraisal processes provides further insight into how perceptions of abusive supervision may contribute to engagement and exhaustion.

KEYWORDS

Abusive supervision;
engagement; exhaustion;
stress

The destructive side of supervisory behavior has obtained widespread interest in the literature within the last decade (Martinko, Harvey, Brees, & Mackey, 2013; Tepper, 2007). The focus of many studies has been on perceptions of abusive supervision, which is formally defined as a subordinate's subjective assessment of the supervisor's engagement in continued hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Approximately 46% of employees in the United States experience abuse from their direct supervisor, and abusive supervision is estimated to cost organizations roughly \$23 billion every year (Gallagher, Yung, Meyer, & Tompor, 2012; Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006).

Perceptions of abusive supervision are an organizational stressor, capable of taxing or exceeding an employee's resources (Restubog, Scott, & Zagenczyk, 2011). Several research studies have supported this assertion, showing that abusive supervision is associated with psychological distress and stress-related outcomes such as increased frustration, helplessness (Ashforth, 1997), somatic health complaints (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002), and diminished levels of self-esteem (Burton & Hoobler, 2006). However, what is lacking in the current literature linking abusive supervision to employee well-being is an understanding

of how employee appraisals of abuse may impact these relationships. Recent research has shown the importance of employee appraisals of supervisory abuse in understanding employee reactions to abuse (e.g., Burton, Taylor, & Barber, 2014; Eschleman, Bowling, Michel, & Burns, 2014; Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012). For example, one employee may appraise the supervisor's abuse as threatening, while another employee may appraise the same supervisory behavior as motivational. In fact, Tepper (2000) noted that a supervisor may belittle subordinates because they perceive these actions are necessary to elicit higher performance. This study addresses the missing gap in the literature by examining how abusive supervision may differentially predict two forms of employee well-being—engagement and exhaustion—through employees' appraisals of abuse as a challenge or hindrance.

Applying a theoretically modified differentiated job demands–resources model (JD-R) (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Van den Broeck, De Cuyper, De Witte, & Vansteenkiste, 2010) and subjective individual appraisal approach (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), we conducted two studies to examine the relationship between abusive supervision and employee well-being. In the first study, we developed and validated a measure assessing challenge and hindrance cognitive appraisals of abusive

supervision. In the second study, we examined challenge versus hindrance appraisal pathways in the relationship between perceptions of abusive supervision and employee well-being.

Appraisals of abusive supervision

Abusive supervision describes behaviors such as public ridicule, misdirected blame, and the silent treatment (Tepper, 2000). Drawing from Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress, Restubog et al. (2011) noted that abusive supervision acts as a stressor (i.e., demand) that can generate negative thoughts and feelings that tax or exceed an employee's resources. However, the differentiated JD-R model (Crawford et al., 2010; Van den Broeck et al., 2010) proposes that while all demands cause strain, they also vary systematically such that some demands trigger psychological responses that only lead to exhaustion while others elicit responses that may also promote engagement (Crawford et al., 2010; Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Exhaustion reflects a prolonged state of low energy and weariness (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001), whereas engagement refers to a positive motivational state that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). Employee exhaustion and engagement can have a significant influence on organizations. Exhaustion has been associated with less productivity, work withdrawal, and poor worker health (Maslach et al., 2001), while employee engagement is related to a variety of organizational variables ranging from job satisfaction and citizenship behaviors (Saks, 2006) to employee health (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

The differentiated JD-R model posits that employees appraise organizational stressors (i.e., job demands) as potentially challenging and/or threatening. Challenge stressors are demands that are appraised as having the potential to promote mastery, personal development, and future gains and are characterized by positive emotions such as eagerness, excitement, and exhilaration (Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Examples of challenge stressors include workload, time pressure, and work responsibility (LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005). Challenge stressors tend to be perceived by employees as leading to positive outcomes such as personal growth and achievement (Crawford et al., 2010; Van den Broeck et al., 2010). Alternatively, hindrance stressors (or threats) are demands that are appraised as having the potential to impede personal growth, learning, and achievement of goals and are characterized by negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and anger (Cavanaugh

et al., 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Examples of hindrance stressors include organizational politics, administrative hassles, and emotional conflict (LePine et al., 2005). Hindrance stressors are generally perceived as obstacles that hinder progress for personal growth and achievement, and can result in energy depletion (Crawford et al., 2010; Van den Broeck et al., 2010).

Most studies using the JD-R model tend to classify specific types of workplace demands as challenges or hindrances. However, this approach is counter to the transactional theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which emphasizes that people have differential reactions to the same stressors. In this approach, no stressor is perceived as uniformly as a challenge or hindrance; although abusive supervision is often seen as a hindrance, this would not preclude some people from perceiving it as a challenge. In fact, many people perceive challenge in stressful situations and focus on positive aspects such as opportunities for success, learning, and growth (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Transactional stress theory also notes that perceptions of hindrance and challenge are distinct but not mutually exclusive appraisals that can occur simultaneously for the same work demand (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Therefore, even the same employee could perceive abusive supervision as both a challenge and a hindrance demand. Adopting this perspective, we propose that employees can appraise abusive behaviors as providing an opportunity for professional growth in addition to creating obstacles for achieving goals.

Effects of abusive supervision on demand appraisals and well-being

According to the transactional theory of stress, "how a person construes an event shapes the emotional and behavioral response" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 24). This theory, which emphasizes differential reactions to the same demand, runs counter to the aforementioned JD-R approach of categorizing workplace stressors as either a challenge or hindrance (e.g., Cavanaugh et al., 2000). However, these two approaches are not necessarily in conflict. Recent research has highlighted how some stressors are perceived as primarily a challenge or hindrance across all employees, while still showing individual variations in both appraisals for a given stressor (Webster, Beehr, & Love, 2011). Consistent with their JD-R theory classifications, role conflict and role ambiguity demonstrated higher hindrance ratings across all employees, whereas workload and responsibility received higher challenge ratings. However, many employees also simultaneously appraised each stressor

as both a challenge and hindrance. For example, stressors typically classified as a hindrance (role conflict and ambiguity) were associated with both challenge and hindrance appraisals. Research on cognitive appraisal processes, however, has not examined the degree to which abusive supervision can be assessed as a challenge by employees.

Extending this logic, we expect that employees are more likely to report higher hindrance rather than challenge appraisals for abusive supervision because it is often associated with negative emotional and behavioral outcomes (Tepper, 2007). However, some employees may also perceive abusive supervision to be a challenge, similar to research showing increased challenge appraisal ratings for other hindrances (Webster et al., 2011). Therefore, we propose that abusive supervision can be positively related to both hindrance and challenge appraisals. Specifically, we examine the direct effects of abusive supervision on exhaustion and engagement through challenge and hindrance appraisal pathways.

We expect that hindrance demand appraisals of abusive supervision will engender exhaustion whereas challenge appraisals will promote engagement. Exhaustion results from hindrance demands because they are believed to deplete energy and exhaust mental and physical resources through sustained effort over time (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Research has consistently found that hindrance demands have a direct positive effect on exhaustion, anxiety, and burnout (Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007). Engagement, on the other hand, emanates from challenge demands because they are perceived as providing opportunities for growth, which elicits positive emotions (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). Challenge demands have a positive effect on motivation, performance (LePine et al., 2005), job satisfaction (Cavanaugh et al., 2000), and engagement (Van Den Broeck et al., 2010). Therefore, we propose that the effect of abusive supervision on well-being occurs through employee challenge and hindrance appraisal pathways.

H1: Challenge demands mediate the relationship between perceived abusive supervision and engagement.

H2: Hindrance demands mediate the relationship between perceived abusive supervision and exhaustion.

Method—Study 1

Sample and procedure

For scale development and validation, we recruited 631 participants through Mechanical Turk (MTurk), which is an online Web-based platform that enlists a diverse

subject pool to complete simple tasks through providing minimal financial compensation. MTurk has gained credibility among scholars in recent years as an effective means for obtaining participants for social science research that results in samples that are comparable to those obtained from traditional subject pools (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). We compensated participants 25 cents for completing a 5- to 10-minute survey.

Prospective participants were told that the purpose of the study was to investigate subordinate–supervisor interactions. Those who consented to participate in the study were asked to answer a series of questions to determine their eligibility. Participants were disqualified if they were not proficient in English, were under 18 years of age, were not U.S. residents, were not employed at least part-time, did not have a direct supervisor, or if their supervisor did not engage in any of the following specific behaviors: “is rude to me,” “reminds me of my past mistakes or failures,” “gives me the silent treatment,” and/or “puts me down in front of others.” In addition, we removed 40 participants from the analyses because they answered both quality indicator questions (i.e., Please answer “Strongly Agree” to this question) incorrectly and it was suspected that they answered the survey carelessly (Meade & Craig, 2012).

The final sample consisted of 243 participants (50% men) with an average age of 31.06 years ($SD = 10.94$). Most participants indicated they were Caucasian (77%), followed by African-American (9%), Asian (7%), and Hispanic/Latino (3%). All participants were employed either part-time (36%) or full-time (64%) with an average of 11.91 years of work experience ($SD = 9.97$), 3.80 years tenure with their current organization ($SD = 4.37$), and 2.32 years reporting to their current supervisor ($SD = 2.44$).

Item development

The abusive supervision demand appraisal measure (ABSDAM) items were developed explicitly for the current study using the procedures outlined by Hinkin (1998). All preliminary items, based on conceptualizations provided in the literature for challenge and hindrance demands, were reviewed independently by each of the authors, and consensus on the final 22 items was reached prior to distribution of the survey to the participants. Unlike existing primary appraisal measures (e.g., Ferguson, Matthews, & Cox, 1999; Peacock & Wong, 1990) that are designed to measure general stressful situations and outcomes, this scale was specifically designed to assess how employees appraise their

supervisor's behavior and its perceived impact on work-related outcomes. The challenge demand items were created to depict goal-relevant and congruent behavior and to measure the extent to which employees feel their supervisor's abusive behavior promotes mastery and professional growth, as well as the degree to which they feel the behavior presents a challenge at work. In contrast, the hindrance demand items were designed to depict goal-relevant and incongruent behavior and measure the extent to which employees feel their supervisor's abusive behavior thwarts their learning, professional growth, and goal achievement, as well as the degree to which they feel the behavior is threatening. To focus participants' appraisals on their supervisors' abusive behavior, participants were asked to first complete a measure of abusive supervision and rate the frequency to which they experienced these behaviors prior to completing the ABSDAM. Instructions for the ABSDAM asked participants to think about the responses they just provided on the measure of abusive supervision and rate their appraisals of those behaviors (where 0 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much so*).

Measures

Abusive supervision

Tepper's (2000) 15-item measure was used to measure perceived abusive supervision. Items were rated using a 5-point scale (1 = *cannot remember him/her ever using this behavior with me*, to 5 = *he/she uses this behavior very often with me*). Items were averaged to form a composite such that high scores indicated a greater frequency of perceiving abusive supervision ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.05$, $\alpha = .90$).

Stress appraisal measure

The threat, challenge, centrality, and stressfulness subscales from Peacock and Wong's (1990) Stress Appraisal Measure (SAM) were used to help establish construct validity by examining the pattern of correlations with the ABSDAM. To avoid negatively biasing participant responses, scale items were slightly modified to refer to their supervisor's behavior rather than the "situation" or "problem." Each subscale contained 4 items (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *extremely*). Items were averaged to create a composite score for each subscale: threat ($M = 3.23$, $SD = .97$, $\alpha = .80$), challenge ($M = 2.17$, $SD = .90$, $\alpha = .72$), stressfulness ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.00$, $\alpha = .86$), and centrality ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.00$, $\alpha = .84$).

Appraisal of life events

The threat and challenge subscales from the Ferguson et al. (1999) Appraisal of Life Event (ALE) measure were also used to help establish the construct validity of the ABSDAM. Each subscale contained six items (0 = *not at all*; 5 = *very much so*) and items were averaged to create a composite score for threat ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.25$, $\alpha = .88$) and challenge ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 1.11$, $\alpha = .90$) appraisals.

Results

Preliminary evidence for the validity of the ABSDAM was established through evaluating the factor structure and the reliability for each subscale. As indicated by Cronbach's alphas greater than .80, the reliability estimates for the challenge demand ($\alpha = .92$) and hindrance demand ($\alpha = .95$) appraisal scales were both appropriate. Maximum likelihood (ML) factor analysis with an oblique rotation was used to identify the shared variance among a set of items that model two latent constructs (challenge and hindrance demand appraisals of abusive supervision). According to Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, and Strahan (1999), these methods provide the best estimates when the aim of the analysis is to identify the underlying structure for a correlated set of variables. The results of the analyses produced a two-factor solution as indicated by the following criteria: both Factors accounted for more than 50% of the total variance; eigenvalues for each of the two factors exceeded 1; the scree plot graphically depicted a sharp decline in the magnitude of the eigenvalues after the first two factors; and all items had a minimal loading of .32 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The results of these analyses suggest that all 22 items be retained, 11 items each for the challenge demand appraisal and hindrance demand appraisal scales, respectively (see Table 1).

Overall, the results suggest that the ABSDAM is a useful means for assessing appraisals of abusive supervision. The exploratory factor analysis revealed that the ABSDAM displayed a two-factor structure reflecting two distinct constructs: challenge and hindrance demands. The subscales had a high level of internal consistency and showed evidence of convergent and discriminant validity as indicated by their correlations with other theoretically relevant measures (see Table 2). The ABSDAM is used in the subsequent study to assess the mediating mechanisms by which cognitive appraisals affect the relationship between perceptions of abusive supervision and employee well-being.

Table 1. Factor loading for exploratory factor analysis with oblique rotation of demand appraisal measures.

Item	Challenge demand appraisal	Hindrance demand appraisal
21. Makes me more proficient at my job	0.88	0.07
12. Helps me improve my overall job performance	0.88	-0.03
13. Provides me with a positive challenge.	0.85	-0.05
9. Motivates me to become the best I can be at my job.	0.82	-0.03
19. Helps increase my chances of getting a promotion at work.	0.79	0.11
1. Helps me achieve my work goals.	0.80	0.02
8. Contributes to my success at work.	0.79	-0.03
17. Helps me become a more valuable employee at work.	0.79	-0.05
15. Makes me want to be better at my job.	0.73	-0.10
4. Encourages me to acquire new knowledge and skills.	0.70	-0.07
6. Facilitates my overall growth at work.	0.65	0.08
11. Deters me from being a top performer in my work role.	-0.03	0.80
22. Discourages me from being the best at my job.	0.05	0.76
7. Stands in the way of me achieving my goals at work.	-0.04	0.75
10. Interferes with my ability to learn new knowledge and skills.	0.06	0.74
5. Keeps "me down" by undermining my performance at work.	-0.03	0.72
14. Has a negative impact on my overall job performance.	-0.14	0.71
20. Threatens my well-being.	0.25	0.71
2. Creates obstacles which prevent me from being successful in my job.	-0.20	0.70
16. Prevents me from being recognized as a good performer at work.	-0.10	0.67
3. Contribute to mistakes that I make at work.	0.03	0.68
18. Makes me feel incompetent at my job.	0.03	0.67
Eigenvalue	7.56	5.23
Percent of total variance	34.36%	23.76%

Note. $N = 241$. Factor loadings $> .32$ are in boldface.

Table 2. Correlations, means, and standard deviations for appraisal measures—Study 1.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Challenge	2.34	1.18	(.92)								
2. Hindrance	3.67	1.15	-0.16*	(.95)							
3. SAM Threat	3.24	0.97	-0.10 ⁺	0.73***	(.80)						
4. SAM Challenge	2.17	0.90	0.64***	0.05	0.09	(.72)					
5. SAM Stressful	3.41	1.00	-0.16**	0.68***	0.83***	-0.01	(.86)				
6. SAM Centrality	3.18	1.00	0.05	0.60***	0.79***	0.26***	0.73***	(.84)			
7. ALE Threat	3.08	1.25	0.13*	0.63***	0.66***	0.28***	0.57***	0.56***	(.88)		
8. ALE Challenge	2.23	1.11	0.76***	0.13*	0.07	0.67***	-0.01	0.17**	0.36***	(.88)	
9. ABS	2.41	1.05	0.20**	0.40***	0.32***	0.23***	0.27***	0.26***	0.48***	0.31***	(.90)

Note. Reliabilities are on the diagonal. SAM = Stress Appraisal Measure, ALE = Appraisal of Life Events, ABS = Perceived Abusive Supervision. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, ⁺ $p < .10$.

Study 2

Sample and procedure

Prospective participants were again recruited through MTurk for a study on "subordinate-supervisor interactions," with participants disqualified from participation if they did not meet one of the following eligibility criteria: proficient in English, at least 18 years of age, a U.S. resident, employed at least part-time, have a direct supervisor, or did not indicate that their supervisor was abusive. Of the remaining sample, participants were also excluded from the analyses if they did not provide their e-mail address, did not complete both waves of the study, or answered the quality indicators incorrectly on either survey. The final sample consisted of 273 participants (58% men) with an average age of 30.68 years ($SD = 20.64$). Most participants indicated they were Caucasian (77%), followed by Asian (11%), Hispanic/Latino (6%), and African-American (4%). All participants were employed either part-time (33%) or

full-time (67%) with an average of 10.63 years of work experience ($SD = 8.28$), 3.72 years tenure with their current organization ($SD = 3.50$), and 2.24 years reporting to their current supervisor ($SD = 2.18$).

In Study 2, data were collected in two waves separated by approximately 2 weeks to help control for the potential for common method bias (Conway & Lance, 2010). During the first wave of data collection, participants were directed to a link that contained survey items measuring abusive supervision, demand appraisal, and demographic/work history. Upon completion, subjects were recruited to participate in the second wave of the study. Respondents were paid 25 cents for their participation during the first wave of data collection.

Approximately 2 weeks after the first data collection wave, the 323 participants that met the eligibility criteria and provided their e-mail address were e-mailed the link that contained the second part of the study. Of these participants, 85% ($n = 273$) completed items

measuring exhaustion and engagement. Participants were compensated 75 cents for their participation in the second wave of the study.

Measures

Abusive supervision

The same measure from Study 1 was used to measure perceptions of abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000). Items were averaged to form a composite measure of perceptions of abusive supervision ($M = 2.51$, $SD = .90$, $\alpha = .93$).

Engagement

The shortened 9-item (0 = *never*; 7 = *always*) version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006) was used to measure engagement. All items were averaged to form an overall composite with higher scores reflecting greater engagement ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.23$, $\alpha = .93$).

Exhaustion

The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (OLBI; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) eight-item subscale was used to measure the most central component of burnout: exhaustion. All items (1 = *strongly disagree*; 4 = *strongly agree*) were averaged to create a composite score for exhaustion ($M = 2.54$, $SD = .49$, $\alpha = .83$).

Demand appraisal

The ABSDAM, developed in Study 1, was used to assess the appraisal of abusive supervision as a challenge or hindrance. Confirmatory factor analyses confirmed the results of Study 1 and indicated that the hypothesized two-factor model provided a superior fit over a one-factor model (CFI = .99, NFI = .99, RMSR = .05, RMSEA = .05), with all factor loadings significant and greater than .40. The items from each subscale were averaged to create a composite score for Challenge Demands ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.26$, $\alpha = .96$) and Hindrance Demands ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.34$, $\alpha = .95$).

Control variable

Participant tenure with their current supervisor was used as a control variable for the current study. Previous research has shown that one’s tenure with a supervisor may influence levels of reported strain as well as responses to interpersonal mistreatment (Burton, Hoobler, & Scheuer, 2012).

Results

The means, standard deviations, reliability estimates, and correlations for the variables in this study are presented in Table 3. In order to assess model fit for our constructs of interest, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Given the ratio of estimated parameters to our sample size, we formed parcels by balancing the best and worst loading items across the parcel (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). Results indicated the five-factor measurement model (abusive supervision, challenge demand appraisals, hindrance demand appraisals, engagement, and exhaustion) fit the data (normed fit index [NFI] = .96, comparative fit index [CFI] = .98, standardized root mean square residual [SRMR] = .04, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .06).

To test our hypotheses, we examined the direct and indirect effect of abusive supervision on well-being through demand appraisals utilizing structural equation modeling to control for measurement error and the testing of multiple relationships. This approach to testing mediation has been found to be more rigorous and accurate for assessing indirect effects, as the use of confidence intervals with bootstrapping does not rely on normal distribution assumptions and very large sample sizes required of the Sobel test (e.g., Preacher & Hayes, 2008). As illustrated in Figure 1, after accounting for employee tenure with their supervisor, Hypothesis 1 is supported as the indirect effect of perceptions of abusive supervision on engagement through challenge demand appraisals was significant (Indirect Effect = $-.08$, $p < .05$). Supporting Hypothesis 2, hindrance demand appraisals mediate the relationship between perceptions of abuse

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables—Study 2.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. ABS	2.51	0.90	(.93)					
2. CD	2.46	1.26	−0.45**	(.96)				
3. HD	3.35	1.34	0.75**	−0.49**	(.95)			
4. Exhaust	2.54	0.49	0.28**	−0.13*	0.30**	(.83)		
5. Engage	4.24	1.23	−0.18**	0.23**	−0.22**	−0.62**	(.93)	
6. Tenure	2.24	2.18	0.05	−0.07	0.00	−0.02	−0.05	—

Note. $N = 273$. Reliabilities (in parentheses) appear on the diagonal. ABS = Perceived Abusive Supervision, CD = Challenge Demand Appraisals, HD = Hindrance Demand Appraisals, Tenure = Tenure with Supervisor.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

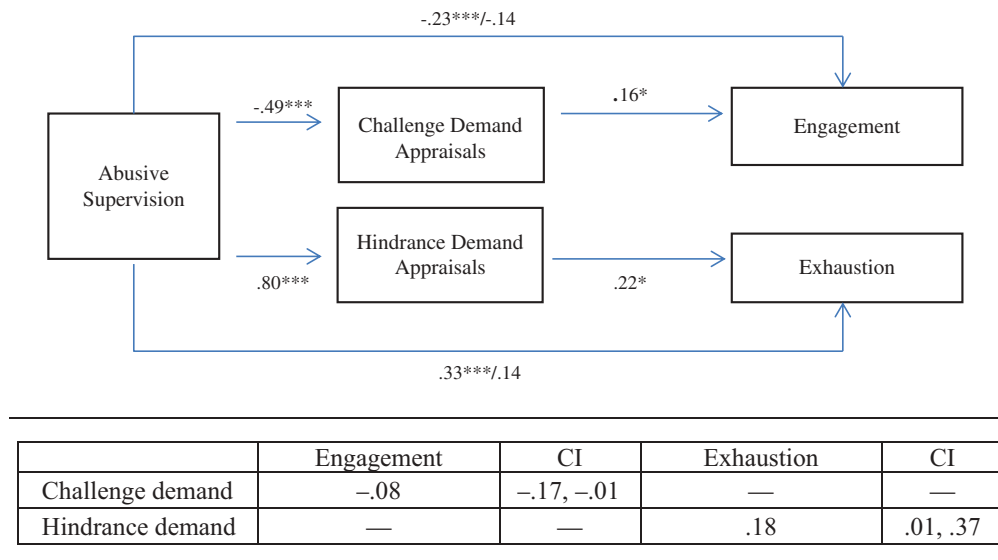


Figure 1. The direct and indirect effects of abusive supervision on well-being through hindrance and challenge demand appraisals—Study 2. *Note.* $N = 273$. Bootstrap sample size = 10,000. Direct effects are standardized coefficient estimates after controlling for tenure with supervisor. Indirect effects were tested for significance using 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI) from 10,000 bootstrap estimates. Significance: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

and exhaustion (Indirect Effect = .18, $p < .05$). In addition, the pattern of results indicates full mediation; when hindrance and challenge demands were added into the model, abusive supervision was no longer a significant predictor of either exhaustion ($\beta = .14$, ns) or engagement ($\beta = -.14$, ns). Note that, although not hypothesized, we also tested a mediation model that added a linkage between challenge demands and exhaustion as well as hindrance demands to engagement. Both of these paths were not significant (to see these results, contact the authors).

Discussion

Drawing from the differentiated JD-R model (Crawford et al., 2010; Van Den Broeck et al., 2010) and the transactional theory of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), this study provides a lens into the mediating mechanisms by which one type of job stressor—perceived abusive supervision—relates to employee well-being. Few studies have examined the relationship between perceived abusive supervision and engagement, while none appear to have accounted for the importance of cognitive appraisal processes for shaping emotional and behavioral responses to perceived abusive supervision. This study is the first, to our knowledge, to examine how cognitive appraisal processes may be important determinants for how perceived abusive supervision impacts both exhaustion and engagement.

The current study establishes demand appraisals as one mechanism that can link abusive supervision to well-being. Our results support previous research that establishes perceived abusive supervision as a type of job demand (Restubog et al., 2011) that is directly associated with higher levels of burnout (Tepper, 2000) and lower levels of engagement (Poon, 2011). We also demonstrated that the relationship between perceived abusive supervision on well-being can be explained via differential challenge versus hindrance demand appraisal pathways. Hindrance demands of abusive supervision fully accounted for the relationship between abusive supervision on exhaustion, while the relationship between perceived abusive supervision and engagement was significant through challenge demand appraisals. These results suggest that the frequent mistreatment by supervisors may be perceived as an obstacle that hinders progress for personal growth and achievement that, in turn, engenders feelings of exhaustion (e.g., Tepper, 2007). However, although challenge demand appraisals mediated the relationship between perceptions of abusive supervision and engagement, the relationships were contrary to our hypothesis. Specifically, perceptions of abuse and challenge demands were negatively related, meaning that employees were less likely to view abuse as promoting mastery, performance, or growth. This is counter to other types of hindrance stressors, like role conflict and role ambiguity, which have been positively linked with challenge appraisals (Webster et al., 2011). Given that challenge appraisals still mediated the

relationship between abusive supervision and work engagement, this finding means that abusive supervision acts as a demotivational force on work engagement that occurs through lower challenge appraisals. That is, abusive supervision appears to be a uniquely toxic work stressor that simultaneously increases exhaustion through higher hindrance appraisals and decreases engagement through lower challenge appraisals. Future research should continue to examine whether abusive supervision could ever impact positive outcomes.

Limitations and future directions

Although we took steps to reduce common method bias, testing theory regarding cognitive appraisals necessitates self-report data (Conway & Lance, 2010). In addition, the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow for strong inferences to be made about causality. According to the transactional theory of stress, the appraisal of abusive supervision can shift from challenging to hindering (and vice versa) as the situation unfolds over time (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Appraisals may, therefore, shift from challenge to hindrance appraisals as the supervisor's behavior becomes worse, the employee feels he or she can no longer manage the situation, the employee perceives it as threatening, and/or the situation interferes with professional achievement. The shift in appraisal may also have implications for the relationship between abuse and engagement or exhaustion (Crawford et al., 2010). For example, perceived abusive supervision, regardless of whether it is appraised as a challenge or hindrance demand, may be eventually reflected in exhaustion. Prolonged response to chronic stressors such as an abusive supervisor will likely wear down the employee's resources and capacity over time and lead to exhaustion (Maslach et al., 2001). Therefore, future research studies should employ longitudinal designs to measure abusive supervision, cognitive appraisals, and well-being at steady intervals throughout the course of year to gain further insight into the dynamic nature of these relationships.

Second, the current study's focus is restricted to employee well-being. There are other organizationally valued criteria that are associated with perceived abusive supervision, such as job performance, withdrawal behavior, and turnover (e.g., Tepper, 2007). Future studies, therefore, should address how the appraisal of abusive supervision as a challenge or hindrance demand differentially impacts these outcomes.

Third, in this study we focused exclusively on employee appraisals of abusive supervision. In future studies, researchers should explore potential individual difference variables that may influence employee

appraisals of supervisory abuse (e.g., gender, self-esteem, positive or negative affectivity, etc.). For example, an employee's level of positive or negative affectivity might influence how he or she appraises the supervisor's abusive behavior. Someone with high levels of negative affectivity may be unlikely to appraise abusive supervision as a challenge demand. Alternatively, someone with high levels of positive affectivity may see the challenge aspects of abusive supervision.

Finally, the ABSDAM may also be considered a limitation for the present study because it is a new measure. The results of two studies, however, have provided initial evidence in support of the ABSDAM and suggest it possesses construct validity and is a viable means for assessing the appraisal of abusive supervision as a hindrance or challenge demand. However, ongoing validation efforts are needed to fully establish the psychometric properties of new measures. Along these lines, future field research should draw from various organizational contexts and a broad range of participants that experience different degrees of abusive supervision to continue to examine how the ABSDAM relates to engagement and exhaustion.

Implications and conclusion

This study presents some important implications for both researchers and practitioners. Overall, cognitive appraisal processes may influence the stressor-outcome relationship for perceptions of abusive supervision and well-being. Accounting for both challenge and hindrance appraisals provides insight into how perceptions of abusive supervision contribute to engagement and exhaustion. Higher frequencies of abusive supervision resulted in both higher hindrance appraisals that were associated with more exhaustion and lower challenge appraisals that were associated with less engagement. Thus, organizations should not tolerate supervisors who mistreat their employees and should have sanctions in place to deter such abuse. Organizations who fail to deal with abusive supervisors may see the diminished well-being of employees.

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