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Sins of the parents: Self-control as a buffer between supervisors' previous experience of family undermining and subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision ☆

Christian Kiewitz [a,*], Simon Lloyd D. Restubog [b], Thomas J. Zagenczyk [c], Kristin D. Scott [c], Patrick Raymund James M. Garcia [b], Robert L. Tang [d]

[a] Management/Marketing Department, University of Dayton, Dayton, OH 45469-2271, USA
[b] Research School of Management, The Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia
[c] Department of Management, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634, USA
[d] School of Management and Information Technology, De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde, 1004 Manila, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Drawing upon social learning theory, the intergenerational transmission of violence hypothesis, and research on self-control, we develop a model of the relationships among previous experiences of family undermining, self-control, and abusive supervision. We tested the model with data obtained from supervisor–employee matched pairs in Study 1 and matched triads in Study 2. Results revealed that: 1) supervisors who experienced higher levels of family undermining (whether reported by the immediate supervisor or a sibling) during childhood are more likely to engage in abusive supervisory behaviors as adults; and 2) this relationship is moderated such that it is stronger for supervisors with low self-control. Overall, our results highlight the role of self-control in mitigating the impact of supervisors' previous experiences of family undermining on subordinate perceptions of abusive supervision, even after controlling for previously established antecedents.

1. Introduction

The study of abusive supervision, 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; emphasis in original, p. 178), has increasingly captured the attention of scholars interested in understanding the 'dark side' of leadership (e.g., Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007; Neider & Schriesheim, 2010). Among others, this interest stems from the fact that non-physical aggression has been found to be more prevalent than the physical forms (i.e., violence) typically reported in the media. For example, a survey of the United States workforce showed that 41.4% (ca. 47 million) of U.S. wage and salary workers reported having experienced verbal and nonverbal aggression at work during the past 12 months, while only 6% (ca. 7 million) reported having experienced physical aggression (Schat, Desmarais, & Kelloway, 2006). These numbers are particularly significant when the negative outcomes of abusive supervision – diminished job satisfaction, lower productivity and health problems (e.g., Harris, Kacmar, & Zivnuska, 2007; Tepper, 2000, 2007) – are considered. Given the current stage of this body of literature (review in Tepper, 2007), it is not surprising that research efforts so far have predominantly focused on the work-related consequences of

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* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 937 229 2046; fax: +1 937 229 3788.
E-mail addresses: kiewitz@udayton.edu (C. Kiewitz), simon.restubog@anu.edu.au (S.L.D. Restubog), thomasj@clemson.edu (T.J. Zagenczyk), kscott3@clemson.edu (K.D. Scott), patrick.garcia@anu.edu.au (P.R.J.M. Garcia), tangr@dls-csb.edu.ph (R.L. Tang).

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abusive supervision perceptions and how employees can best cope with the experience of abusive supervision (e.g., Harvey, Stoner, Hochwarter, & Kacmar, 2007). In contrast, only few studies to date have explored its antecedents (e.g., Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007; Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006). We believe this is a critical oversight because without knowledge of the causes of abusive supervision, finding solutions to minimize its frequency or prevent its occurrence remains elusive.

Our sentiments thus echo those of Tepper (2007), who urges researchers to advance the abusive supervision literature by taking steps to explore potential antecedents. We answer this call by examining the role of a supervisor's previous experience of family undermining (e.g., insults, silent treatment) as a key antecedent to abusive supervision (as perceived by her or his subordinates). To this effect, the main contribution of our work lies with offering a novel theoretical perspective on the etiology of abusive supervision. In the handful of studies that have investigated the antecedents of abusive supervision, researchers have principally adopted a displaced-aggression perspective (Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Tepper, 2007). Accordingly, abusive supervision occurs when it is not feasible to retaliate against the original source of frustration (i.e., the organization), thereby leading supervisors to direct hostility toward more convenient, albeit innocent targets (i.e., their subordinates) instead. In this vein, studies show that abusive supervisory behavior often occurs when supervisors believe that they have been victims of psychological contract violations (Hoobler & Brass, 2006) or interpersonal/organizational injustices (Aryee et al., 2007; Tepper et al., 2006). While we have gained valuable insights into the important role that organizational agents play in contributing to abusive supervision (e.g., through interactional injustice), we wish to extend the literature by turning our attention to supervisor-specific variables that may explain deeper-level causes of abusive supervision.

Our rationale for focusing on supervisor-specific variables draws from research findings showing that the effects of abusive supervision can carry over into an employee's home life (e.g., Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Restubog, Scott, & Zagenczyk, 2011). We similarly argue that abuse experienced in the home can affect an employee's work life (e.g., Duffy, Scott, & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005). Our perspective is grounded in theory and empirical research which has convincingly demonstrated that children who grow up in emotionally or physically abusive households are more likely to behave in an aggressive or abusive manner as adults. For instance, a plethora of studies shows that abused children exhibit antisocial behavior frequently not only in educational institutions, but also in almost all other contexts relevant to adolescent and adult life (e.g., dating, social relationships, parenting; Hoglund & Nicholas, 1995; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2005; Vissing, Straus, Gelles, & Harrop, 1991). Despite such evidence, there is still a dearth of studies exploring the effects of abusive family relationships experienced during childhood on adult behavior in the workplace. In fact, we are only aware of one study that has assessed the influence of aggressive home and neighborhood environments on workplace aggression (Douglas & Martinko, 2001). However, to our knowledge, no extant study has examined whether the previous experience of specific abusive behaviors in the family results in subordinate abuse in the future. Given that adult children of abusive parents often display abusive patterns of behavior toward their own children and toward other members of society (e.g., Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002), it seems plausible that such behavior patterns would be observed in the workplace as well. To support our case, we present a theoretical discussion in which we integrate the literatures on abusive supervision and family violence using social learning theory (Bandura, 1973). Our objective is to elucidate the impact of early life experiences involving parental aggression on employee adulthood behaviors, especially with regard to forming and maintaining (work) relationships.

In addition, we consider dispositional factors that may further exacerbate or mitigate the strength of this relationship. We do so, in part, to address a question that has long vexed family violence research: that is, why do not all individuals who experience abuse as a child become abusive as adults? Based on related research in criminology and management (e.g., Douglas & Martinko, 2001; Marcus & Schuler, 2004), we argue that a particular individual difference variable – self-control – offers a potential answer. Defined as "freedom from impulsivity" (Sarchione, Cuttler, Muchinsky, & Nelson-Gray, 1998, p. 905), self-control refers to exerting control over the self by the self, with the goal of regulating how one thinks, feels, or behaves (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Research has found that low levels of self-control in individuals are strongly associated with counterproductive behaviors in and outside of workplaces (e.g., Marcus & Schuler, 2004), as persons with such tendencies tend to be insensitive to the pain and suffering of others (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). We incorporate this notion into our theoretical model and hence argue that supervisors with higher levels of self-control will be less likely to psychologically abuse their subordinates as a result of their past, while supervisors with low levels of self-control will be more likely to engage in abusive supervisory behavior. As such, our research could help efforts directed at identifying leaders who will more or less likely engage in abusive supervision despite previous experiences of family undermining. In the next section, we delineate the constructs in our model and discuss the expected relationships among them. We then test our predictions in a series of two independent, multi-source studies of working adults.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. Previous experience of family undermining and abusive supervision

Our first research question examines the relationship between the level of family undermining experienced by supervisors while growing up and how abusive those supervisors behave later in life toward (and according to) their subordinates. We postulate a positive relationship between the two phenomena based on research pertaining to the social-learning approach to aggression (Bandura, 1973, 1983) in general and the intergenerational transmission of violence (e.g., Egeland, 1993) in particular. On a broad level, social learning theory (Bandura, 1973, 1986) highlights the important role of socio-contextual factors for

learning which types of behaviors are appropriate in specific situations and/or relationships. Regarding aggression, the theory suggests – and many empirical studies have shown – that repeated exposure to and subsequent modeling of the seemingly acceptable aggressive behaviors of others increases the likelihood that an individual will learn to aggress and eventually behave more aggressively in both similar and dissimilar circumstances (Bandura, 1973, 1983; Berkowitz, 1993; Geen, 2001). A particularly relevant finding in this context comes from studies showing that exposure to aggression in one's neighborhood and household often results in the enactment of aggressive behaviors not only at home (Berkowitz, 1993; Garcia, Restubog, & Denson, 2010), but also in the workplace (Dietz, Robinson, Folger, Baron, & Schultz, 2003; Douglas & Martinko, 2001).

As a general framework, the social-learning approach to aggression – i.e., individuals learn to aggress by observing the aggressive behavior of others and adopting those behaviors themselves (Bandura, 1973, 1986) – is invoked frequently to explain the mechanism underlying the intergenerational transmission of violence (ITV) hypothesis (e.g., Delsol & Margolin, 2004), which suggests that the propensity to engage in antisocial and dysfunctional behaviors is passed on from one generation to the next (Egeland, 1993; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2005; Ozturk Ertem, Leventhal, & Dobbs, 2000; Stith et al., 2000; Widom, 1989). Two specific characteristics render ITV research important for our purposes, as this body of work is concerned not only a) with the experience and subsequent performance of aggressive acts in familial contexts, but also b) with individuals' beliefs regarding the legitimacy of such behaviors (e.g., Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Hankla, & Stormberg, 2004).

Regarding the latter, when aggressive behavior is used as the dominant mode of conflict resolution in a family, social learning processes contribute to legitimizing familial aggression (Reitzel-Jaffe & Wolfe, 2001) because family members eventually conceive of such aggression as a legitimate – or even necessary – part of family dynamics (Delsol & Margolin, 2004). As a consequence, "each generation learns to be violent by being a participant in a violent family" (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, p. 121). In this way, the legitimization of aggressive behavior enables hostile tendencies to manifest themselves strongly enough so to carry over into other life domains, such as workplace settings encountered in adulthood. In support of this theorizing, studies have shown that growing up in a violent family environment increases one's chance of exhibiting dysfunctional behaviors oneself (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2005), including problematic behaviors as a child (Litrownik, Newton, Hunter, English, & Everson, 2003), dating violence as an adolescent (Wolf & Foshee, 2003), self-destructive behaviors as a college student (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Monson, Meyer, Caster, & Sanders, 1998) and becoming involved in a violent marriage as an adult (Stith et al., 2000). To sum up these and other findings in this literature: "a history of maltreatment is *the* major risk factor for perpetration in the next generation" (emphasis added; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 1998, p. 244; reviews in Dubow, Huesmann, & Boxer, 2003).

Regarding the forms of aggressive behaviors that family members learn, past research investigating dysfunctional family processes (and the intergenerational transmission thereof) has focused overwhelmingly on physical forms of aggressive behaviors (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2005) — a fact that O'Leary (1999) attributes to policymakers' and researchers' "implicit assumption" (p. 3) that physical abuse is the most common and damaging form of abuse. Yet, as Langhinrichsen-Rohling (2005) points out in her review, newer evidence suggests "that psychological or verbal abuse needs to be elevated to a critical variable in the domestic violence field because it appears to have as great, if not greater, negative impact on victims than does physical violence" (p. 113). To this effect – and with national surveys attesting to the prevalence of non-physical forms of abuse (for a synopsis, see Gagné & Bouchard, 2004) – more recent research has explicitly scrutinized their ramifications, such as the impact of psychological abuse in the form of verbal aggression (e.g., blaming, insulting and swearing) on children. Studies in this area generally attest to the devastating impact that parents' psychological, emotional and verbal abuse has on their offspring (e.g., Gagné, Drapeau, Melançon, Saint-Jacques, & LéPine, 2007). For instance, Vissing and colleagues (1991) showed that children who suffered frequent verbal aggression from their parents exhibited heightened levels of physical aggression, delinquency and interpersonal problems. Likewise, Hoglund and Nicholas (1995) found that individuals who had experienced high levels of emotional abuse during their childhood reported higher levels of shame, of overt and covert hostility, and of expressed and unexpressed anger at college age. Particularly noteworthy in this context is a study by Ney (1987) that found verbal abuse to be equally or more damaging to children than other types of abuse. This effect occurs because verbal abuse is not only likely to change children's self- and world-views, but also is more likely (and readily) transmitted between generations than are physical forms of abuse. Ney's (1987) findings and arguments are corroborated in a review by Repetti and colleagues (2002) who conclude that minors living with aggressive and hostile parents are likely to exhibit high levels of aggressive or antisocial behaviors themselves, plus an inability to develop desirable social skills: "overall, the findings … suggest that the development of social competence and supportive relationships outside of the family are compromised by growing up in a risky family environment" (p. 346).

Based on these findings, we argue that growing up in a family environment marked by abusiveness in various non-physical forms has significant and predominantly negative implications for forming and maintaining social relationships in adulthood (O'Leary, 1999; Repetti et al., 2002). We further argue that the various non-physical forms of abuse described in the family violence literature converge on the commonality of having an undermining effect on children (cf. Ney, 1987). In other words, given that parental undermining behaviors have the same (or even stronger) negative ramifications as the more frequently researched physically abusive behaviors (cf. Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2005; Ney, 1987; O'Leary, 1999), we posit that growing up in a family environment where parents undermine their children (e.g., through verbal abuse) increases the likelihood that those children will experience a host of relationship problems as adults. In particular, we propose that these problems are very likely to re-surface in the workplace given the power asymmetry inherent in supervisory relationships (Gabarro, 1987) and psychological parallels between parent–child and subordinate-supervisor relationships (Game, 2008). Specifically, Game (2008) suggests that parent–child and supervisor–subordinate relationships mirror each other because (1) similar to how children view their parents, supervisors are viewed by subordinates as authority figures capable of influencing their behaviors and decisions; (2) as parents do

with children, supervisors control the sanctions and rewards offered to subordinates; and (3) as parents are a source of support for children, supervisors are a key source of work-related support for subordinates. Hence, we posit that supervisors who have suffered parental undermining during their upbringing are likely to exhibit a higher propensity to engage in abusive supervisory behaviors as perceived by subordinates:

Hypothesis 1. Supervisors' previous experience of family undermining is positively related to subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision.

2.2. Moderating role of self-control

In the present study, we also investigate the role of self-control as a moderator of the relationship between supervisors' previous experience of family undermining and subordinate perceptions of abusive supervision. The inclusion of self-control, a dispositional variable, in our model is motivated by the observation that not all individuals who experience or witness family violence turn violent as adults (Widom, 1989). Indeed, studies have found several mitigating factors that influence the relationship between family-of-origin aggression and future aggressive behavior. For example, previous studies have identified attachment styles (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1998), attitudes toward violence (O'Hearn & Margolin, 2000), and alcoholism (Downs, Smyth, & Miller, 1996) as conditions that facilitate the transmission of learned aggression across generations. Although some disagreement exists about the true rate at which intergenerational transmissions take place (e.g., Cappell & Heiner, 1990; Delsol & Margolin, 2004; Widom, 1989), domestic violence researchers estimate that only about 30% of those who experienced or were exposed to family violence engage in aggressive behavior later in life (e.g., Egeland, 1993). This circumstance has implications for our research in that it represents an important boundary condition affecting the family undermining and abusive supervision relationship. In other words, we need to take into account factors that might increase or decrease the likelihood that an individual who has been undermined as a child will become an abusive leader.

While there might exist several mitigating factors (cf. Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2005), we propose that an individual's self-control is highly relevant in the context of this study. Our rationale draws from Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) theoretical arguments that highlight the importance of self-control for behavioral outcomes, as postulated in their General Theory of Crime and validated by empirical research findings (e.g., Bordia, Restubog, & Tang, 2008; Marcus & Schuler, 2004). First, regarding the significance of the concept, research has shown that individuals who lack self-control exhibit higher levels of drug and alcohol abuse (Vazsonyi, Trejos-Castillo, & Huang, 2006) as well as more instances of dysfunctional behavior in general (Sarchione et al., 1998). Conversely, individuals with high self-control tend to have higher levels of academic achievement, psychological well-being, self-esteem, and favorable interpersonal relationships (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004), plus they tend to perform better even when experiencing negative emotions (Brown, Westbrook, & Challagalla, 2005).

Second and regarding the theoretical reasons, the theory posits that individuals with low levels of self-control are more apt to react to situational triggers with criminal behavior than their high self-control counterparts because the former fail to understand the long-term consequences of their actions and hence more easily succumb to temptation. Of particular importance for understanding this failure to self-regulate is the concept of transcendence (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996), which we deem critical to arguing for a moderating effect of self-control in the relationship between supervisor previous experience of family undermining and abusive supervision. Transcendence is defined as the ability to focus one's awareness beyond the immediate stimuli (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). Importantly, individuals differ in terms of how much value and focus they afford their current state. Those who focus more on the current situation tend to lose sight of long-term goals and high ideals, which may result in a failure to control their emotions. As an example, aggression often arises because of trigger events that evoke anger (Geen, 2001). Individuals who experience anger in turn tend to focus on themselves and lose sight of the long-term consequences of their actions and how they affect others in the environment (Zillmann, 1994). Applying these principles to our purposes, it appears plausible that low self-control individuals who were previously exposed to family undermining may be more likely to engage in abusive supervision because they fail to transcend the current situation. Conversely, individuals with high levels of self-control are better able to foresee the long-term implications of their behaviors, which should allow them to refrain from enacting abusive leadership behaviors. As a compounding factor, individuals with low self-control are also more likely to be abusive because their impulsivity and inattention to long-term consequences renders them insensitive to the pain and suffering of others (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). In line with this reasoning, we offer the following prediction:

Hypothesis 2. Supervisors' self-control will moderate the relationship between their previous experience of family undermining and subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision such that the relationship is stronger for supervisors with low levels of self-control and weaker for supervisors with high levels of self-control.

2.3. Overview of the studies

To test the strength of our model, we conducted two studies with working adults employed in different organizations in the Philippines. We control for a number of variables (e.g., psychological contract violation, procedural and interactional justice, neuroticism, power distance) that have been shown to significantly predict abusive supervision in prior studies (review in Tepper, 2007). In doing so, we aim to examine whether a supervisor's history of family-related undermining significantly contributes to subordinates' perceptions of supervisor abuse, while also accounting for the impact of control variables and the

moderating potential of supervisors' self-control. In addition, we took steps to minimize common method variance by obtaining data from multiple sources. Specifically, we collected data from supervisors (Study 1) and their siblings (Study 2) to assess prior experience of family undermining while we obtained data from subordinates to assess perceptions of abusive supervision. Altogether, we undertook these measures with the goal of facilitating a robust test of the proposed model.

3. Study 1

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants and procedure

Data were collected in a large retail organization in the Philippines as part of a consulting project examining effective leadership in the workplace. A total of 273 supervisors and their corresponding subordinates were sent surveys kits through the organization's internal mailing system. The survey kit provided the relevant questionnaires, a brief explanation of the study's purpose and an assurance of confidentiality. Supervisors and subordinates completed the surveys during work time and returned them using a pre-paid return envelope addressed to the research team. Employees returned 229 surveys (83.9% response rate) and supervisors returned 192 surveys (70.3% response rate). Surveys were matched using non-identifying code based on the first two letters of the participants' father's first name, the first two letters of their mother's first name, and the day of their birthday. Several questionnaires were excluded from the analysis due to a) non-submission of the corresponding supervisor survey ($n = 37$) and b) either missing or incorrect code-identifiers ($n = 13$). Altogether, this procedure yielded 179 supervisor–subordinate matched pairs (65.6% response rate based on 200 survey kits). Of the sample's 179 supervisors, 98 (54.7%) were female. They were on average 33.5 years old and had been working with their respective subordinates for an average of 3.3 years. More than half of the supervisors (61.8%) had been employed in their organization for 1–5 years. Of the 179 subordinates, 95 (53.1%) were female, 79 (44.1%) were male, and five (2.8%) did not report their gender. More than half of the subordinates (52.6%) were between 21 and 25 years of age, and the majority (79.4%) had been working for the organization between 1 and 5 years.

3.1.2. Measures

Surveys were prepared in English in all studies because it is the dominant language used in Philippine business organizations (Bernardo, 2004). Unless otherwise noted, all focal variables and neuroticism were assessed with a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*).

3.1.2.1. Measures from supervisors

3.1.2.1.1. Supervisors' previous experience of family undermining. Previous experience of family undermining was assessed with a five-item scale (1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Always*) used by Restubog et al. (2011) to assess spousal undermining. For the present purposes, however, we replaced the referent "partner/spouse" with "parents or step-parents". The items were hence prefaced with: "How often, before you were 18 years of age, have your parents or step-parents …". This phrase was then followed by these five items: "acted in an unpleasant or angry manner toward you", "gave a critical remark on your ideas", "criticized you", "insulted you", and "gave you the silent treatment." Cronbach's alpha (α) for the scale was .90.

3.1.2.1.2. Supervisors' self-control. Due to survey length restrictions, self-control was assessed using a five-item version of a scale developed by Scott (1965) that has been used in prior research (Bordia et al., 2008). An example item from the scale ($\alpha = .91$) is: "I practice self-control." To provide evidence that this shortened five-item measure of self-control was equivalent to the full measure, we collected data from an independent sample of 128 employees from a manufacturing organization in the Philippines. Bivariate correlations indicated that the shortened and full version were highly correlated, $r = .94$, $p < .001$.

3.1.2.2. Measures from subordinates

3.1.2.2.1. Subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision. Abusive supervision perceptions were assessed with Tepper's (2000) 15-item scale. Items from the scale ($\alpha = .96$) were prefaced with "My immediate supervisor …" and followed by such items as: "tells me my thoughts or feelings are stupid", "reminds me of my past mistakes and failures" and "makes negative comments about me to others." We employed a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (*I cannot remember him/her using this behavior with me*) to 7 (*He/She always uses this behavior toward me*).

3.1.2.3. Control variables. In order to rule out alternative explanations to our study findings, we controlled for previous antecedents that have been found to predict subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision (cf. Tepper, 2007). Specifically, supervisors' perceptions of psychological contract violation and procedural and interactional justice were included as control variables. Psychological contract violation was measured using Robinson and Morrison's (2000) four-item scale ($\alpha = .89$). Procedural ($\alpha = .96$) and interactional justice ($\alpha = .97$) were measured with the six-item and nine-item scales, respectively, developed by Niehoff and Moorman (1993). Furthermore, we also controlled for supervisors' gender, duration of the working relationship between the supervisor and subordinate, and subordinates' neuroticism. Supervisor gender was included as a control because males are more likely to engage in aggressive behaviors, which are congruent with masculine role behavior, while females are more apt to engage in supportive behaviors (Eagly & Steffen, 1986). Duration of the working relationship was included due to research suggesting that demographic differences between supervisor and subordinate tend to diminish over time as they learn

Table 1
Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among variables in Study 1.

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Supervisor gender	1.45	.50									
2. Length of working relationship	3.30	3.97	.09								
3. Supervisor procedural justice	5.26	1.42	.01	.02	(.96)						
4. Supervisor interactional justice	5.53	1.49	.14	−.04	.49***	(.97)					
5. Supervisor psychological contract violation	2.25	1.32	−.21*	.09	−.24***	−.30***	(.89)				
6. Subordinate neuroticism	3.15	1.14	−.05	−.02	−.17*	−.37***	.31***	(.90)			
7. Supervisors' previous experience of family undermining	2.16	1.27	−.09	−.04	.07	−.21**	.24***	.39***	(.90)		
8. Supervisor self-control	4.64	1.42	−.07	−.22**	.36***	.50***	−.26***	−.40***	−.10	(.91)	
9. Subordinate perceptions of abusive supervision	2.03	1.21	−.23**	−.11	−.26***	−.56***	.35***	.49***	.48***	−.38***	(.96)

Note: $N = 179$.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

more about each other (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). We further controlled for subordinate neuroticism because employees with higher levels of neuroticism are more apt to perceive that they are being mistreated or victimized by others at work (Aquino & Bradfield, 2000). Neuroticism was assessed with a seven-item short version of the semantic differential scale ($\alpha = .90$) developed by Goldberg (1992).

4. Results

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for Study 1 variables are reported in Table 1. We employed moderated multiple regression (MMR) analysis (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003) to examine the impact of supervisors' prior experience of family undermining on subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision (H1) and the moderating role of supervisors' self-control (H2). In Step 1, we entered the control variables (e.g., supervisor gender, duration of working relationship with the subordinate, supervisor self-control, and subordinate neuroticism) into the regression equation. Supervisors' previous experience of family undermining (independent variable) and supervisors' self-control (moderator) were entered in Step 2, followed by their interaction term in Step 3. Following Cohen et al. (2003) guidelines, the two variables had been mean-centered prior to creating the interaction term in order to reduce multicollinearity.

The results of these analyses provided support for both hypotheses and are reported in Table 2. Regarding H1, supervisors' previous experience of family undermining explained a significant amount of variance (i.e., 33%) in subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision, $R^2\Delta = .09$, $F(2, 155) = 14.34$, $\beta = .33$, $p < .001$, over and above the effects of supervisor and subordinate characteristics. Concerning H2, a significant two-way interaction emerged over and above the contribution of the main effects, $R^2\Delta = .02$, $F(1, 154) = 4.62$, $\beta = -.12$, $p < .05$. In order to fully examine the nature of the significant interactions, we employed simple slope analysis (Cohen et al., 2003). As shown in Fig. 1, at low levels of self-control, the positive relationship between supervisors' previous experience of family undermining and subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision was significant, $t(168) = 4.88$, $p < .001$, whereas at high levels of self-control that relationship was not significant, $t(138) = 1.47$, *ns*; thereby suggesting that self-control acted as a buffer variable. Overall, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

To rule out alternative explanations to our findings, we also examined a series of alternative models. First, we examined the role of self-control as a mediator between supervisors' previous experience of family undermining and subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision.[1] We did so based on arguments derived from the General Theory of Crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), which suggests that the development of self-control may be affected by socialization processes – such as poor parenting – thus positing self-control as a mediating mechanism. Using Preacher and Hayes (2008) bootstrap procedure, however, the indirect effects of supervisors' family undermining experience in predicting subordinates' abusive supervision perceptions via self-control were non-significant (*indirect effect* = −.01, *95% CI* = −.04 to .01).

Next, we tested other mechanisms through which supervisors' previous experience of family undermining may potentially affect abusive supervision. For example, it could be possible that family undermining may result in greater perceptions of psychological contract violation or organizational justice. To test these notions, we examined several moderated mediation models that involved assessing the conditional indirect effects of supervisors' previous experience of family undermining in predicting subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision via: supervisors' perceptions of psychological contract violation at low and high levels of self-control (Model A); supervisors' perceptions of interactional justice at low and high levels of self-control (Model B); and supervisors' perceptions of procedural justice at low and high levels of self-control (Model C). To examine the proposed moderated mediation models, we used Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes' (2007) regression-based approach to calculate the conditional indirect effects at low and high levels of self-control. All the results were non-significant: Model A: low self-control, *indirect effect* = .05, *SE* = .03, $z = 1.80$, $p = .07$, *95% CI*: −.01 to .12 and high self-control, *indirect effect* = .02, *SE* = .02,

[1] We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

Table 2
Results of hierarchical moderated regression analysis in Study 1.

Variables and steps	Study 1		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Supervisor gender	−.12*	−.13*	−.12*
Subordinate neuroticism	.31***	.17*	.12
Length of working relationship	−.13*	−.13*	−.12*
Supervisor procedural justice	.03	−.03	.05
Supervisor interactional justice	−.40***	−.28***	−.28***
Supervisor psychological contract violation	.14*	.09	.09
Supervisors' previous experience of family undermining (SPEFU)		.33***	.34***
Supervisor self-control (SSC)		−.14*	−.14*
SPEFU × SSC			−.13*
Adj. R^2	.43***	.52***	.54***
ΔR^2		.09***	.02*

Note: $N = 179$.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.
***$p < .001$.

$z = 1.16$, $p = .25$, *95% CI*: .00 to .09; Model B: low self-control, *indirect effect* = .05, *SE* = .04, $z = 1.16$, $p = .25$, *95% CI*: −.06 to .17 and high self-control, i*ndirect effect* = .09, *SE* = .05, $z = 1.40$, $p = .11$, *95% CI*: −.02 to .19; and Model C: low self-control, *indirect effect* = −.05, *SE* = .03, $z = -1.62$, $p = .10$, *95% CI*: −.13 to .01 and high self-control, *indirect effect* = .01, *SE* = .03, $z = .04$, $p = .69$, *95% CI*: −.03 to .06.

5. Study 2

Although Study 1 results supported our hypotheses, the study has a potential limitation in that the solicited retrospective accounts could be inaccurate due to faulty memories or erroneous reconstructed experiences that might occur over time (Henry, Moffitt, Caspi, Langley, & Silva, 1994). Further, it is conceivable that supervisors who experienced serious family undermining as children may have repressed some of their painful memories (Loftus, 1993). Therefore, we elected to conduct a constructive replication of Study 1 by requesting that a brother or sister of the supervisor reported the degree to which the supervisor was the target of undermining behavior by his/her parents. Prior research suggests that siblings are knowledgeable informants who can provide credible information about parental behavior (Schwarz, Barton-Henry, & Pruzinsky, 1985). While it is possible that siblings may also repress such memories, we believe that attempting to replicate our previous findings in a second study with a different source of data lends credibility and strengthens the internal validity of our results. Thus, for Study 2, we tested the same hypotheses as before, yet changed the referent from supervisors' self-reports to siblings reporting the extent to which supervisors had suffered family undermining. A second limitation of Study 1 lies with not accounting for the effects of individual-level cultural differences that might be relevant to abusive supervision, such as power-distance beliefs (i.e., the extent to which unequal distribution of power is accepted; Hofstede, 1980). As Tepper (2007) pointed out, countries (e.g., the Philippines) with a high power-distance orientation may exhibit higher levels of abusive supervision since unequal power distributions are perceived to be legitimate. To address this issue, we control for the effects of power-distance beliefs in our analysis.

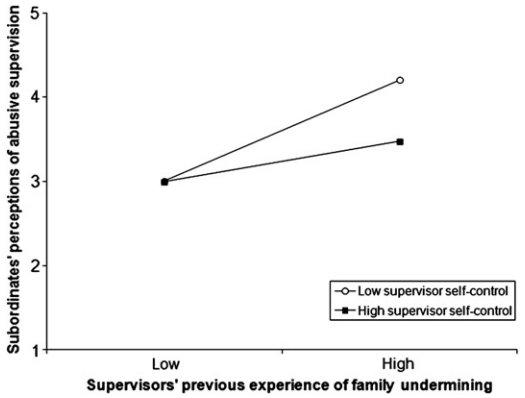

Fig. 1. Plot of the interaction between supervisors' previous experiences of family undermining and supervisors' self-control in predicting subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision in Study 1.

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Participants and procedure

Participants for this study were 180 part-time students who were enrolled in various postgraduate programs offered at a large university in the Philippines. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was assured. Two inclusion criteria were specified: participants had to 1) be employed full-time and 2) have supervisory responsibilities. Self-report surveys assessing their demographic and dispositional characteristics (e.g., self-control, power distance beliefs), plus workplace experiences (e.g., psychological contract violation, procedural and interactional justice), were administered in class. Of the 180 disseminated surveys, 143 were returned, yielding a response rate of 79.4%. Of the 143 surveys, we excluded eight from further analysis, either because participants did not have any supervisory responsibilities ($n=3$) or surveys had a large number of missing responses ($n=5$). In addition to filling out self-reports, participants had been asked to give a brief survey to a sibling and to nominate an immediate subordinate with whom they had regular interactions at work. Completed surveys from siblings and subordinates were returned to the research team via a self-addressed, stamped envelope. From siblings, we received a total of 127 surveys, a response rate of 70.6%. However, ten of those surveys had to be excluded from further analysis, either because of wrong or missing identity codes ($n=8$) or unanswered survey forms ($n=2$). We took steps to ensure that siblings actually completed the surveys. First, we asked siblings to enclose their responses in the self-addressed envelope, which meant the research team directly received their responses. We also instructed them to seal the said envelope and affix their signatures across the flap. These procedures are important in order to curtail any form of survey tampering. Second, a research assistant randomly contacted ten percent of the sibling respondents ($n=10$) to verify if they have indeed completed the survey questionnaire. All ten sibling respondents verified their participation in the research.

Subordinates returned 138 surveys for a response rate of 76.7%. Of those, we excluded 12 surveys due to a large number of missing responses ($n=9$) or missing/wrong identity codes ($n=3$). Eventually, the collected data were matched via an anonymous code that each participant had included on the survey forms. Incomplete cases were deleted from the data set (e.g., cases in which a participant lacked a survey from a sibling or a subordinate). Altogether, this process resulted in 97 triads of matched surveys that were retained for further analysis (i.e., each case comprised a survey from a supervisor, one from the supervisor's subordinate and one from the supervisor's sibling).

Of the supervisors, 56 (57.7%) were male. The supervisors were on average 31.9 years old. A large proportion (63.9%) had been working in their organization between 1 and 5 years and with their respective subordinate for an average of 3.5 years. They represented a broad spectrum of business sectors, such as research and development (12.4%), public relations (12.4%), finance and accounting (11.3%), entertainment and media (11.3%), general management and human resources (10.3%), customer service (9.3%), marketing and sales (8.2%), information technology (8.2%), legal (8.2%), and manufacturing and production (8.2%). Concerning the siblings, 58 (59.8%) were male; they were on average 32.4 years old. Of the subordinates, 41 (42.3%) were male. Subordinates reported their age as follows: 18–20 years (6.3%), 21–25 (49.5%), 26–30 (27.4%), 31–35 (9.5%), 36–40 (1.1%), 41–45 (1.1%), 46–50 (2.1%), and 50 and above (3.2%). The majority of subordinates (60%) had been working in their organization between 1 and 5 years.

5.1.2. Measures

The same measures used in Study 1 were retained for Study 2. The alpha reliabilities for these measures are listed in the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix along the diagonals in Table 3. Siblings were requested to report the extent to which the focal supervisor had been undermined by his/her parents in the past (prior to the age of 18). Siblings indicated their responses to a series of items prefaced with the phrase: "How often did your parents or step parents treat your brother/sister (prior to the age of 18) in the following ways?" As was the case in Study 1, we controlled for the effects of supervisors' perceptions of psychological contract violation, interactional justice, procedural justice, supervisors' gender, duration of working relationship

Table 3
Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among variables in Study 2.

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Supervisor gender	.42	.49										
2. Length of working relationship	3.54	4.36	.10									
3. Supervisor procedural justice	5.07	1.57	−.05	.01	(.97)							
4. Supervisor interactional justice	5.49	1.39	.06	.02	.65***	(.96)						
5. Supervisor psychological contract violation	2.33	1.22	−.15	−.07	−.10	−.24*	(.89)					
6. Subordinate neuroticism	3.34	1.12	.10	−.20	−.15	−.20*	.24*	(.88)				
7. Subordinate power distance beliefs	3.83	1.66	−.01	.22*	.31**	.31**	−.11	−.08	(.92)			
8. Siblings' ratings of supervisors' previous experience of undermining	2.21	1.25	−.17	−.19	−.25*	.08	.13	.22*	−.16	(.91)		
9. Supervisor self-control	4.32	1.39	−.17	−.16	.37***	−.40***	−.07	−.23*	.06	.09	(.90)	
10. Subordinate perceptions of abusive supervision	2.07	1.15	−.26*	−.25*	−.26**	−.44***	.30**	.45***	.31**	.32***	−.19	(.96)

Note: $N=97$.
* $p<.05$.
** $p<.01$.
*** $p<.001$.

Table 4
Results of hierarchical moderated regression analysis in Study 2.

Variables and steps	Study 2		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Supervisor gender	−.25**	−.25**	−.23*
Subordinate power distance beliefs	.17	.12	.16
Supervisor procedural justice	.05	−.02	−.02
Supervisor interactional justice	−.31**	−.27**	−.30**
Supervisor psychological contract violation	.08	.08	.06
Subordinate neuroticism	.36***	.29**	.21*
Duration of working relationship	−.10	−.11	−.07
Siblings' ratings of supervisors' previous experience of family undermining (SSPEFU)		.24*	.26*
Supervisor self-control (SSC)		−.11	−.20
SSPEFU × SSC			−.24*
Adj. R^2	.41***	.44*	.47*
ΔR^2		.03*	.04*

Note: $N = 97$.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

with their subordinate, and subordinates' neuroticism. To address the issue pertaining to individual cultural differences, we controlled for power distance beliefs because previous research on abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007) and workplace bullying (Loh, Restubog, & Zagenczyk, 2010) suggests that employees from low power-distance cultures will respond to abusive treatment more negatively than those from high power-distance cultures, as the latter tend to more readily accept the existence of societal power differentials (and hence respective treatment consistent with power asymmetries). Specifically, we used Early and Erez's (1997) six-item scale to assess individual-level power distance beliefs, which asked subordinates to indicate the extent to which they agreed with statements such as: "I believe that employees should not express disagreements with their managers."

6. Results

Data were analyzed using the same methods described in Study 1. Descriptive statistics for Study 2 variables are presented in Table 3. Once again, we found support for Hypothesis 1, which predicted that supervisors' previous experience of family undermining was positively related to subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision in Step 2 over and above the effects of the controls, $R^2\Delta = .09$, $F(2, 85) = 3.19$, $\beta = .24$, $p < .05$ (see Table 4). In support of H2, the interaction term explained additional variance in predicting subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision over and above the main effects contributions, $R^2\Delta = .04$, $F(1, 84) = 6.77$, $\beta = -.24$, $p < .05$. To aid interpretation, we plotted the simple slopes (Cohen et al., 2003) for low and high levels of self-control. Paralleling the results in Study 1, a significant slope emerged only for low supervisor self-control, $t(84) = 3.47$, $p < .001$, while the slope for high supervisor self-control was not significant, $t(84) = .33$, *ns*. Thus, for supervisors with low self-control, the positive relationship between siblings' ratings of supervisors' previous experience of family undermining and their subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision became stronger with increasing levels of previously experienced undermining, but that was not the case for supervisors with high self-control (see Fig. 2). Overall and as in Study 1, the data supported both hypotheses.

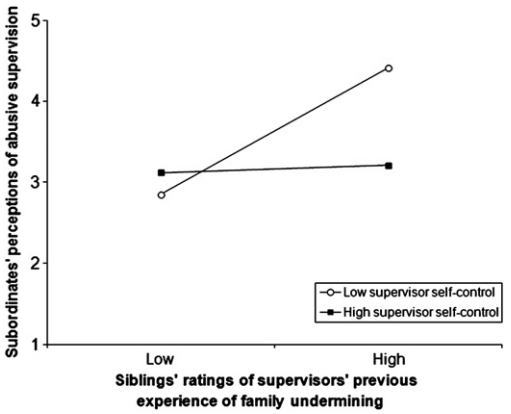

Fig. 2. Plot of the interaction between siblings' ratings of supervisors' previous experiences of family undermining and supervisors' self-control in predicting subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision in Study 2.

As we did in Study 1, we again examined a series of alternative models to rule out alternative explanations of our study findings. First, we examined self-control as a mediator linking supervisors' previous experience of family undermining and subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision. Using 2000 re-samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), the indirect effects of supervisors' previous experience of family undermining in predicting subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision via self-control were non-significant (*indirect effect* = .00, *95% CI* = −.04 to .02). Second, we examined several moderated mediation models, which involved assessing the conditional indirect effects of supervisors' previous experience of family undermining in predicting subordinates' perceptions of abusive supervision via: supervisors' perceptions of psychological contract violation at low and high levels of self-control (Model A); supervisors' perceptions of interactional justice at low and high levels of self-control (Model B); and supervisors' perceptions of procedural justice at low and high levels of self-control (Model C). Mirroring the Study 1 findings, results for all these models were non-significant: Model A: low self-control, *indirect effect* = .03, *SE* = .03, $z = .93$, $p = .35$, *95% CI*: −.01 to .11 and high self-control, *indirect effect* = .04, *SE* = .04, $z = .98$, $p = .33$, *95% CI*: −.03 to .16; Model B: low self-control, *indirect effect* = −.05, *SE* = .04, $z = -1.07$, $p = .28$, *95% CI*: −.20 to .06 and high self-control, *indirect effect* = .08, *SE* = .07, $z = 1.20$, $p = .23$, *95% CI*: −.01 to .19; and Model C: low self-control, *indirect effect* = −.08, *SE* = .04, $z = -1.72$, $p = .09$, *95% CI*: −.17 to .01 and high self-control, *indirect effect* = −.03, *SE* = .05, $z = -.59$, $p = .56$, *95% CI*: −.14 to .04.

7. Discussion

In two studies, results supported our hypotheses that 1) supervisors who experienced higher levels of family undermining during childhood are more likely to engage in abusive supervisory behaviors as adults (H1); and 2) this relationship is moderated such that it is stronger for supervisors reporting low levels of self-control (H2). We found that these effects emerged: a) even after controlling for subordinates' levels of neuroticism, power distance beliefs, and tenure with the supervisor, plus supervisors' perceptions of psychological contract violation, procedural and interactional injustice (the latter three variables had been shown to significantly predict abusive supervision in prior studies; Tepper, 2007); b) in a replication study that relied on supervisors' siblings to assess the degree to which supervisors had been undermined by their parents prior to age 18 (Study 2), hence replicating the results patterns found in Study 1 (which drew on supervisors' self-reports of their previous experience of family undermining); and c) consistently across two distinct samples involving employees working in retail settings (Study 1) and a wide variety of industries (Study 2).

7.1. Theoretical contributions

We take away several insights from our study. On a broad level, the present research contributes to a body of organizational research that examines the impact of employees' dispositional characteristics (e.g., self-control) and early life experiences (e.g., Avolio, Rotundo, & Walumbwa, 2009; Little, Nelson, Wallace, & Johnson, 2011) on work-relevant phenomena. To this effect, our study shows the value of considering supervisors' prior experience of family undermining as an antecedent to abusive supervision processes, thus corroborating earlier works on workplace aggression and abusive supervision that demonstrate the significance of individual differences for aggression-related processes in general (e.g., Inness, Barling, & Turner, 2005) and of individuals' prior history with aggression (e.g., Douglas & Martinko, 2001) and self-control (e.g., Marcus & Schuler, 2004) in particular. Notable in this context is the fact that not much research to date has considered the role of formative experiences which employees have undergone during their upbringing, especially those that exert an enduring impact on their thoughts, emotions and behaviors. Yet the available evidence speaks to the potential of gaining valuable insights into the impact of early-life experiences on leadership (e.g., Avolio et al., 2009; Ligon, Hunter, & Mumford, 2008). For example, regarding the question of how one becomes a great leader, Bennis and Thomas (2002) discuss the formative role of "crucibles," that is, the experience of circumstances which are extremely trying (e.g., surviving a near-fatal illness), but ultimately help a person realize their full leadership potential. In line with this, Ligon and colleagues (2008) found that outstanding leaders use these formative life experiences as guides in decision-making, especially during times of crises. In contrast to such positive ramifications, however, our paper focuses on the impact of a different kind of crucible – namely having been undermined by one's parents while growing up – and its potential relevance for engaging in abusive behaviors when in a leadership position later in life.

On a more specific level, our work makes a contribution by offering an additional framework to a literature that so far has proposed either displaced-aggression or victimization as explanatory mechanisms underlying abusive supervision (Tepper, 2007). As an important point, however, we do not mean to imply that our approach supersedes or refutes earlier explanations of abusive supervision advanced in the literature. Instead, it is rather likely that the processes outlined in our paper (i.e., problematic socialization experiences facilitating abusive supervision) work in unison with them. More precisely, one might argue that such phenomena as displaced aggression and victimization actually constitute symptoms that emerge from deeper causes — for example, from negative socialization experiences such as having suffered psychological abuse during childhood. In this way, it seems plausible that early life experiences of family undermining also facilitate learning to displace one's aggression (because aggressing against the original instigator, such as one's parents, is not feasible), plus to seek out victims who appear weak, unable to defend themselves, disagreeable and so on (cf. Olweus, 1993), because targeting such individuals increases one's chances to aggress successfully (and hence is repeated; cf. Denson, 2008).

One proximal implication that arises from such reasoning is that scholars may want to examine whether a sequence exists that links the experience of family undermining with subsequent abusive behaviors toward others in educational institutions and finally abusive supervision at work. A more distal implication concerns the question of whether displacement and socialization

processes work together in ways that result in vicious circles of abuse transfer. For example, recent studies have shown that abused subordinates experience significant psychological distress that they displace onto spouses and other family members (Aryee et al., 2007; Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Restubog et al., 2011). If such aggressive displacement involves verbal undermining of minors over prolonged time periods, our findings would suggest that those minors are in turn more likely to become abusive supervisors themselves in the future. Moreover, with studies showing that subordinates not only displace aggression, but also retaliate against abusive supervisors (Restubog et al., 2011), spirals of antisocial behavior (cf. Andersson & Pearson, 1999) might be triggered due to the way the abusive supervisor has been socialized to respond to aggression. From a broader perspective, then, these notions lend themselves to discussing the role of socialization effects in abusive supervision processes. While the socialization experiences underlying the processes studied in this research purportedly involve long time periods (i.e., childhood and/or adolescence), it is important to note that shorter socialization experiences are patently sufficient to learn and encourage abusive behaviors in organizational settings. Due to its concomitant implications for managers, we elaborate on this argument in the next section in conjunction with the role of organizational norms.

7.2. Practical implications

Our study has several implications for management practice. First, given that previous experiences of extensive undermining constitute a factor in a supervisor's abusive behaviors, it is not likely that brief, one-shot interventions will suffice. Instead, due to the deeply engrained nature of such behavioral patterns, long-term interventions are warranted, potentially those building on cognitive-behavioral principles (Meichenbaum, 2007). Managers should keep in mind here that the costs of long-term interventions might be rather justified, as recent research shows that the costs of deviant work behaviors exceed the benefits of organizational citizenship behaviors (Dunlop & Lee, 2004).

Second, our study indirectly highlights the importance of role models in shaping individuals' behaviors. Specifically, our results support the notion that aggressive behavior is learned through social learning processes such as modeling and observational learning (Bandura, 1973). Among others, this occurs because individuals adopt the belief ("learn") that aggression is a viable conflict resolution strategy. In the context of the workplace, the same processes may facilitate the development and continued perpetration of abusive supervision. For instance, abusive leaders may encourage employees to also engage in aggressive behavior because their behavior signals that it is acceptable and "part of the job." Unsurprisingly, then, unfair treatment in the workplace has been found to spiral from dyadic relationships to third parties (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). It is therefore important for organizations to fill leadership positions with individuals who role-model interaction styles that foster positive relationships with other organizational members.

Finally, we turn our attention to the important role of self-control in reducing the occurrence of abusive supervision. Based on our study, although supervisors were previously exposed to family undermining during childhood, some of them are able to exercise self-control. The implication of this finding for organizations is that increasing employee self-control may help in managing abusive supervision. Indeed, recent work on self-control suggests that it can be likened to a muscle that – while exhaustible through strain – can be strengthened through practice (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996). Specifically, repeated self-regulation is posited to result in greater will power, which in turn decreases the rate by which it is depleted. Organizations may be able to help employees exercise greater self-control by offering structural and external sources of control. For example, clear rules on what constitutes abusive supervision, plus credible communication and enforcement that such abuse will not be tolerated can substantially minimize its occurrence. In addition, encouraging employees to report abusive behaviors and implementing procedures on how to report it can potentially prevent abusive supervision in organizations.

7.3. Limitations

Our study is not without limitations. Foremost, caution needs to be exercised when invoking the intergenerational transmission of violence because it is not an inevitable fact of life (although it was once viewed as such; Kaufman & Zigler, 1993). Fortunately, not all individuals who were exposed to family violence turn violent as adults (Widom, 1989), with domestic violence researchers estimating that approximately 30% of those who experienced family violence engage in aggressive behavior later in life (Egeland, 1993; Kaufman & Zigler, 1993; Ozturk Ertem et al., 2000). This circumstance has implications for our research in that we strongly caution against making any assumptions that employees who have been abused in the past will inevitably become abusive themselves, and therefore will automatically become a problem employee or pose a security risk. Paralleling similar realizations in the family violence literature (Delsol & Margolin, 2004), not only do other factors (e.g., genetic, environmental) have a bearing on whether an abused child or adolescent becomes abusive later in life (Kaufman & Zigler, 1993), but there are also variations in what is transmitted (e.g., types of deviant behavior or maladjustment, attitudes, cognitions, vulnerability, and so on) for whom (e.g., differential gender effects) and under what circumstances (e.g., financial solvency and social support acting as buffer variables; Cappell & Heiner, 1990; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2004; Repetti et al., 2002; Wolf & Foshee, 2003).

7.4. Future research

Besides our hope that offering a different theoretical perspective on abusive supervision will stimulate future research efforts, further implications of our work emerge from assessing the role of the supervisor's self-control in abusive supervision dynamics.

Our research incorporates a dispositional variable which we deem crucial for more carefully predicting which supervisors are likely to engage in abusive supervision. Our study results clearly reinforce the notion that individual differences variables play an important role in contributing to workplace aggression in general and abusive supervision in particular (e.g., Douglas & Martinko, 2001; Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, & Tang, 2010). A promising avenue for future research therefore lies with exploring other dispositional characteristics that might be relevant in the context of abusive supervision. For example, one specific person factor that has been found to influence aggressive behavior is narcissism (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). It is characterized by inflated, grandiose, or unjustified favorable views of self (Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000). Individuals high in narcissism are sensitive to even slight insults or criticisms and regard these as threats to the self (Baumeister et al., 2000). In order to maintain and protect their inflated self-image, narcissists engage in hostile behaviors such as retaliation and derogation of others (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). In the workplace, threats to a supervisor's self-image may come in the form of their subordinates' poor performance that may be seen as a reflection of their own leader effectiveness. Thus, it is plausible that supervisors with high levels of narcissism may engage in greater abusive supervision compared to those with low levels of narcissism. Similarly, a strong desire for control may result in abusive supervision. According to Wortman and Brehm (1975), reactions to uncontrollable events depend on how much desire the individual has to exert control over the situation, with high levels of desire for control lowering the anger threshold of individuals when encountering uncontrollable circumstances. Therefore, supervisors high in desire for control might be more susceptible to engage in abusive supervision because they easily succumb to anger in ambiguous situations. Finally, the two examples presented here allude to another future research opportunity, namely exploring the question of whether specific constellations of dispositional variables and work situations exist that heighten the chance for abusive supervision to occur (e.g., Machiavellianism and low procedural organizational justice).

8. Conclusion

From a theoretical standpoint, our work speaks to the potential of employees' past experiences to significantly influence the occurrence of abusive supervision in the present, and to this effect, points to some interesting venues for future research, such as exploring the role of previous socialization experiences (e.g., professional) and examining the impact of facilitating and/or impeding dispositional variables in the ensuing abuse dynamics. As such, we hope that our findings highlight the need to consider the influence of situational and personal factors beyond the workplace on leader behavior and serve to stimulate further interest in this important topic — especially so as we demonstrate that an individual's previous experience of undermining explains significant variance beyond that explained by other traditional antecedents to abusive supervision. Finally, regarding our empirical contribution to the abusive supervision literature, we not only conceptualized and explored the impact of so far untested antecedent and moderating variables, but also tested our model with data from two samples using multi-source ratings in an effort to substantiate our findings through literal and constructive replication (cf. Lykken, 1968).

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